



Cabinet Meeting

4 February 2015

Time 5.00 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Executive
Venue Committee Room 3 - Civic Centre, St Peter's Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1SH

Membership

Chair Cllr Roger Lawrence (Lab)
Vice-chair Cllr Peter Bilson (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Steve Evans
Cllr Val Gibson
Cllr Andrew Johnson
Cllr Elias Mattu
Cllr Phil Page
Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Sandra Samuels
Cllr Paul Sweet

Quorum for this meeting is five Councillors.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the democratic support team:

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Some items are discussed in private because of their confidential or commercial nature. These reports are not available to the public.

Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

MEETING BUSINESS ITEMS

- 1 **Apologies for absence**
- 2 **Declaration of interests**
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (14 January 2015)** (Pages 3 - 8)
[For approval]
- 4 **Matters arising**
[To consider any matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting]

DECISION ITEMS (AMBER - DELEGATED TO THE CABINET)

- 5 **Budget 2015/16 - Outcome of Consultation** (Pages 9 - 30)
[To approve the initial response to the budget consultations]
- 6 **2015/16 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 - 2018/19**
(Pages 31 - 52)
[To provide an update on the 2015/16 budget and the medium term financial strategy for the period to 2018/19]
- 7 **Scrutiny Review of Welfare Reforms - Unclaimed Benefits** (Pages 53 - 98)
[To consider the recommendations from the scrutiny review and the Executive response thereto]
[Note: The Chair of the scrutiny review group has been invited]
- 8 **Anti-Social Behaviour Service - Authorisations to Support TUPE Transfer**
(Pages 99 - 104)
[To provide the required authorisations to proceed with Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) transfer of staff and associated services currently delivered by Wolverhampton City Council to Wolverhampton Homes]
- 9 **Appointments to Outside Bodies** (Pages 105 - 110)
[To approve appointments to outside bodies, trusts and charities]



Meeting of the Cabinet

Minutes - 14 January 2015

Attendance

Members of the Cabinet

Cllr Roger Lawrence (Chair)
Cllr Peter Bilson (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Steve Evans
Cllr Val Gibson
Cllr Andrew Johnson
Cllr Elias Mattu
Cllr Phil Page
Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Sandra Samuels
Cllr Paul Sweet

Employees

Dereck Francis	Democratic Support Officer
Keith Ireland	Managing Director
Mark Taylor	Director of Finance
Tony Ivko	Service Director - Older People
Kevin O'Keefe	Director of Governance
Tim Johnson	Strategic Director - Place

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
No apologies for absence were received for the meeting.
- 2 Declaration of interests**
No declarations of interests were made.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting (10 December 2014)**
Resolved:
That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 December 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4 Matters arising**
There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

5 **Housing Revenue Account Business Plan (including 2015/16 budget rents and service charges)**

Cllr Peter Bilson presented a report on an updated Housing Revenue Account business plan. The report also provided, as an integral part of that business plan, a proposed HRA budget for 2015/16, including proposed rents and service charges to take effect from 6 April 2015, and a proposed HRA capital programme for the period 2014/15 to 2019/20, for recommendation to full Council.

Cllr Bilson informed Cabinet that consultations on the 2015/16 budget had been carried out by Wolverhampton Homes on behalf of the Council. It was proposed to recommend to Full Council average rent increases of 3.11% with effect from 6 April 2015. This was neither the lowest or highest rent that could have been recommended, but was below the limit rent the in accordance with Government guidelines. The HRA would also fund an investment programme of £2.0 billion of capital works that would be required to the Council's houses over the next 30 years.

