

CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
COUNCIL

# Governance and Ethics Committee

Thursday, 24 November 2022

Dear Councillor

## GOVERNANCE AND ETHICS COMMITTEE - THURSDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER, 2022

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Thursday, 24th November, 2022 meeting of the Governance and Ethics Committee, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

<b>Agenda No</b>	<b>Item</b>
5	<b><u>Changes to the Constitution - Rules of Debate (Pages 3 - 8)</u></b>
7	<b><u>Local Authority Companies - Linked Bodies (Pages 9 - 62)</u></b>

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Democratic Services team:

**Contact** Donna Cope  
**Tel** 01902 554452  
**Email** [democratic.services@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@wolverhampton.gov.uk)  
**Address** Democratic Services, Civic Centre, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, St Peter's Square,  
Wolverhampton WV1 1SH

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<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Governance and Ethics Committee</b> 24 November 2022
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<b>Report title</b>	Changes to the Constitution – Rules of Debate	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities	
<b>Accountable director</b>	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
<b>Originating service</b>	Governance	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
	Tel	01902 553840
	Email	David.Pattison@wolverhampton.gov.uk
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>		

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**Recommendation for action or decision:**

The Governance and Ethics Committee recommend to Council that:

1. The Changes in the Constitution, particularly the Rules of Debate, are made at the next Council meeting as set out in the report.

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide a recommendation on changes to the constitution, the constitution remains a living document that should be updated and revised as and when needed.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Governance and Ethics Committee regularly receives reports seeking to update the Constitution where it is necessary, the last such report was on 23 March 2022.
- 2.2 Changes have been brought forward previously following a full review of the Constitution. These changes are brought forwards following the meeting of the Council on 2 November 2022.
- 2.3 As the Committee is aware the constitution has been reviewed in totality and remodelled based on the model produced for local authorities by a national firm of solicitors, Bond Dickinson model. This is to ensure the constitution is clear and concise and that the decision-making processes can be followed by all.
- 2.4 Only those parts of the constitution listed below are amended, the other parts will remain unchanged.
- 2.5 This is part of a series of reports – there will be additional reports brought forwards to review the other parts of the constitution. A further report will be brought forward shortly covering Part 3 delegations to officers, this is currently being updated. The report is due to come to the January meeting of the Committee and will include changes to the planning delegations.

## 3.0 Changes to the Constitution

- 3.1 **Leader's report – winding up** – the issue was raised that there is no right of reply to the Leader's report. The previous rules had no time limit and provided merely for leader's report followed by questions and answers by any Councillor. The new approach limits it to simply having leader's report (10 mins) and opposition response (5 mins). It is recommended that, in line with the practice for other reports/questions and motions, that there is a right of reply. It is recommended that there is an amendment to introduce a 2 minute right of reply from the leader.

Adding in 10.3 –

*The Leader will have a right of reply to the opposition response(s). The right of reply will last no more than 2 minutes.*

This will need a consequential amendment to para 5.2 to make it clear that Leader's report item is now 17 minutes.

- 3.2 **Extensions of time of the meeting** – there was some challenge to an extension of time of the meeting – at the meeting on 2.11.22 the time was extended beyond the guillotine of 3 ½ hours. It was extended for a period of 15 minutes and there was then a

question as to whether at the end of that there could be a further extension. The relevant rule (para 14.1(l) – simply provides that a motion can be moved

*“(l) that the meeting continue beyond 3 ½ hours in duration”*

- 3.3 There is nothing in the rules preventing this or indeed allowing the option to extend the time beyond an agreed amount. We can clarify this in the rules by stating, for example that:

*“(l) that the meeting continue beyond 3 ½ hours in duration – for the avoidance of doubt this can include a motion to extend by a certain amount of time, in which case further motions could be brought forwards to extend the time if the earlier extension proves insufficient and the meeting wishes (by vote) to continue beyond that extended time”*

- 3.4 Alternatively, it can just be that we adopt the practice of simply extending the meeting and not extending by a fixed amount of time, but rather give an indicative time.

- 3.5 **Voting** - presence in the chamber – there was some debate on the named votes at Council on the motion. The relevant rule provides:

*“16.1 Majority*

*Unless the constitution provides otherwise any matter will be decided by a simple majority of those Councillors voting and present at the time the question was put”*

- 3.6 Previously there was a provision in the constitution that only those Councillors present for the whole debate could vote, that was removed following a number of requests on the basis that it caused issues for those with disabilities or with prayer requirements. This is very distinct for decisions of a Planning/Licensing Committee where they exercise a “quasi judicial” function and need to be present for the whole of the relevant item.

- 3.7 The question then follows as to whether when there is a named vote a Councillor can vote provided they are there for when their name is called (through the roll call).

- 3.8 The law is stated as follows in Knowles on Local Authority Procedure:

*7.121 The answer is that a member present at a meeting is entitled to vote at any time before the chairman declares the outcome of the voting in a final way. Thus, where a requisition is demanded after a show of hands (and, as indicated above, it must be demanded immediately), a decision has not yet been made and there is nothing to stop a member who was not present at the show of hands from voting on the requisition or to prevent a member who voted one way at the show of hands changing their mind and voting differently. Just when a vote has finally been settled is a question of fact, which must rest with the chairman. These rules are also subject to any particular requirements imposed by standing orders. Some authorities have adopted a standing order that provides that members must be in the council chamber ‘when the question is put’ in order to be able to vote. Putting*

*the question means asking for those in favour of a motion, and it would not be in order, under such a standing order, for a member to arrive in the chamber after that point had been reached and expect their vote to be counted. See the discussion at 11.38 on when a committee decision has been finalised.*

3.9 Legally there are 2 important points:

- 1) Legally it is worth noting that a Councillor can change their view at any point up until the result of the vote is announced by the person presiding
- 2) When is the question “put”? – the Council’s legal view is that when there is a simple verbal for and against it is when the question is asked by the Person Presiding – however when there is a request for a named vote before the vote is taken the time the question is put is when each Councillor is individually asked.

3.10 We can, if that is what Councillors’ desire, make it clear that the requirement for presence is at the time the named vote is requested – this would involve the tweak below

“16.1 Majority

Unless the constitution provides otherwise any matter will be decided by a simple majority of those Councillors voting and present at the time the question was put – *for the avoidance of doubt in the event that a named vote is called (or required) only those Councillors present at the start of the named vote will be entitled to vote.*”

3.11 Officers would then monitor as follows using the Mayoral Officer on duty to monitor the door and advise if they come late or after they step aside as a named vote is called that their vote will not count.

#### **4.0 Financial implications**

4.1 There are no financial implications associated with the recommendation in this report.  
[GE/18112022/L]

#### **5.0 Legal implications**

5.1 The Council is required by Section 37 of the Local Government Act 2000 to prepare and publish a Constitution which contains its standing orders relating to decision-making, finance and contracts. The Council is also required to keep its Constitution updated. The Director of Governance is authorised under the constitution to make amendments which more accurately reflect legislative and organisational changes. This report ensures that the Council meets its duties. [DP/18112022A]

#### **6.0 Equalities implications**

6.1 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act;
- b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

6.2 The Constitution seeks to ensure that, in its decision-making and its operations, the Council fully complies with the public-sector equality duty.

**7.0 Any other implications**

7.1 There are no other implications arising from the report at the current time.

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<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Governance and Ethics Committee</b> 24 November 2022
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<b>Report title</b>	Local Authority Companies - Linked Bodies	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities	
<b>Accountable director</b>	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
<b>Originating service</b>	Governance	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
	Tel	01902 553840
	Email	David.Pattison@wolverhampton.gov.uk
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>		

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**Recommendation for decision:**

The Governance and Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the approach taken in the Governance of Linked Bodies paper and advice for Councillors/Officers.

