

City of Wolverhampton Council – Decisions taken by the Cabinet on Wednesday, 8 September 2021

Item 5	
Title	Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Report
Status	Recommendation Approved
Record of Decision	That the City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) and the regional adoption agency service response to the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) finding be endorsed.
Options Considered	<p>Option One – The service continues to practice with the change below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial conversations take place with potential applicants with a view to providing them with information and giving them an opportunity to discuss their circumstances and any issues that may be likely to affect their suitability to adopt. • Guidance and information is offered on the likely impact of any potential vulnerabilities in relation to the timing of their decision to start the adoption process. • All potential applicants are offered the opportunity to submit a Registration of Interest (ROI). The agency has five working days within which to decide about whether to progress any potential applicant from the point of receiving the ROI. <p>Option Two – The service provides every potential applicant with the opportunity to formally Register their Interest after attending an information event and does not undertake any initial conversations or offer guidance to potential applicants about their circumstances and potential strengths or vulnerabilities within their application.</p>
Reasons for Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The regional adoption agency service aims to focus its resources strategically by prioritising social worker and other staff time in assessing and approving those applicants who are most likely to meet the needs of the children within the region in need of adoptive families. Option one enables to the service to offer full information and guidance at an early stage. This is considered common and best practice in the sector and the majority of people interested in

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	<p>adopting will work with the information and guidance provided by the agency and not submit a Registration of Interest if the information about their circumstances suggests there may be vulnerabilities in their application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Option two would require potential applicants to submit a formal application and provide a significant amount of personal information. This is likely to raise expectations and lead to disappointment where, due to the lack of prior guidance and discussion about their circumstances, the agency decides (within the five working days allowed) to make a decision not to progress their application to Stage One of the process. It would also create pressures on staff time and resources and reduce the ability of the service to target its resources towards those potential applicants most likely to meet the needs of children.
Record of Conflicts of Interest	None
Dispensation Granted	Not applicable
Decision available for implementation (subject to call-in)	14 September 2021

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Item 6	
Title	Severn Trent's Commonwealth Legacy Forest
Status	Recommendations Approved
Record of Decision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Council support the principle of the Severn Trent Commonwealth Legacy Forest and proposing sites for both the Legacy Forest and Tiny Forests on land owned or managed by the Council. 2. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for City Environment and Climate Change, in consultation with the Director of Governance, to sign any relevant agreements to enable planting to take place on the proposed sites, should they be accepted and the terms of planting be considered acceptable to the Council. 3. That it be noted that the report seeks delegated authority in the case of sites being proposed and accepted but does not commit to Council to providing sites for the Commonwealth Legacy Forest or Tiny Forests, should sites not be identified and selected or should the terms of planting not be acceptable to the Council.
Options Considered	<p>Option 1 - approve the report, support the initiative and seek to engage with Severn Trent and Earthwatch to identify sites. This will further the aims of the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy, Climate Emergency Declaration and Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. It will also promote community engagement in planting and maintaining the forests, in particular the Tiny Forests, as well as supporting the wider benefits to the City of the Commonwealth Games.</p> <p>Option 2 - do nothing. This will bring no benefit to the City, reduce wider engagement with the Commonwealth Games and will bring about possible reputational harm with existing and future partners and with the public.</p>

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Reasons for Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is recommended that support for the principal of the Commonwealth Legacy Forest is given to complement the Council's wider support for the Commonwealth Games and the benefits which they will bring to the City and region. Such support is also in line with the Council's existing Tree and Woodland Strategy, Climate Emergency Declaration and Open Space Strategy and Action Plan.• Planting of sites as part of the Commonwealth Legacy Forest, either the main forest or Tiny Forests, would further the aims of the Tree and Woodland Strategy, Climate Emergency Declaration and Open Space Strategy and Action Plan. This would include wider benefits of social inclusion and promoting public health, in addition to the direct environmental benefits such as tackling climate change and supporting biodiversity. Tiny Forests, with the aim of community involvement in planting, maintenance and monitoring, would have additional benefits.
Record of Conflicts of Interest	None
Dispensation Granted	Not applicable
Decision available for implementation (subject to call-in)	14 September 2021