Resolved:

A. That Full Council be recommended to:

1. Adopt the business plan set out at appendix A as the approved Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan, including:
 - (a) The revenue budget for 2015/16 set out in the plan;
 - (b) The capital programme for 2014/15 to 2019/20 set out in the plan.
2. Approve an increase in rents for HRA dwellings of an average of 3.11% with effect from 6 April 2015.
3. Increase rents for HRA garages by 3.11%, with effect from 1 April 2015.
4. Approve that HRA service charges and district heating charges are set at the levels detailed in appendix B3, with effect from 1 April 2015.
5. Approve that Hostel charges are set at the levels detailed in appendix B4, with effect from 1 April 2015.
6. Note the charges to be levied on tenants and leaseholders by Wolverhampton Homes set out in appendix B5 are noted.

B. That Full Council is asked to note:

1. The forecast outturn against the 2014/15 revenue budget is a surplus before allocations of £18.9 million compared to a budgeted surplus of £11.9 million.
2. That carelink charges are currently under review.
3. That the Council places on record its sincere thanks to all those tenants' representatives and all other stakeholders and partners who put forward views and comments during the consultation process

6 **2015/16 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 - 2018/19 - Provisional Local Government Settlement Update**

Cllr Andrew Johnson presented a report which updated Cabinet on the 2015/16 provisional local government settlement. He informed Cabinet that there had been little change with the illustrative 2015/16 settlement which the Council received as part of its 2014/15 settlement in January 2014. Its impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy was £400,000.

He drew Cabinet's attention to comparative data for the 2014/15 settlement to 2015/16 that illustrated year on year how Wolverhampton had seen a substantial reduction in its spending power. He also informed Cabinet that he had met the Local Government Minister yesterday when the issue of funding had been raised. There was no signal of more resources going into local government because of the national picture but the point had been made that the Council had been badly treated in terms of its settlements.

Resolved:

1. That the outcome of the 2015/16 provisional local government finance settlement be noted.
2. That it be noted that the update to Cabinet on 4 February 2015 would reflect the outcome of budget consultation, which is due to be complete on 15 January 2015. That report would also include the outcome of detailed budget work for 2015/16 including a review of all savings and the risks associated with their delivery.

7 **Council Tax Taxbase 2015/16 and Approval of NNDR (Business Rates) Net Rate Yield 2015/16**

Cllr Andrew Johnson presented a report seeking Cabinet approval to set the Collection Fund for 2015/16, which the council manages on behalf of precepting bodies and central government.

Resolved:

1. That the Collection Fund Council Tax Base for 2015/16 be set at 59,103.95 Band D equivalents.
2. That the Collection Fund Business Rates (NDR) Net Rate Yield for 2015/16 be set at £75.8 million.
3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources in consultation with the Director of Finance to approve amendments to:
 - a) the final NDR net rate yield as required as a result of changes to the NNDR1 form (national non-domestic rates return) by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) or data revisions and changes in projections;
 - b) the Council Tax Base as a result of any data revisions and changes in projections.

8 **Collection Fund Estimated Outturn 2014/15**

Cllr Andrew Johnson presented the report on the estimated outturn for council tax and NDR (business rate) transactions on the Collection Fund in 2014/15. He informed Cabinet of a surplus on both council tax and business rates on the Collection Fund. The council tax surplus had been achieved despite the challenges that were presented by the council tax reduction scheme. He paid tribute to employees within the Council's Revenues Team for their efforts in achieving the surplus against the background of the revise council tax reduction scheme.

Resolved:

1. That the payments to the precepting authorities of their share of the council tax surplus in equal instalments be approved.

The estimated outturn in 2014/15 is a cumulative surplus of £1.1 million. Based on their proportion of the 2014/15 council tax bill, as approved by Council in March 2014 the amounts are as follows:

- Wolverhampton City Council £980,000
- West Midlands Police £76,000
- West Midlands Fire Service £39,000

2. That the payments to central government and the precepting authority of their share of the business rates (NDR) surplus in equal instalments be approved.