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide clarity on the approach taken regarding Linked Bodies – namely those bodies that the Council has ownership (or part ownership) of.
- 1.2 A further paper to the Committee will cover those other bodies that the Council supports/has potential liability to/guarantees for.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Across the England and Wales there has been a significant rise in the number of companies over the last few years. The background to the rise in Local Authority Companies is set out in the presentation taken to the Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel in June 2022 attached as appendix 1.
- 2.2 Overall it is the Monitoring Officer's view that the arrangements in relation to related parties (and in particular linked bodies – see below) ensures good governance.
- 2.3 This paper proposes to have in place a code relating to the way in which local authority trading companies in particular are governed as well as clear guidance in relation to the way in which those involved in the management of such bodies operate to avoid risks such as conflicts of interest.
- 2.4 The Council has an interest in a number of related parties, including companies/other bodies, that the Council owns (linked bodies), and these are covered in the Council's statement of accounts and importantly also included in the Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The AGS forms a key part of the accounts and is reported to the Audit and Risk Committee. This Council has now introduced an additional step in its assurance process by including a 6 months' update on progress against the AGS, which will be reported to the Audit and Risk Committee shortly.
- 2.5 The AGS has in recent years had a greatly increased section in relation to the operation of linked bodies following challenges that have taken place with trading companies in other local authorities.
- 2.6 The following are the linked bodies that this Council has primary responsibility for:

Name	Description		Date set up	Ownership/control
Wolverhampton Homes	A housing management company.		2013	Owned by the Council.
Yoo Recruit	A company providing temporary staff to CWC.		2014	Owned by the Council.
City of Wolverhampton Housing company	A housing development company set up to deliver housing within Wolverhampton by way of market sales, the		2016	Owned by the Council.

Limited (“WV Living”)	Help to Own scheme, and an affordable rental scheme.			
Help 2 Own	Set up to pilot an affordable housing product to help potential homes buyers pay a deposit and secure a mortgage on their own home.		2021	Partnership with the Combined Authority.

### 3.0 Linked Bodies – proposed arrangements

- 3.1 The Council and other local authorities have long had an interest in several kinds of corporate bodies and trading companies.
- 3.2 When establishing their companies, local authorities have had to carefully navigate the means by which its interests are to be governed, and how the distinct company commercial activities are to align with their public body activities.
- 3.3 In response to difficulties encountered by many local authorities in establishing appropriate legal and governance arrangements, a model for all local authorities was produced by Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) which explains the status of the companies to stakeholders and which provides a “blue-print” for future company ventures.
- 3.4 The approach listed in paragraph 3.3 is the approach that the Council already takes for its trading companies and as such will not involve any significant change.
- 3.5 The model ensures there is a commonality of approach not just within each authority but across all authorities. It also provides a reference point to the Council and interested parties (such as Councillors, officers, company representatives, etc.) in understanding the requirements of the Council in setting up a local authority company, and how the governance arrangements for those companies are expected to work once set up.
- 3.6 The LLG model has been adapted for CWC is attached at appendix 2 and comprises:
- Guidance note for Members & Officers – Representing the Council on outside bodies
  - Code of Practice - Governance of Council involvement in linked bodies
- 3.7 The Guidance note provides clarification for officers and members on the scope of their role, their duties and liabilities (depending on type of linked body), indemnities and crucially, how to deal with conflicts of interests.
- 3.8 The Code of Practice sets out:
1. the law and guidance which govern how local authority companies are to be established and run;
  2. the way in which a local authority might wish to organise its company interests;
  3. how those interests may be best governed according to a set of principles;

4. how decisions will be taken as shareholder;
5. how scrutiny is to be conducted, where there is a scrutiny function and where there is not; and
6. how regulatory matters and conflicts of interest may be best managed.

3.9 Typically, CWC companies are controlled in a number of ways including:

- the shareholder agreement between the Council and the linked body (which sets out a number of key Council's rights);
- monitoring by officers of the company's financial performance and adherence to its business plan and key performance indicators;
- ensuring the Board of Directors includes persons with relevant experience and knowledge;
- setting up a Shareholder Board to guide the Shareholder Representative and to hold the company to account, which receives advice from the relevant senior officers;
- clear blue water between the parties;
- ensuring adherence to the Constitution in relation to company decisions, and maintaining links to Audit and Risk Committee and Scrutiny Board/Panels by way of reports;
- regular updates to Cabinet members, leader of the opposition via numerous channels (including budget reporting and future plans);
- regular audit of company accounts (in some cases by CWCs own auditors);
- 3-yearly review of company arrangements by officers.

3.10 A review is currently being undertaken of the CWC linked bodies shown in the table above to ensure they align with the LLG model (as adapted) and which will help determine, where a departure from best practice is identified, that this is both justifiable and preferable in light of the unique circumstances of the relevant company arrangement.

#### **4.0 Financial implications**

4.1 There are no financial implications associated with the recommendation in this report. [SR/21112022/A]

#### **5.0 Legal implications**

5.1 The Council has a series of legal duties as set out in the appendix regarding the operation of Local authority linked bodies including trading companies including through the Local Government Act 2003, the approach detailed in this report and the linked papers ensures that the Council meets those legal duties. [DP/21112022A]

**6.0 Equalities implications**

6.1 The compliance of the linked bodies with equalities legislation and indeed promoting the Council's aims and objectives in an important part of the monitoring of the arrangements in place with the relevant linked body.

**7.0 Any other implications**

7.1 There are no other implications arising from the report at the current time.

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# Arrangements for monitoring of linked bodies – Monitoring Officer presentation to Resources and Equalities Panel

June 2022

## Background - Linked Bodies (1)

- Local authorities can own/control certain types of companies/other bodies such as limited liability partnerships (“Linked bodies”) and indeed in certain circumstances they need to in order to act lawfully
- There are a significant number of different approaches adopted by Local Authorities – as at 2018 it was estimated that there were over 740 Local Authority companies in the UK, with the largest percentage relating to property/investment.

## Background - Linked Bodies (2)

- The types of bodies include:
  - Trading companies
  - Certain joint ventures with other organisations
  - Property companies
  - Service provision companies including so called “Teckal” companies (which avoid the need for local authorities to go through the procurement rules when contracting with a local authority controlled service provision company provided that certain tests are met)

## Background - Linked Bodies (3)

- The legal framework makes it clear that Local Authorities can use Linked Bodies, under the Local Government Act 2003 and then widened through the Localism Act 2011.
- Grant Thornton in their 2018 study identified that there were a number of reasons for the rise in Local Authority including:
  - the decline in popularity of outsourcing to the private sector.
  - increased funding pressures on local authorities leading to use of trading powers to reduce the net burden on the budget and use of other innovative methods to reduce costs

## Background - National issues - types of vehicles used

- There a number of different approaches that can be taken including:
  - Wholly owned companies by one authority
  - Wholly owned companies by a collection of authorities
  - Joint venture companies with input by the private sector as well as one/a number of local authority companies
  - Limited Liability Partnerships provided that not used to trade commercially (as under the law trading can only be carried out through Limited Companies)

## Background – National issues – trading powers (1)

- In the case of trading companies a number of measures (covered in the next slide) are in place through the Local Government Act 2003 the reasons for these are that it:
  - Ensures a level playing field between local authorities and private sector companies.
  - Means that local authorities do not receive the tax advantage they would otherwise have had over private sector companies.
  - Results in greater transparency arising from the company law requirements. This is useful for the purposes of avoiding subsidy control restrictions (which has replaced state aid restrictions following the UK's departure from the EU)
  - means that there is greater protection for the council taxpayer and the monies paid to the public purse as a result of limited liability.