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Item 7	
Title	Revised Affordable Rents Policy for all New Build Wolverhampton Council Housing
Status	Recommendations Approved
Record of Decision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Social Rents are applied to new build council properties only when allocated to a returning tenant(s) who are displaced as a result of an approved council led regeneration programme. This is only applicable for new build properties built without using grant funding. 2. That Social Rent is charged on properties purchased through the Market to Affordable Housing Conversion Programme only when the property is allocated to an existing tenant(s) who is required to temporarily decant to assist in the progression of the approved council led regeneration programme. 3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director of City Housing and Environment, to authorise future amendments to the City's Affordable Rents Policy for new build council Housing.
Options Considered	<p>Option 1- Make no change to the current Affordable Rents Policy, this ensures no negative impact to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and a consistent approach across all council new build development. Rents in Wolverhampton are relatively low and there is little difference between Social and Affordable Rent, so the impact on the majority of tenants, should be insignificant. However current policy does not account for estate regeneration where existing council tenants have to leave their homes due to a need to demolish or carry out extensive works on an estate and neither does it allow the use of Social Rents when using homes purchased and brought back into the Council's housing stock for temporary decant purposes.</p> <p>Option 2 - Amend the current policy and apply a Social Rent to all non-grant funded new build developments. This approach would bring the Council in line with the recommendations of the Black Country Tenancy Strategy but would have a greater impact on the HRA and could have a negative impact on the ability to pursue other much needed social housing development in the City.</p>

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Reasons for Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In updating the policy to include the planned proposal for Social Rents to be charged on council regeneration schemes and for those properties purchased via the Market to Affordable Housing Conversion Programme for use as temporary homes for those affected by regeneration; it will allow Social Rents to be charged within the parameters detailed within the report for existing tenants who wish to remain on their current estate during the regeneration programme or for those tenants who wish to return once the regeneration programme is completed. This will ensure existing tenants are able to remain within their established communities and retain local connections to that area.• The policy also recognises that where the Council leads on a regeneration scheme that it should not be of detriment, in terms of rent charges, to existing tenants directly affected by the planned redevelopment.
Record of Conflicts of Interest	None
Dispensation Granted	Not applicable
Decision available for implementation (subject to call-in)	14 September 2021

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Item 8	
Title	Help to Own Scheme Update and Governance
Status	Recommendations Approved
Record of Decision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the governance structure and approvals process identified in the report be approved. Key decisions, as listed, would be reported to Cabinet for approval. Other operational decisions as noted are delegated to the Director of Finance and the Chief Operating Officer acting on behalf of the Council as a member of the Help to Own partnerships, and otherwise to the appointees to the scheme Management Board. 2. That the minor amendments to correct and clarify certain of the transaction documents signed on 16 April 2021 to establish the scheme and delegation to the Director of Finance and Chief Operating Officer of authority to approve on behalf of the Council as a member of HTO2 LLP be approved. 3. That it be noted that this is the first six monthly update on the scheme and shows a strong initial performance with 352 applications for the 100 houses. Of these 70 have been approved to date, 50.% from key workers and 61% from Wolverhampton residents. 4. That it be noted that the first 23 houses are expected to be delivered and occupied in September with the balance delivered in tranches over the following 6 months. Loans would be drawn down from the facility with the West Midlands Pension Fund (WMPF) to fund the purchase of each tranche.
Options Considered	A range of alternative options have been considered however the appointees to the Management Board and governance structure proposed is considered to offer the most effective and efficient oversight of the scheme.

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Reasons for Decision	The proposal ensures proper management control and governance of the HtO scheme. The amendments to legal documentation ensure all contracts are correctly drawn up.
Record of Conflicts of Interest	None
Dispensation Granted	Not applicable
Decision available for implementation (subject to call-in)	14 September 2021