The estimated outturn in 2014/15 is a cumulative surplus of £124,000. As prescribed by legislation the amounts are as follows:

- Wolverhampton City Council £61,000
- Central Government £62,000
- West Midlands Fire Service £1,000

3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources, in consultation with the Director of Finance, to confirm any final changes to the forecast outturn reflecting any further information received ahead of the statutory deadline of 31 January 2015

9 **Introduction of Local Controls Regarding the use of Sky Lanterns**

Cllr Roger Lawrence presented the report on a proposal to introduce local controls regarding the use of sky lanterns at council run events and private events that are undertaken on Council owned land and to seek to use licensing controls to curtail the use of sky lanterns on private sites.

Whilst there was little evidence to suggest that sky lanterns had caused problems within Wolverhampton, on occasions they had been the cause of serious fires with devastating effects on property, assets and lives.

Resolved:

1. That the review of the Statement of Licensing Policy to allow the Licensing Authority to restrict the use of sky lanterns at licensed premises under the public safety licensing objective be approved .

2. That the use of licensing controls to restrict the use of sky lanterns at approved marriage venues be approved.
3. That the inclusion of a condition in the terms of use for Council owned land (highways, parks, the piazza, etc.) that restricts the release of sky lanterns when land is hired for events be approved.
4. That the implementation of a local policy prohibiting/ limiting the use of sky lanterns at all Council organised events be approved.
5. That Government be lobbied to introduce national controls on the use of sky lanterns

10 **Exclusion of press and public**

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within the paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Act set out below:

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Applicable paragraph</i>
11	Outcome of consultation on proposals for the Old Tree Nursery	3
12	Outcome of consultation on the future of the Supported Employment Service	3

11 **Outcome of consultation on proposals for the Old Tree Nursery**

Cabinet received a report on the consultation process that has been undertaken about the future of Old Tree Nursery, which is part of the All Age Disability service and works with adults with a learning disability. Cllr Steve Evans requested Cabinet approval to proceed with further discussions with Heantun Housing Association/ The Accord Group in relation to their expression of interest of Old Tree Nursery.

Resolved:

That the proposal to proceed with further discussions with Heantun Housing Association/ The Accord Group in relation to their expression of interest of Old Tree Nursery be approved.

12 **Outcome of consultation on the future of the Supported Employment Service**

Cllr Steve Evans asked Cabinet to receive the report on feedback from the consultation on future options for the Supported Employment Service which was designed to support people with a learning disability into paid employment. He also sought approval to proceed with further discussions with Shropshire Council in relation to their expression of interest to take over the Supported Employment Service.

Resolved:

That the proposal to proceed with further discussions with Shropshire Council in relation to their expression of interest to take over the Supported Employment Service be approved.

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Cabinet Meeting

4 February 2015

Report title	Budget 2015/16 – Outcome of Consultation	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Andrew Johnson Resources	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Mark Taylor, Finance	
Originating service	Finance	
Accountable employee(s)	Mark Taylor Tel Email	Director of Finance 01902 556609 mark.taylor@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board	22 January 2015

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to consider the responses to the consultation undertaken for the Five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 to 2018/19 as detailed in this report.

Recommendations for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note the final response will also be fed back to those that participated in the consultation.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report sets to inform Cabinet about the consultation process undertaken to support the 2015/16 budget-setting decisions, allowing for Councillors' consideration of the initial responses to the consultation.
- 1.2 The completed set of responses to the consultation will be taken into account in the final budget that Cabinet recommends to Council to approve on 25 February 2015. The final response will also be fed back to those who participated in the consultation.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Council's budget consultation took place from 27 October 2014 to 15 January 2015 in order to inform the budget-setting decisions for 2015/16. All of the consultation and analysis was conducted in-house and this was a major factor in keeping the cost of delivery to a minimum.
- 2.2 The process was comprised of:
 - An invitation to submit comments in writing;
 - A survey (available online and on paper) for the public and employees;
 - Stakeholder meetings with
 - Wolverhampton's residents;
 - The business community;
 - Trades unions;
 - Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.
- 2.3 The survey collected 591 responses. 18 members of the public attended the stakeholder meetings. The breakdown was:
 - 2 attendees at Low Hill Community Centre,
 - 9 attendees at Bilston Town Hall,
 - 3 attendees at Bantock House,
 - 2 attendees at Blakenhall Healthy Living Centre,
 - 2 attendees at Business Breakfast.