## Background – National issues – trading powers (2)

- In the additional hurdles for trading companies include:
  - approval of the establishment of the Company by the Council
  - requires an authority to prepare a business case supporting the exercise of the trading power. The authority must approve this business case. This requirement ensures that authorities manage risks effectively.
  - prohibiting authorities from subsidising their trading activities on a continuing basis
  - prohibiting authorities from trading in services (other than to other local authorities) that they have a statutory duty to provide

## Background – Control (1)

- Critically in the case of each linked body established by the Council best practice shows that there should be
  - A shareholder agreement between the Council and the linked body defining the arrangement
  - A business case
  - A business plan setting out the key performance indicators and expected financial performance
  - Governance arrangements to monitor the compliance with the shareholder agreement/business case/business plan

## Background – Control (2)

- Whilst a linked body should have a certain amount of autonomy to act and deliver within the agreed parameters the Council as shareholder has some critical powers including
  - Power to appoint remove/directors
  - Approval/rejection of business plan
  - Power to wind up the linked body

## Background – Wolverhampton position

- What “linked bodies” does CWC have? These are listed on the following slides – critically for each there is
  - a shareholder agreement/contract between the Council and the linked body defining the arrangement;
  - A business case and a regularly refreshed business plan setting out the key performance indicators and expected financial performance and
  - Governance arrangements to monitor the compliance with the shareholder agreement/business case/business plan

## Background – Wolverhampton position

1. **Wolverhampton Homes** - Wolverhampton Homes is the Council's Arm's Length (Housing) Management Organisation (ALMO) and is a company wholly owned by the Council.
  - The control of the ALMO is through the Board which has representatives drawn from 1/3 council, 1/3 tenants and 1/3 independent. There is a Management Agreement between the Council and Wolverhampton Homes which sets out the contractual and governance arrangements between the parties, performance of the agreement with Wolverhampton Homes is regularly monitored.
  - The agreement with Wolverhampton Homes and compliance with it is subject to a detailed review by the Council in 2022 to ensure that it remains fit for purpose as there is a break clause in the agreement in 2023.

## Background – Wolverhampton position

2. **WV Living** - City of Wolverhampton Housing Company Limited – this is a wholly owned trading company set up under the powers in the Local Government Act 2003 and is known as WV Living focused on developing properties within the City to meet the Council’s aspirations in terms of available housing.

## Background – Wolverhampton position

3. **Yoo Recruit Limited** – this is a wholly owned trading company set up under the powers in the Local Government Act 2003 and provides staffing to the Council and other bodies.

4. **Help 2 Own** – this is a limited liability partnership that was jointly established with the West Midlands Combined Authority in 2021 to pilot an affordable housing product that helps to address the issue that many potential buyers who are in work have in raising the deposit to secure a mortgage.

This is the subject of a number of legal agreements which sets up the contractual and governance arrangements between the relevant parties.

## Background – National – challenges that have arisen

- Whilst the vast majority of Local Authority Linked Bodies have worked well and have assisted in the delivery of key services/development of important facilities etc there have been issues with some such bodies including those in
  - Nottingham City Council
  - London Borough of Croydon
- As always it is critical that we learn the lessons from other authorities and indeed that is what we have done.

## Background – National – challenges that have arisen

- Lessons from Nottingham City Council – Robin Hood Energy
- General view from Auditors (Grant Thornton) on RHE (in August 2020 report) was
  - *More generally, it is not seen as good practice for councillors to be on the boards of local authority companies, with other mechanisms used to ensure that the company meets the Council's policy objectives.*
  - *This reflects the above issues in relation to the expertise and experience of many councillors, and the potential for conflicts of interest between the councillors' commitment to the interests of the company, which has to override other interests when they are on company 'business', and their wider responsibilities as councillors.*
  - *Having councillors on company boards can lead to a failure to properly separate the two sets of interest – of the company and of the Council – and it appears that this occurred in relation to the expectation that the Council would continue to fund RHE indefinitely.*

## Background – National – challenges that have arisen

- Lessons from London Borough of Croydon – Brick by Brick public interest report by Grant Thornton see here - and failures led to a section 114 notice issued in 2020 –
  - *A rapid review into the council’s finances and governance said that Brick by Brick has not delivered on expectations, with the town hall having managed the endeavour “extremely poorly”. “The council should immediately strengthen its oversight of Brick by Brick (BBB) by improving communication, monitoring contract information and development milestones and having experienced non-execs on the BBB board,” it added. Ministers ordered the review after Croydon Council issued a Section 114 notice in November last year, putting a freeze on all non-essential spending, after it accumulated a £66m budget deficit. Auditors revealed that the authority had lent Brick by Brick £200m since 2015 without receiving any dividends or interest in return.*
  - *The company formed a major part of the council’s plans to borrow another £500m over three years, today’s review said.*
  - *Lead reviewer Chris Wood said: “Members of both parties [Labour and Conservatives] and senior officers have reported to us the existence in the past of an ‘inner circle’ of the (then) leader and three cabinet members, who exercised a great deal of control of the council’s finances and championed the cause of the council’s commercial activities including Brick by Brick.”*
  - *Inside Housing 2.2.21*

## Wolverhampton position – governance arrangements

- Overall for all linked bodies there has been increased oversight included in the Council's Annual Governance Statement taken to Audit and Risk Committee each year and now also monitored on a 6 month basis
- Overall Monitoring Officer has confidence that the relevant rules are being complied with and that there is good oversight in each of the linked bodies
- Agreed that at least every two months an update would be provided on those bodies either owned by the Council or with potentially large liabilities to the Council to Cabinet members/Leader of the Opposition going through:
  - Budget
  - Compliance with business plan KPIs
  - Future plans

## Wolverhampton position – governance arrangements

- Importantly External Auditors happier with approach on Council Owned/Involved Bodies – not least partly due to the updates oversight covered.
- Important to note that Council accounts for 2020-21 were unqualified by external auditors and detailed questions were asked about how we manage our relationships with linked bodies, in the light of challenges in other authorities.
- We expect detailed questions will be asked by Auditors in 2022 as part of the Audit of the 2021/22 accounts based on the issues that have taken place in other authorities.
- We will be bringing a detailed report on each of the relevant Linked Bodies to the relevant Scrutiny Panel to ensure that there is transparency on the Governance arrangements for each body.
- Each of the Linked Bodies is subject to a detailed review of arrangements at least every 3 years.

## Wolverhampton approach – specific bodies

- **WVL** – In 2020/2021 a detailed review took place of the governance of WVL – led to changes including appointment of
  - Non exec Director with experience of the relevant sector
  - New Business Plan
  - Strengthening of Shareholder Board and Transparency
  - Clear Blue water between the bodies
- WV Living’s accounts are audited separately by external auditors and an unqualified opinion was provided on the accounts for 2020-2021, a copy of which will be published on the Council’s website
- Critically borrowing from the Council to WVL has been serviced throughout and has significantly reduced to current levels being less than £5 million and likely to reduce further.
- WVL’s assets (which the Council has charges over) significantly exceed the Council’s lending

## Wolverhampton approach

- **Yoo Recruit -**
  - Yoo Recruit's accounts are audited separately by external auditors and an unqualified opinion was provided on the accounts for 2020-2021, a copy of which will be published on the Council's website .
  - An internal review of the Council's approach and need for Yoo Recruit has been carried out and will be reported to Cabinet and the Resources and Equalities Panel, later in 2022
  - Subject to the decisions made by Councillors Yoo Recruit will update their business plan
  - Currently Yoo Recruit's performance is reviewed by officers and reported to cabinet members and the leader of the opposition through the regular monitoring of linked bodies.

## Wolverhampton approach

- **Wolverhampton Homes**

The Council's internal auditors also provide the internal audit service for Wolverhampton Homes.

They were able to provide reasonable assurance that the Company had adequate and effective governance, risk management and internal control processes, and this was reported through their Audit and Business Assurance Committee.