Views from the voluntary sector and Trade Unions were obtained at one of their scheduled meetings. The attendance at these meetings was not recorded.
- 2.4 The consultation was branded as 'Managing Reality' and the Council's Communications team provided support to develop Facebook advertising and sign-post the public to the online consultation pages. The 'Managing Reality' campaign was publicised in both the Chronicle and the Express and Star newspapers. Appropriate Cabinet Members, Strategic and Assistant Directors attended stakeholder meetings in order to support the process and answer any questions.

3.0 Key Findings

3.1 A fuller summary of the consultation findings can be found in appendix one. Respondents commented upon key areas such as:

- Protecting services from cuts,
- Public volunteering to help reduce the cost of running services,
- Reducing the level of cuts and replacing those with cuts to other services,
- Raising Council Tax.

3.2 Protecting services from cuts

Respondents were asked to choose if each of 13 services should have total, some or no protection. A table of responses for all respondents and by age group can be found in appendix two.

The top three services respondents stated should remain **totally protected** from the proposed savings round were:

- Protecting children from harm (79.20%)
- Caring for and protecting from harm the elderly and vulnerable adults (77.20%)
- Ensuring there are enough school places for the city's children (66.15%)

The top three services respondents stated should have **some protection** from the proposed savings round were:

- Keeping streets and open spaces clean (58.57%)
- Library Services (55.57%)
- Leisure Centres (54.09%)

The top three services respondents stated should have **no protection** from the proposed savings round were:

- Neighbourhood Services (i.e. Neighbourhood Wardens) (29.95%)
- Cultural Services (i.e. Art Galleries, Bantock House) (27.18%)
- Leisure Centres (25.91%)

16-34 year olds voted to totally protect "Ensuring there are enough school places for the city's children" whereas 35+ year olds voted more for "Protecting children from harm". Older respondents (45+) voted no protection for "Leisure Centres", whereas, younger respondents (16-24) voted no protection for "Dustbins and recycling".

3.3 Public volunteering to help reduce the cost of running services

438 of 584 respondents (75%) stated that they would **not** be willing to give up some of their own time as a volunteer to help reduce the cost of running services. 16-24 year olds were more likely to give up their time volunteer with 45% responding yes. Only 19% of 35-44 year olds responded yes. Reasons given included:

"I already volunteer and look after a neighbour as well as working"

“In principle yes, e.g. helping to run a community library service. However, this would lead to more job cuts, more benefit claims, and reduced spending power within the community so I am not convinced it is the right option.”

“No-because I already give a lot of my time to volunteering in Wolverhampton.”

“Unfortunately as a full time mother and full time student midwife I simply don’t have any spare time”

“I already do I work in a local library staffed by volunteers only.”

Overall, respondents reported that although they supported the view to volunteer to help reduce the cost of running services, respondents clearly felt they did not have enough time to do so. More details about the comments received are outlined in appendix one.

3.4 Reducing the level of cuts and replacing those with cuts to other services

Respondents stated that:

“All of my choices relating to Total Protection are to ensure the safety of residents. If cuts were to be made in any of these areas it would be detrimental to all residents.”

“I would like to see the council encourage people to get involved with volunteering in sectors such as environment, sports & leisure, and the arts, where I think people with the relevant skills will be inclined to want to help out.”

“Make use of community centres which do not cost a lot of money and where empty spaces can be used, use the supermarkets which have space available.”

Respondents felt that protecting services aimed at the elderly and younger people in the City ought to be a priority for the Council. They thought that this proposal would have implications for the overall safety of residents. They were also concerned that residents would not be able to access alternative facilities and that the proposal may have a disproportionate effect on some groups such as the elderly.