The agreement with Wolverhampton Homes is subject to a detailed review by the Council in 2022 to ensure that it remains fit for purpose as there is a break clause in the agreement in 2023

A detailed report will be brought to the relevant Scrutiny Panel

## Wolverhampton approach

- **Help 2 Own**

- Help 2 Own was only established in 2021.
- The Council and the WMCA instructed and obtained detailed external advice in order to ensure that the arrangements are fit for purpose and will protect the interests of each body and deliver the proposed outcomes. The partnership is subject to external audit.
- A review of the way governance works for all linked bodies including Help 2 Own will be carried out in 2022/23 and will be reported to the relevant Committees including the Council's Audit and Risk Committee.
- The operation and governance of Help 2 Own continues to be reported on regularly to Cabinet members and the Leader of the Opposition.

## Conclusion

- **Monitoring Officer conclusion**
  - Linked Bodies are likely to continue to operate to assist local authorities with budgetary challenges and to find innovative ways of working
  - CWC has robust measures in place to check and challenge how the linked bodies operate
  - Those measures will continue to be reviewed and reported on to Councillors including relevant scrutiny panels
  - CWC has good governance in place for its linked bodies

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## Code of Practice – Governance of Council interests in companies

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this Code of Practice is to provide a reference point to the Council and interested parties (Members, officers, company representatives and contractors) in understanding the requirements of the Council in setting up a local authority company, and in particular a local authority trading company (LATC), and how the governance arrangements for that company will work once set up.
- 1.2 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/G20 helps define corporate governance by saying that it:
- “involves a set of relationships between a company’s management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders; and*
- “provides the structure through which the objectives of the company are set, and the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance are determined”.<sup>1</sup>*
- 1.3 This Code of Practice therefore sets out how the Council will normally go about managing those relationships and ensuring that a company will go on to deliver the objectives established for it by the Council. It also briefly explains and makes reference to the law and basic requirements placed upon a local authority in establishing or owning companies.
- 1.4 The Code of Practice is set out as:
- an explanatory background;
  - a set of guiding principles; and then
  - a set of working expectations.
- 1.5 Attached, as appendices, are also key documents used in this process.

## 2. Background

### **(a) Local authority trading and the local authority trading company<sup>2</sup>**

- 2.1 There are long-established powers for councils to trade. Among the most important is the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970, which authorises councils to enter into agreements with other local authorities and other designated public bodies, for the provision of goods, materials and administrative, professional and technical services, for the use of vehicles, plant and apparatus and associated staff, and for the carrying out of maintenance. Payment terms are set out in an agreement. These are not limited to cost recovery. The 1970 Act is the bedrock of trading within the public sector and there is substantial experience of its operation. But the Act is limited in scope. For example, it does not allow trading with the private sector or the public at large. Other established trading powers are specific in nature, such as the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976,

<sup>1</sup> G20/OECD Principles of Corporate Governance - OECD Report to G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors” - September 2015

<sup>2</sup> Source: Local Government Association Briefing

which enables councils to enter into agreements with anyone for the use of spare computer capacity.

- 2.2 The Local Government Act 2003 added new possibilities to charge for services, to both provide extra services at cost and to trade with the private sector. Under the 2003 Act, the Government authorizes trading by means of a trading order. The Trading Order currently in force was made in 2009<sup>3</sup>, which permits all councils in England to trade or "to do for a commercial purpose", anything which they are authorised to do for the purpose of carrying on their ordinary functions, which includes use of the granted general power of competence.
- 2.3 Under that 2003 Act and Trading Order, as augmented by the Localism Act 2011, for a local authority to exercise the power to do things for a commercial purpose (which the authority couldn't otherwise do), then it must be done through a company. Councils are thus enabled to establish a company by which they can trade with the private sector for a profit - that is to enter into commercial contracts. The profits may then go back to the council through dividends or service charges.
- 2.4 The reason given for this legislative requirement is that:  
*"local authorities and their trading arms have to be on a level playing field with the private and commercial sector in both a positive and negative way. They should not be at a disadvantage, but they should not have an outstanding advantage. Taxation is a particular issue. It is right to carry forward the requirement that such bodies should be companies and trading as such."*
- 2.5 To exercise the power to establish a company and trade, a local authority must first approve a business case ('a comprehensive statement') covering:
  - the objectives of the business;
  - the investment and other resources required to achieve those objectives;
  - any risks the business might face and how significant these risks are; and
  - the expected financial results of the business, together with any other relevant outcomes that the business is expected to achieve.
- 2.6 That business case is then implemented and refreshed by way of a business plan, which should be updated and submitted for approval each year, to guide the company in carrying out its continuing activities.
- 2.7 The local authority must also recover the costs of any accommodation, goods, services, staff and anything else they supply to the company under any agreement or arrangement. This is an absolute requirement and distinct from the various rules on procurement or providing state aid.
- 2.8 Other important legal, commercial and financial considerations for councils or

<sup>3</sup> *The Local Government (Best Value Authorities) (Power to Trade) (England) Order 2009*

fire and rescue authorities setting up a trading company include company law issues, the cost of bidding for contracts, tax liability (corporation tax and VAT), EU procurement law and state aid rules and employment law (TUPE and pensions).

### **(b) The Local Authority company**

- 2.9 The kind of company that must be utilized to enable the Council to trade in this way is defined in Part V of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 ('LGHA 89'). That lists:
- a company limited by shares;
  - a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital;
  - a company limited by guarantee and having a share capital;
  - an unlimited company;
  - a society registered or deemed to be registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965.
- 2.10 The LGHA 89, and the current Order<sup>4</sup> made under it, places local authority companies into one of three categories, being controlled or influenced by the local authority (a regulated company) or a company in which the local authority has a minority interest. It then goes on to set out a number of additional restrictions and requirements to which the local authority and the companies must adhere.
- 2.11 The reasons for these limitations were described by the Government of the day, when setting out the reasons for the LGHA 89, as being that:
- "when a company is effectively under the control of a local authority... the most significant controls that Parliament has laid down for the conduct of local authorities should apply to that company."*
- 2.12 A regulated local authority company and any subsidiary of it, for example, is required to state on all correspondence that it is "**a local authority controlled company**" or "**a local authority influenced company**" (as the case may be) and name the relevant authority or authorities and is subject to rules concerning access by the Council's auditors and for delivery of information to the authority and its members.

### **(c) Other Local Authority entities**

- 2.13 If it isn't needed as a means by which it can trade, a local authority is free to involve itself in any one of a number of different forms of sole and joint ventures to best assist it in achieving its goals and aims, which may or may not involve establishing an entity that has a separate legal personality. These may also be as above, companies as defined by the Companies Act and which can include an industrial or provident society or a community interest company. They may alternatively be established as a distinct trust, with the council or appointees as trustee. They may be embodied as limited liability partnerships. They may also exist simply as unincorporated partnerships, with

<sup>4</sup> *The Local Authorities (Companies) Order 1995*

other public bodies or private persons (that can often act as if they were a distinct entity), such as the Local Economic Partnership.

- 2.14 There are certain rules yet to be brought into force, and the Secretary of State holds reserve powers, that may require, prohibit or regulate the taking of specified actions by entities connected with a local authority and those appointed to or representing the local authority at them<sup>5</sup>. In this respect:
- “entity” means any entity, whether or not a legal person, and
  - an entity is stated to be “connected with” a local authority if financial information about that entity must be included in the local authority’s statement of accounts.
- 2.15 Whilst this Code of Practice will apply to all companies in which the Council has an interest, it may not be as appropriate for the governance of the Council’s relationship with other entities which it is connected to, is a member of or has an interest in. In these instances, regard will be had to this Code but its application will be determined on a case by case basis.