3.5 Raising Council Tax

276 of 580 respondents (47.59%) stated that they would be willing to pay more Council Tax if that rise reduced the level of cuts to services. To quantify the proposed increase, the impact of each 1% increase would be the equivalent of an additional £10.40 per year based on the average property value (Valuation Band B) in Wolverhampton. Of those 276,

135 (49%) would be willing to pay an extra 1% taking the increase to 3%

74 (27%) would be willing to pay an extra 2% taking the increase to 4%

65 (23%) would be willing to pay an extra 2+% taking the increase to 4+%

16-24 year olds responded most positively to paying more Council Tax with 70% saying yes followed by 35-44 year age group with 57%. Only 36% of 65+ year olds responded yes to paying more.

4.0 General comments unrelated to specific savings proposals

- 4.1 The survey showed that the majority of people (429 of 578, 74.18%) were in agreement with the principle that the Council should focus its resources on protecting children from harm, caring for and protecting from harm the elderly and vulnerable adults and ensuring there are enough school places for the City's children. Participants were concerned about the impact of the savings on the most vulnerable and that the savings might have unintended outcomes particularly related to the most vulnerable in the City.
- 4.2 Respondents were interested in the Council's overall approach to managing the budget challenge. Some participants felt that the Council's back office costs and duplication could be reduced still further and that partnering arrangements with other local authorities should be considered. A partnership approach to addressing the challenges that the City faces was advocated by many and it was felt that the community had an important part to play in this.
- 4.3 Many participants would like to see an increased focus on prevention, which they said would ultimately save money, and some individuals raised concerns about their ability to comment meaningfully on the cuts based on the information provided.
- 4.4 68 suggestions were made for saving money on staffing costs. This included changing terms and conditions, reducing staffing hours, reducing the number of consultants in the Council, capping or reducing salaries (with some advocating that this should be set above a certain salary level) and working from home.

5.0 Initial Observations

- 5.1 It is clear that the responses to the consultation are consistent with the work the Council is undertaking to reduce the number of looked after children as protecting children from harm was voted to be totally protected by 79.02% of respondents.
- 5.2 Following the presentation of a petition to Council in November 2014 regarding the neighbourhood wardens a focus group was established at the petitioners request to consider alternative options to the removal of the service. The focus group identified a preferred option of maintaining ten wardens, funded by the Council for a period of three years, to operate within the crime and community safety priority areas of the City. This would still require investment of approximately £260,000 per annum for this three year period after which the model would be community led and Council funds would be removed. The responses to the consultation do not support this petition as only 18.04% of respondents voted to totally protect Neighbourhood Services. Further discussions will take place around this.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The final outcome of budget consultation will be taken into account in the Cabinet's final budget recommendations to Council in March 2015.

- 6.2 Should any changes be made to the 2015/16 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy as a result of the findings of the budget consultation exercise which results in an increased net budget requirement, new savings proposals of an equivalent value will have to be urgently identified to address the projected budget deficit.

[MH/27012015/U]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 Sections 32 and 33 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 imposes a duty on local authorities to calculate their budget requirements and set the Council Tax for each financial year. These provisions are subject to amendment following the Localism Act 2011 which replaces these provisions with a new Section 31A and 31B, under which authorities will no longer be under a duty to calculate their budget requirement for the year, but will be under a duty to calculate a Council Tax requirement. The aim is to make local authority calculations (which must be in accordance with the 1992 Act otherwise the Council Tax setting will be void) simpler and to avoid the need for regulations each financial year.
- 7.2 Part Two of the Local Government Act 2003 also imposes a series of duties and powers to give statutory support to important aspects of financial good practice. This includes provisions in respect of the requirement for the Chief Financial Officer to report on the robustness of the estimates including the adequacy of the reserves.
- 7.3 Cabinet is required to agree a budget proposal to recommend to Full Council.
- 7.4 The Council is obliged to set its Council Tax by the statutory deadline of 11 March 2015.
- 7.5 The Council is required to consult on its draft Council plan and budget. [TS/27012015/T]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a statutory duty to pay due regard to the impact of how it carries out its business on different groups of people. This is designed to help the Council identify the particular needs of different groups and reduce the likelihood of discrimination. The nine equality strands covered in the legislation are:
- Age
 - Disability
 - Gender reassignment
 - Marriage and Civil Partnership (this strand only applies to employment and not to service delivery)
 - Pregnancy and Maternity
 - Race
 - Religion or Belief
 - Sex
 - Sexual Orientation