### **3. Guidance**

- 3.1 In exercising the power to establish a local authority trading company (LATC), local authorities were obliged under the 2003 Act to have regard to Statutory Guidance. The “*General Power for Local Authorities to Trade in Function Related Activities Through a Company*”<sup>6</sup> was issued and it is to this document that this and other councils in establishing the companies have had regard to.
- 3.2 That Statutory Guidance is now out of date, however, and was withdrawn as of 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Whilst new guidance is awaited, the withdrawn guidance nevertheless remains useful and largely very relevant. Where it is still relevant, this Code has had regard to it and, where associated with the principles of this Code, accompanying direct quotes from the Government Guidance are included throughout.
- 3.3 All listed companies are subject to the *UK Corporate Governance Code*<sup>7</sup>. The Council will expect all of its companies and their subsidiaries, and indeed any company with which it is associated, to adopt the “comply or explain” approach of the UK Corporate Governance Code as a demonstration of best practice in corporate governance.
- 3.4 The *Corporate Governance Guidance and Principles for Unlisted Companies in the UK*<sup>8</sup> and also the *Corporate Governance Handbook*<sup>9</sup> have additionally been utilised in the compiling of this Code of Practice.

<sup>5</sup> S.212 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

<sup>6</sup> First published: 29 July 2004: UK Govt Archive

<sup>7</sup> September 2014: Financial Reporting Council

<sup>8</sup> First edition: November 2010: Institute of Directors (IoD) and European Confederation of Directors’ Associations (ecoDa)

<sup>9</sup> Third edition 2013: Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA)

3.5 The Council itself has adopted a Code of Corporate Governance and the approach of this Code of Practice will fall to be associated with the provisions of that Code.

#### **4. Principles of Governance of Council Companies**

4.1 In setting out the governance relationship between the Council and its companies, group of companies and organisations it has invested in, this Code has three key underpinning principles. These are as follows, preceded by a relevant quote on the subject from the Government Guidance.

##### **i. Controls and Freedoms**

###### The Guidance:

4.2 *“A successful company will be one that works alongside the authority in delivering joint objectives. The authority will have to consider how to balance the need to assist the company to achieve its trading objectives with the principles of transparency, accountability and probity.”*

###### The Principles

4.3 It is recognised that, whilst appreciating this should not be unfettered, a trading company needs to be given commercial freedoms to enable it to succeed.

4.4 Accordingly, governance arrangements will seek to ensure that:

- the company will be provided with sufficient freedoms to achieve its objectives; and
- the Council will retain sufficient controls to ensure that its investment is protected, that appropriate social and financial returns on investment can be obtained and that the trading activities of the companies are conducted in accordance with the values of the Council.

##### **ii. Relationship, Integrity and Accountability**

###### The Guidance:

4.5 *“It is important that trading companies can operate on an equal footing with their competitors, but it is equally important that they are not used as a device for inhibiting legitimate public access to information about local government and local government services.”*

###### The Principles

4.6 It is recognised that, whilst appreciating its procedures operate in a way that protects the company's commercial interests, those procedures should ensure that the Council can carry out its functions as an investor, as a trustee of public funds and a local authority committed to both due responsibility for the exercise of its functions and for providing a vision for the City.

4.7 Accordingly, governance arrangements will seek to ensure that:

- the executive can make investment decisions based upon complete and accurate consideration of business cases and business plans;
- the executive can evaluate social and financial benefits and returns on investment; and
- the Council's overview and scrutiny committees (namely Scrutiny Board and Panels) are able to exercise their powers in relation to the executive's decision making

in a manner that ensures the companies can provide full and frank financial and business reporting against their business plans and be open to an appropriate level of scrutiny without fear of commercial confidentiality being breached.

### **iii. Understanding of role**

#### **The Guidance:**

4.8 *"A trading company will be a separate legal entity from a local authority. It will derive its legal authority from its Memorandum of Association and the Companies Acts. Its directors and officers will derive their authority from the articles of association and the law relating to companies.*

...

*"Those "who are appointed directors will participate directly in the activities of the company and are answerable to the company and have the powers and duties of company directors whilst they do so.*

...

*"Local authority members and officers should be aware of potential conflicts of interest when carrying out their roles for their authorities, or when acting as directors of trading companies."*

#### **The Principles**

4.9 It is recognised that, as company ventures have a separate legal personality to the local authority, the success and good governance of the company venture depends upon those involved understanding their role and responsibilities collectively and individually.

4.10 Accordingly, governance arrangements will seek to ensure that there is sufficient induction, training and other materials in place so that:

- their legal duties;
- stewardship of assets;
- the provisions of the governing documents;
- the external environment; and
- the total structure of the organizations and the venture

are appropriately understood by Members of the Council in their role as part of the executive or of overview and scrutiny, by officers of the Council associated with these duties and by the directors of the companies. Both Members and officers representing the Council on outside bodies should read and understand the guidance at Appendix 3.

## **5. Ownership and control of the company**

- 5.1 The City of Wolverhampton Council (the local authority as a corporate body) will be a member of the company. The membership will be as guarantor if a company limited by guarantee or, as will be the norm if a LATC, the holder of shares (perhaps the only share) in a company limited by shares.
- 5.2 The rights and duties as a member of the company will, however, almost always fall to be exercised as an executive responsibility. This means that, at the Council, decisions to be taken as a member of the company (as shareholder) fall to be decided on by the Leader. In the normal way, therefore, these functions may be delegated by the Leader to the Cabinet, a member of the Cabinet or to an officer and will be subject to key decision and access to information rules, call-in and review by overview and scrutiny committee.
- 5.3 For ease of use, where decisions are to be taken by the local authority as a member of a company, those decisions are referred to in this Code as being taken by 'the executive'.
- 5.4 The authority of the shareholder is exercised where decisions of the company are reserved for approval of the executive before they can be implemented, but also directly in the form of a shareholder's written resolution or at the company's general meetings.
- 5.5 At the company general meetings the executive will be present and voting as a member of the company, where this presence and voting will be in the form of a single person known as the 'shareholder representative'.
- 5.6 Decisions to be made by the executive, rather than left to the company itself, are known as 'reserved matters'. Reserved matters cover such things as the approval of the company's annual business plan or mid-year amendments to it, the appointment of directors, certain key financing decisions and so forth. These are established either through agreement with the company, known as a shareholders' agreement, or as set out in the company's governing articles of association.
- 5.7 The relationship between the local authority (and the companies it is a member of) is governed by these and other key documents that are required

to establish a local authority company, and a trading company in particular. In establishing the local authority's company and then in governing the relationship with what is now a separate legal personality, the executive will need to put in place the following documents:

- The **business case** which assesses the risk involved in the proposed trading enterprise and decides whether or not it should be established and proceed to trade. It starts the process of business planning.
- The **articles of association**, or the memorandum and articles of association as it used to be called, which is the constitution of the company. This is the legal documents required to set up a limited company and give details of its name, aims and authorised share capital, conduct of meetings, appointment of directors and registered office.
- The **shareholders agreement**, or management agreement, which sets out the rights of the Council as the sole or co-shareholder and how it can exercise those rights. It details the powers of the board of the company and how and when the shareholder might influence those powers. It is important to note that the shareholder agreement is capable of being developed and added to as the company develops.
- The **financial agreements** which are the commercial agreements that set out what assistance is to be provided and on what terms. This may be purely financial, such as a direct loan or a facility such as a parental guarantee, and made on commercial terms. It may also be in the form of goods, services or staff to be provided and set out in a resourcing agreement or a service level agreement, which is likely to be on a service charge or cost recovery basis. The agreements may require regular and detailed access to information and financial reporting to the Council and/or holding company.
- The **business plan** which sets out the objectives of the business, how they are to be achieved and standards met adjusted in the light of experience and changing circumstances. It is a comprehensive analysis of the business situation at a particular point in time. It is often referred to as the annual business plan because it is expected to be submitted for shareholder approval annually.

5.8 A model shareholder agreement for use with the holding company, setting out the principal decisions reserved for the executive's approval, including subsidiaries of the company as a group, is outlined at Appendix 2.

## **6. Shareholder (Advisory) Board**

6.1 The structure described above creates a governance process whereby, so far as appropriate under this Code's Principles, the company is left to get on with its business. Following the UK Corporate Governance Code, the companies will utilise a unified board, with appropriate non-executive directors providing outside expert help and with board committees (such as an audit committee) to provide oversight and ensure delivery.

- 6.2 The Leader and cabinet, in turn, will seek to inform the executive decisions and holding the company to account utilising a reflection of the company board structure in the form of a Shareholder Board, including external expertise and sub-groups. The role of this group is to provide the necessary oversight from a shareholder's perspective that the parameters, policies and boundaries that the executive as the shareholder has established for the company are being adhered to. In it, the Leader or the appointed member of Cabinet with portfolio remains the decision maker but the Shareholder Board act as advisors in the making of those executive decisions.
- 6.3 Such a Shareholder Board is considered to be an effective means of governance of the companies. This is because it allows for decision making and discussion in an informed atmosphere, which also provides the executive with:
- a mechanism to communicate the shareholders' views to the company; and
  - a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the company board and the delivery of the company performance against strategic objectives.
- 6.4 It is intended that the Leader, or the appointed member of Cabinet with portfolio, will make most decisions concerning the executive's role in respect of company interests at meetings of the Shareholder Board. It is envisaged that key decisions concerning the companies will, however, still normally be made at meetings of the Cabinet.
- 6.5 The Terms of Reference for the Shareholder Board are set out at Appendix 1.

## **7. Scrutiny**

- 7.1 The overview and scrutiny committees have a significant role to play to ensure that the company is able, and the executive has properly required the company, to make sufficient returns for the investment to be worthwhile and, indeed, ensure that the social objects set for it are not lost in the drive towards the overriding and essential requirement for the company to be economically successful.
- 7.2 It is the executive, the Leader and Cabinet, who is responsible for approving the business case to establish a company, of setting the right balance between the economic, social and environmental objects of a company when it is established and of subsequently exercising the Council's powers as shareholder.
- 7.3 Once established, the company must then get on with the business of delivering the objectives with which it has been tasked, within the parameters set for it. It must be otherwise free, however, to operate in its own best interests and to compete on an even basis with its competitors in the marketplace.
- 7.4 Again, it is the executive, either generally or when considering reserved

matters, to whom the company must answer and by whom it is held to account for its success, or failure, in achieving the objectives set for it.

- 7.5 The key role of overview and scrutiny is then to advise the executive and hold it to account on behalf of the wider public interest and its role within the Council.
- 7.6 This creates a flow of information and accountability, in which:
- the company needs to get on with the business of delivery;
  - the executive needs to make the company decisions reserved to it and to hold the company to account for performing against them; and
  - Members as part of overview and scrutiny need to advise on or scrutinise the decisions of the executive.

This needs to be done in a trading environment that requires them all to make speedy and reactive commercial decisions and to handle often highly valuable and commercially sensitive information.

- 7.7 Overview and Scrutiny, to fulfil its role, requires a means of access to the sensitive information and debate that inform the Shareholder Group and the Cabinet member/Leader's decision making, without either oppressing that process or endangering its own strictly non-executive role. As a result the key information is shared with the relevant Councillors.
- 7.8 Scrutiny Board/Panels may then review any matter concerning the Council's companies and make proper use of its full powers and function, having had these matters drawn to its attention by, and with the benefit of, a fully informed Chair. To that end there is a clear commitment that at least every 3 years each linked body that the Council owns will have a "deep dive" review brought to the relevant Scrutiny Panel/Board with a lighter touch report on each body annually.
- 7.9 In carrying out any such review, the Government Guidance states that:
- "The local authority should ensure that its overview and scrutiny committees are able to exercise their powers in relation to the discharge of local authority functions under the relevant legislation."*
- 7.10 To this end, the legal framework for local authority companies includes an express requirement concerning the provision of information to Members of the Council, which reflects the similar provision in relation to local authorities generally. This states that a local authority regulated company "*shall provide to a Member of the Council such information about the affairs of the company*

*as the member reasonably requires for the proper discharge of his duties.”<sup>10</sup>*

- 7.12 The exception here is that the company cannot be required to provide information in breach of any enactment, or of an obligation owed to any person.
- 7.13 It is also worth noting that, where a Member or an officer has become a member or director of a local authority company, the local authority must make arrangements for them to be open to questioning about the company’s activities by Members of the Council at a meeting of the authority, or a committee or sub-committee, or by cabinet members in the course of proceedings of the cabinet or a committee of the cabinet. Importantly, the Member or officer is not required to disclose confidential information about the company.
- 7.14 A diagram showing the recommended Company and Shareholder Model is shown at Appendix 4.

## **8. Investment and Finance**

- 8.1 The balance of how each company venture may be financed will be assessed and set out in the business case, required at the very beginning of the venture and the incorporation of the company as described above, and in business plans as made or amended and agreed by the executive. Each decision will take into account state aid implications and such matters as where legislative and regulatory requirements demand full cost recovery or standard commercial terms to be applied.
- 8.2 Where the purpose of a company is to better utilise assets owned by the Council, for example, the principal investment in the company is likely to be those assets. The assets may then be made use of by the company through their being transferred in their entirety from the Council to the company or by being provided to the company by the Council under a lease, loan or use agreement.
- 8.3 Investment at the initial stage of a trading company will normally be by way of purchase of share capital, often together with a loan or loan facility on commercial terms. This is to fund those costs which arise at the start of the company or company joint venture, including the holding company and its subsidiaries, to cover initial set up costs, working capital costs and collateral costs. For purchased company interests, share value should reflect the fair value of the going concern.
- 8.4 Direct investment may well also be by various other forms of agreement. This may be for the supply of monies, directly as a loan or under a parental guarantee, credit agreement, facility and so forth, which should be on standard commercial terms. It may also be for the supply of goods, property or staff, as described above and at section 12 below.

<sup>10</sup> Article 7, Local Authorities (Companies) Order 1995

## **9. Companies Structure**

- 9.1 Wherever advantageous and reasonably practicable to do so, the Council's companies and any subsidiary companies will be expected to adopt a common 'group' approach. Especially where a Teckal company, this will involve the companies using existing Council policies and strategies where appropriate and, in particular, the Council will require the company and its subsidiaries to adopt a common approach across the group on branding and its finance, ethics and procurement policies and practices wherever practicable. For example, the Council will require a Teckal and potentially other companies owned by the Council to approve the procurement and authorisation of spend levels set by each company for its directors and staff.
- 9.2 More detailed matters may also be set as a common approach by the Council, where it considers that that will increase effectiveness, efficiency and engender common understanding. This is likely to include such things as group financial procedure rules, fraud and whistle-blowing policies, decision making levels and procedures, capability and disciplinary procedures, health and safety practices and so forth.
- 9.3 The Council and any holding company may similarly provide a natural home and conduit for support and control roles that will be common across the group, such as company secretarial services, procurement, finance and human resources. These fall into two groups. The first is those services that would be better employed directly by the company within any group structure, such as financial and payroll systems for example. The other are those provided as managed services to the companies by the Council, under a resourcing agreement (or service level agreement), because this is more cost effective, appropriate or is a demand of the shareholder, such as HR or company secretarial and legal services. (This is described further at section 12 below).
- 9.4 The secondary purpose is financial, in that a range of company activities can share VAT registration where appropriate and more than one company, one arranged as a subsidiary to another, can be treated as holding group accounts. The latter means that reporting is as one set of accounts and that profit and loss can be distributed across the group, setting one off against another, as might be desired to meet the aims and values set for the group.
- 9.5 The executive will approve the appointment of auditors for any company and its accounts may be required to appear as part of the Council's financial statements.