The strands include everyone.

- 8.2 In relation to determining the overall revenue budget for the Council there is always a difficult balance to be struck in deciding the levels at which to invest, reduce expenditure and raise income set against the often competing needs of different groups within the Wolverhampton community.
- 8.3 In order to address these complex issues, the Council operates an open and consultative approach to budget and Council Tax determination. Year-on-year and medium term spending forecasts are provided to every household and business ratepayer within the City as part of the documentation which accompanies the Council Tax demand.
- 8.4 Budget consultation meetings have been held with the education community, the business community, the voluntary sector, communities of interest and trade unions. The Council's budget consultation approach has also included an online survey in order to gain feedback on budget and service priorities.
- 8.5 In determining the budget for 2015/16, considerable focus has been placed on the development of savings proposals. All of these proposals will be subject to an equality analysis screening and where necessary a full equality analysis will be conducted.
- 8.6 The Council is facing a particularly challenging short and medium term financial environment in which savings must be generated and a tight control on spending maintained. This means that a greater focus than ever is necessary to ensure that core equalities commitments are met.
- 8.7 In summary, the Council's annual budget and medium term financial strategy supports a range of services designed to meet key equalities objectives. A cumulative equalities analysis will be conducted on the overall budget proposals, including the overall impact of job losses. This is will be made available on the Council's website.
- 8.8 Councillors should also be aware that under the Equality Act 2010, they must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) when making budget decisions. What this means in practice is that Councillors must consciously think about the three aims of the PSED as part of the decision making process. The three aims are to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation,
 - Advance equality of opportunity by removing or minimising disadvantages, meet differing needs and encouraging participation,
 - Foster good relations between people from different groups.
- 8.9 The Act does not require the Council to treat everyone in the same way; sometimes different treatment is required, for example, be making reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of disabled people.
- 8.10 Consideration of equality issues must influence the decisions reached by public bodies including:
- How they act as employers,
 - How they develop, evaluate and review policy,
 - How they design, deliver and evaluate services,
 - How they commission and procure from others.

8.11 The Brown Principles, established as a result of a legal case concerning Post Office closures in 2008, provide an important checklist that should be considered when making decisions:

- Decision makers must be made aware of their duty to have due regard to the identified goals,
- Due regard must be fulfilled before and at the time that a particular decision is being considered, not afterwards,
- The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind. It is not a question of ticking boxes,
- The duty is cannot be delegated; it must be fulfilled by the organisation in question rather than through the use of an external body to do it to the organisation,
- The duty is a continuing one,
- It is good practice to keep an adequate record showing that it has considered the identified needs.

9.0 Environmental implications

9.1 Environmental implications will be addressed on a case by case basis as part of individual savings proposals.

10.0 Human resources implications

10.1 In line with the Council's statutory duties as an employer under the Trade Union Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, an HR1 form has been issued to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills identifying the intention to reduce the workforce by up to 1,000 jobs across the Council in the period up to December 2014. The HR1 covers the current voluntary redundancy programme and savings proposals which will result in compulsory redundancies. A further HR1 based on additional proposals will be required from December 2014.