## **10. The Company's Board**

- 10.1 The Government Guidance advised that a local authority company will be run by its board of directors answerable to the shareholders, in accordance with the articles of association, and goes on to suggest that a board of between 3 and 8 directors is most likely to be practical (although this will be dependent

on the circumstances of each company). The participating Local Authority should be represented on the board of its company.

- 10.2 The representatives who are appointed directors by the executive will participate directly in the activities of the company and are answerable to the company and have the powers and duties of company directors whilst they do so. Accordingly, the Government Guidance goes on to suggest that this requirement in a trading company and the accompanying conflict of interests that may arise means that officers are better placed to fulfil this role.
- 10.4 Specific arrangements may be required outside of the norm in certain circumstances. For example, the Council may require that it appoints the Chair of the board of directors and that the Chair will have a deciding say to be exercised through means of a 'golden vote' procedure on the board. This approach may be needed in a specific kind of company, for instance, to ensure that the Council's officers will always be able to out-vote the directly appointed directors on the holding company. Such matters as the quorum requirement for board meetings of the company and the like will be expected to reflect that objective.
- 10.5 A Council owned company will normally be required to have two standing committees, which will be as follows:
- The Remuneration Committee, which will conduct appointments and remuneration decisions and recommendations to the Council (where an appointment is not wholly reserved to the Council).
  - The Audit Committee, which will fulfil the same role and function as the Council's Audit Committee, the outputs of which will feed into the holding company board, the company business plans and the Council's own statement of accounts and Annual Governance Statement.
- 10.6 In respect of the individual wholly owned trading companies, non-trading (Teckal) companies and joint ventures, the appointment of directors of the company will be as are considered best to meet the requirements of the subsidiary or venture concerned.
- 10.7 Where an officer is placed on a company board, he or she will be provided with an indemnity for their actions in that role. This is provided for under the Local Authorities (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order 2004. It should be noted, however, that any such indemnity only covers actions taken honestly and in good faith.
- 10.8 Appointments to company director will be of the relevant post or office of the Council, not as an individual. This will be reflected within each of the companies' articles in that if any one of the Council appointed directors ceases to be an employee or office holder of the Council, then they automatically also cease to be a director of the company.
- 10.9 The remuneration of Council appointed directors to a company controlled or influenced by the Council, other than permitted expenses, will be met by the

Council and not the company. This is because, whilst that director's overriding duty is to the company, that person's role as director on the company board is only because of, and in fulfilment of, their employment as an officer of the Council, for which they are remunerated by the Council under that contract of employment. The position on the company is an inherent part of their job, for which payment is not to be made twice, directly or by different persons, for the same work

10.10 That is not to say that the Council would fail to recognise that the position of an officer appointed as a company director or company officer will include distinct and potentially onerous additional responsibilities. Rather, it is that it is the Council that needs to recognise the value of those responsibilities, through a job evaluation process or other means by which the Council sets salaries, in considering any review of an officer's remuneration. To do otherwise risks a future action against the officer or the Council and, if a payment were made to a Council officer by the company that was considered to be a fee or reward accepted under the colour of his or her office or employment other than his proper remuneration, that officer may also have committed a criminal offence<sup>11</sup>.

10.11 For the purposes of completeness, where a Member of the Council is a director of a regulated company the law only permits such a Member to receive payment for that directorship up to the amount payable for that role under the authority's Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)<sup>12</sup>, set as a result of the recommendation of the Independent Remuneration Panel<sup>13</sup>. These payments may be made by the company directly or, more normally and as would be the case here, by the Council for reasons of simplicity, accounting and accountability.

10.12 The view behind this is that the regulated company is, in fact, simply a part of the Council. In the same way that there is a bar on Members of the Council being employees, the philosophy runs akin to that for officers in that the Council may not pay a Member for any other activities they may carry out as a Member of the Council other than through their SRA.

## **11. Conflicts of interest**

11.1 The Government Guidance states that "*Local authority members and officers should be aware of potential conflicts of interest when carrying out their roles for their authorities, or when acting as directors of trading companies.*"

11.2 There will always arise a point where, in matters of reporting, contractual discussion, investment requests or resourcing agreements, there is potential for the same person to be a decision maker or advisor both for the Council and the company.

<sup>11</sup> s117(2) of the Local Government Act 1972

<sup>12</sup> Article 5 of the Local Authorities (Companies) Order 1995

<sup>13</sup> Reg 21 of the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

- 11.3 This is a reflection of the position of each company as a separate legal entity and that the directors of each company are subject to. As the Corporate Governance Guidance and Principles puts it:

*'An important principle of Company Law is that directors have a duty to promote the success of the company as a whole. They are specifically prohibited from directing the activities of the company in favour of themselves or particular shareholders and/ or stakeholders.'*

- 11.4 An essential element of this in terms of this Code is that, whilst changes to the Companies Act and current articles of association allow for appropriate provisions dealing with conflicts of interest and the ability of company directors to authorise them, an officer of the Council or a Member can never waive their duty to act in the public interest in exercising their responsibility for functions of the Authority. This will, on occasion, therefore, create an inescapable conflict of interest between someone's role as a Member or, more likely, as an officer of the Council and as a director of a company, of which those involved need to be aware.
- 11.5 Appendix 3 sets out a Guidance Note for Members and Officers and which gives further advice on the issue.
- 11.6 There are also natural points where it is expected that the Council and one of its trading companies will take a different approach. In this respect, the Government Guidance states that:
- "The local authority should consider appointing a 'contract officer' and/or 'contract member' with primary responsibility for liaison between the company and the authority, and for access to information about it. It might wish to place limitations on these individuals to ensure that they are fully accountable to the authority as a whole and to ensure that the Section 151 Officer/Monitoring Officer countersigns major decisions about the company's operations."*
- 11.7 This is the role of the Shareholder Board. In support of that function, the Council will appoint a lead authority and client-side officer to lead on managing contractual arrangements with the companies and in holding of the companies to account.
- 11.8 A certain form of wholly owned local authority also exist to provide services directly to or for the Council (known as a 'Teckal' company). The relationship between the authority and the company are set out in a contract for services. In this scenario, clear separation is required between commissioner and provider and there will be a requirement for further support to be provided, beyond the position of lead authority and client officer.
- 11.9 Officers placed into any of these roles are, at some point, likely to find themselves in a position where they are, or are negatively seen to be, acting against the interest of their own authority and also challenging the Council as

their employers or senior managers to whom they might normally answer to. As a result of such activities, their performance in the company or actions they feel are required of them by the company, some of those officers may even find themselves in a position where it is no longer felt tenable that they can be appointed by the authority as a director of a company. The Council as an employer, from the viewpoint of both the executive and overview and scrutiny, wholly recognises these unusual positions that such officers may find themselves. The Council therefore undertakes that no officer will suffer any ill affect to his or her employment or career with the authority for fulfilling these activities to the best of their ability or in undertaking these actions asked of them.

## **12. Managed Services, Support Arrangements and Employees**

12.1 The authority is required under the 2009 regulations to recover the costs of any accommodation, goods, services, staff or any other thing it supplies to a company in pursuance of any agreement, or arrangement in place. It cannot subsidise the operation of the company in this way.

12.2 The Government Guidance in addition clarifies that

*“Because the power to trade is subject to a restriction requiring it to be exercised through a company, it follows that the authority has the requisite power to enter into arrangements with a company in order for the trading power ... to be exercised. It is not necessary therefore, for the company to be expressly designated as a public body under the Local Authorities (Goods and Services) Act 1970, in order for the authority to be able to provide it with staff, goods etc, for the purpose of exercising the power to trade.”*

12.3 This means that the authority may enter into an agreement with the companies to provide services at cost or as a surplus service charge and that staff time and resources utilized for company purposes should be carefully accounted for. Where this is done at cost, which shall be the norm, it is helpfully stated in the Guidance that the approach should be in accordance with the CIPFA definition of ‘whole cost’.