10.2 Reductions in employee numbers will be achieved in line with the Council's HR policies. Compulsory redundancies will be mitigated as far as is possible through seeking voluntary redundancies in the first instance, and through access to redeployment. Given the volume and range of savings being proposed, there will be reductions in services and employee numbers which will require fair and due process to be followed regarding consultation, selection and implementation of any compulsory redundancies. The accelerated timetable for achieving savings in the light of the financial settlement is likely to require the Council as an employer to utilise the statutory 45 day and 30 day consultation periods for some service reductions, rather than the best practice position of allowing, where possible, 90 days.

10.3 The Council will ensure that appropriate support is made available to employees who are at risk of and selected for redundancy, and will work with partner and external agencies to provide support. Proposals to move service delivery from direct Council management to private, community or third sector providers may have implications under the TUPE regulations.

10.4 There is on-going consultation with the trade unions on the impact Council's budgetary position and the proposals being made to meet the challenges posed by it.

11.0 Corporate Landlord Implications

11.1 Corporate landlord implications will be addressed on a case by case basis as part of individual savings proposals.

12.0 Schedule of background papers

12.1 Five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2018/19, reported to Cabinet on:

- 25 February 2014
- 22 October 2014

12.2 Managing the Budget Cuts – The Next Phase, reported to Cabinet on 25 June 2014.

12.3 Budget Review – Five Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2018/19, reported to Scrutiny Board on 9 December 2014.

Appendix 1 –Report on the outcome of budget consultation 2015/16

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In order to tackle the substantial budget deficit that followed the drastic reduction in financial resources available to the Council arising from successive cuts in government grant support, the Council has identified that a minimum of £27 million of additional savings for 2015/16 will need to be identified in order to demonstrate that a balanced budget can be achieved. A further £37 million of additional savings will also need to be identified, taking the total additional savings to be identified to £60 million, in order to address the projected budget deficit over the medium term to 2018/19.
- 1.2 The majority of the Council's revenue income comes from Central Government revenue support grants. The Government grants will continue to reduce following the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2015/16 so the Council automatically faces a budget shortfall. There is nothing within the Council's control that could have been done to prevent this.
- 1.3 The Council can also not control inflation or rising energy, food and fuel prices which impact further into its budgets every year. At the same time, low interest rates mean that the Council is not earning as much from its investments as it once did, while the economic downturn has had a negative effect on its income from fees and charges.
- 1.4 These challenges are coupled with local pressures on the budget, for example increased cost pressures created from looked after children, pension fund strain and the Primary School Expansion Programme. All these things together have caused the projected budget deficit that the Council faces.
- 1.5 Wolverhampton City Council is committed to involving its citizens in contributing to the important decisions it has to make. In October it published its Draft Budget Strategy 2015/16 and Medium Term Financial Strategy. This document contained savings proposals totalling £60m.

2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 Between 23 October 2014 and 15 January 2015, the Council undertook and made available a range of consultation mechanisms to gather views on the proposed budget cuts. These included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

2.2 Consultation sources

The following is a summary of the participants in the stakeholder and community group meetings, plus details of other groups and interested parties that provided their views and opinions.

2.2.1 Stakeholder engagement meetings x 7

- 4 Community meetings;
- 1 Trade Union meeting;
- 1 Business Community meeting; and
- 1 meeting hosted by the Third Sector Partnership

2.2.2 18 members of the public attended the stakeholder meetings. The breakdown was:

- 2 attendees at Low Hill Community Centre,
- 9 attendees at Bilston Town Hall,
- 3 attendees at Bantock House,
- 2 attendees at Blakenhall Healthy Living Centre,
- 2 attendees at Business Breakfast.

Views from the voluntary sector and Trade Unions were obtained at one of their scheduled meetings. The attendance at these meetings was not recorded.

2.2.3 The Council also received letters from residents outlining their support for the Council's approach to managing the proposed cuts.

2.2.4 The Council made a survey available to residents and employees, online and on paper, for the duration of the consultation. This was publicised via the Council website and the Facebook page "Wolverhampton Today". The survey collected 591 responses.