12.4 Referred to above as the ‘managed services’, those areas of the authority’s resources so utilized might include project management, initial set-up staff, human resources, audit, business continuity, communications, procurement, legal or finance and so on. It is for the company and the executive to agree what is the appropriate level of authority led resource that is appropriate, should or can be delivered to the company in each case. The parameters of those services can be agreed through a Resourcing Agreement or what is known as a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

12.5 The authority as shareholder, however, does need to be assured that there are effective and robust support services in place in certain areas. This is to satisfy itself that sufficient standards of operational governance, legal and company secretarial compliance and effective financial management within

the company are adhered to. The authority will reserve to itself the ability under the Shareholder Agreement to insist on supplying these services to a controlled company, at cost, if it feels that these standards are not otherwise being met or are not in its opinion likely to be met.

- 12.6 In particular, the Company Secretary role should have a consistent approach across all of the Council owned companies or group of companies. This is to ensure consistent interpretation of the compliance standards across the companies and of the governance relationship between the companies and between the companies and the Council. In addition, it ensures that appropriate and proper intelligence is shared across the companies and the authority. In relation to all authority-controlled companies and their subsidiaries, therefore, the position of company secretary as an officer (not a director) of each company in the group is to be fulfilled by the Council's Monitoring Officer, being the equivalent corporate governance, assurance and general counsel position for the Council. All company secretarial and general counsel duties for the companies will then be carried out through that office, either directly or through the position of an assistant company secretary, with the exception of where a conflict of interest is identified and is acknowledged by that officer.
- 12.7 In relation to company staffing, it is expected that staff of the local authority trading companies will be directly recruited and employed by the companies themselves, with the exception of those support staff supplied by or seconded from the authority as described above. Where the business case includes that staff are transferred, however, this will be subject to full reporting and then consultation and requirements under TUPE legislation and guidance.

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*Based on the LLG Guidance Note for England & Wales February 2018*

## **Appendix 1**

### **SHAREHOLDER BOARD - TERMS OF REFERENCE**

#### **1. Overview**

The purpose of the Shareholder Board is to advise the Cabinet Member in the exercise of his/her responsibility for the Council's functions as corporate shareholder of a company or group of companies and in their role to represent the interests of the Council as Shareholder Representative at meetings of a company.

#### **2. Decision making**

The Cabinet Member may make decisions concerning companies in which the Council is or is proposed to become a shareholder, either:

- (a) within Cabinet; or
- (b) in the presence of the Shareholder Board.

#### **3. Membership and Arrangements**

The Shareholder Board shall consist of the Cabinet Member with relevant portfolio (or other Cabinet Member as may be appointed by the Leader for this purpose) in the presence of:

- (a) at least one relevant senior officer of the Council as are appointed by the head of paid service (or their deputies);
- (b) such other Members of the Cabinet as may be invited by the Cabinet Member;
- (c) up to two co-opted members, who may be appointed from time to time, who will be independent persons providing relevant expertise and appointed on merit (but which process may be carried out in association with the Audit Committee's arrangements for co-opted appointments); together with
- (d) a Chair (or representative) of a relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who may be invited by the Cabinet Member to act in the capacity of Observer.

The s.151 officer and the monitoring officer, or their deputies, will be advisors to the Shareholder Board to provide open and strong advice.

#### **4. Restrictions on Membership**

As the Shareholder Board is to advise on the discharge of executive functions in relation to company matters and the role of the Shareholder Representative, only

executive members may be members of the Shareholder Board and, only then, where there is no conflict of interest between the role of the Shareholder Board in advising the Shareholder Representative on behalf of the Council's corporate interest and that member's role as portfolio holder or company director.

## **5. Meetings**

The Shareholder Board shall meet on a basis agreed by itself and normally in private.

The quorum of Shareholder Board Meetings must include the elected member of the Cabinet together with at least one officer of the Council to give advice on the matters to be discussed.

Where an invitation to attend is made to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (or their nominated deputy) it should be made at least three clear days in advance of the meeting taking place. This notice period may be waived if the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (or their nominated deputy) so agrees.

An invitation to attend must also have been provided to the section 151 officer and the monitoring officer (or their nominated deputies), which will normally be at least three clear days in advance of the meeting taking place.

The Cabinet Member will chair the Shareholder Board and is the sole decision maker.

## **6. Functions**

The purpose of the Shareholder Board is to provide strategic direction to a Council regulated company which shall, in particular, include to:

- (a) Oversee the performance of a company in relation to its Business Plan, including but not limited to monitoring the company's performance:
  - (i) in financial matters;
  - (ii) against the social goals of the company as set out in the company's Objects, Business Case or Business Plan; and
  - (iii) against the values of the Council.
- (b) Evaluate and monitor:
  - (i) the financial and social returns on investment (be that shareholding, loans or direct investment); and
  - (ii) risks and opportunities including those arising from joint ventures or new opportunities.
- (c) Consider matters reserved to the Council for shareholder approval, such as:
  - (i) Varying Articles of Association
  - (ii) Varying ownership and structure
  - (iii) Variations to shares (number of, rights, etc.
  - (iv) Appointment, removal and the remuneration of directors (members of the Company Board);
  - (v) Entering contracts that:

- (1) have a material effect on Council business (including other companies or partnerships within which the Council holds an interest);
  - (2) are outside of the Company's Business Plan or do not relate to the business of the Company; or
  - (2) are significant in relation to the size of the business of the Company, the Business Plan, etc.;
  - (vi) Acquiring or disposing of any material assets of the Company (as may be defined in the Annual Business Plan) (whether by one transaction or a series of transactions);
  - (vii) Material legal proceedings outside of ordinary business;
  - (viii) Adopting and amending business plans each year and strategic plans (3 years);
  - (ix) Appointment of auditors
  - (x) Issue of dividends
- as may be more particularly set out in a Company's Articles of Association or Shareholder Agreement.

## **7. Relationship**

The Shareholder Board as it considers appropriate in accordance with its functions described above, may:

- (a) report and make formal recommendations to the Leader, directly or to the wider Cabinet;
- (b) make reports to and consult Overview and Scrutiny (including full Council) or
- (c) make reports to and consult the Audit Committee, in relation to that Committee's particular functions.

**Appendix 2**

**OUTLINE OF THE SHAREHOLER AGREEMENT**

1. DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION
2. FINANCING THE COMPANY
3. DIVIDEND POLICY
4. SUBSIDIARIES
5. MANAGEMENT OF THE COMPANY
6. SHAREHOLDER GROUP
7. THE BUSINESS PLAN AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE BUSINESS PLAN
8. REPORTING AND ACCOUNTING MATTERS
9. BANKING ARRANGEMENTS
10. TERMINATION
11. UNLAWFUL FETTER ON THE COMPANY'S POWERS
12. ASSIGNMENT AND SUB-CONTRACTING
13. FURTHER ASSURANCE
14. REMEDIES AND WAIVERS
15. ENTIRE AGREEMENT
16. VARIATION
17. CONFLICT WITH THE ARTICLES
18. SEVERANCE
19. CONFIDENTIALITY
20. NOTICES
21. NO PARTNERSHIP OR AGENCY
21. COUNTERPARTS
22. CONTRACTS (RIGHTS OF THIRD PARTIES) ACT 1999
23. GOVERNING LAW AND JURISDICTION

**Appendix 3**

**GUIDANCE NOTE FOR MEMBERS AND OFFICERS – REPRESENTING THE  
COUNCIL ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

This is available as a separate document.