2.3 Considerations around representativeness of the data

In line with best practice issued by Government (The Government's Consultation Principles July 2012), the consultation particularly focused on involving the range of stakeholders affected by the proposals, as well as enabling the general public to comment through the online survey, Facebook pages and public meetings. The findings from the stakeholder meetings and other qualitative correspondence, is by its very nature, indicative only and not necessarily representative of the wider population.

2.4 Considerations around reporting

It is recognised that the public, community groups and key stakeholders are not always aware of the budgetary constraints that local authorities operate under. For example, there is little awareness or understanding of the difference between capital and revenue budgets, controllable and non-controllable expenditure, nor distinctions made between statutory and discretionary spend. This document does not attempt to unpick this, but simply reports the views of the various consultees in their broadest perspective.

2.5 The qualitative findings are a source of information on the specific budget proposals. These have been drawn from comments from the survey, emails received from members of the public and Facebook pages where available. It should be noted that these individuals represent their own views; however, the inclusion of many of these comments forms an important part of the Council's Equality Assessment of the budget proposals – a process that is legally required.

3.0 Executive Summary and Conclusions

- 3.1 This document summarises the key findings from a range of consultation exercises run by Wolverhampton City Council on its budget proposals for 2015/16. It includes an analysis of qualitative presentations and meetings with key stakeholder and community groups designed to gather views and opinions on 87 specific savings proposals. It also includes the outline findings from the survey and data gathered through social media. Stakeholder engagement meetings were held with Trade Unions, four community meetings, the Business Community and the Third Sector Partnership.
- 3.2 The Third Sector Partnership hosted a meeting where representatives were apprised of the Council's approach to managing the budget cuts. Those in attendance included representatives from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups; Third Sector groups; Carers Forums; Deaf people; the Interfaith and Regeneration Network representing faith communities; an organisation representing Transgender and Transsexual people (Gender Matters), the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Network, Voice for Parents, the Over 50's Forum, Experts by Experience and Women of Wolverhampton (WOW).

4.0 Key Findings

The main proposals that respondents commented upon were:

- Protecting services from cuts,
- Public volunteering to help reduce the cost of running services,
- Reducing the level of cuts and replacing those with cuts to other services,
- Raising Council Tax.

4.1 Protecting services from cuts

Respondents were asked to choose if each of 13 services should have total, some or no protection. A table of responses for all respondents and by age group can be found in appendix two.

The top three services respondents stated should remain **totally protected** from the proposed savings round were:

- Protecting children from harm (79.20%)
- Caring for and protecting from harm the elderly and vulnerable adults (77.20%)
- Ensuring there are enough school places for the city's children (66.15%)

The top three services respondents stated should have **some protection** from the proposed savings round were:

- Keeping streets and open spaces clean (58.57%)
- Library Services (55.57%)
- Leisure Centres (54.09%)

The top three services respondents stated should have **no protection** from the proposed savings round were:

- Neighbourhood Services (i.e. Neighbourhood Wardens) (29.95%)
- Cultural Services (i.e. Art Galleries; Bantock House) (27.18%)
- Leisure Centres (25.91%)

16-34 year olds voted to totally protect “Ensuring there are enough school places for the city’s children” whereas 35+ year olds voted more for “Protecting children from harm”. Older respondents (45+) voted no protection for “Leisure Centres”, whereas, younger respondents (16-24) voted no protection for “Dustbins and recycling”.

4.2 Public volunteering to help reduce the cost of running services

438 of 584 respondents (75%) stated that they would **not** be willing to give up some of their own time as a volunteer to help reduce the cost of running services. 16-24 year olds were most likely to give up their time to volunteer with 45% responding yes. Only 19% of 35-44 year olds responded yes.

The comments received have been grouped thematically.

There were also a group of people who either asked for more information about volunteering or made other related comments:

May be interested in the future	1
It would depend on what it was/ how many hours required	12
Have caring/ other responsibilities/ no capacity	8
Already volunteering	22
Don't agree with Council services being run by volunteers	8

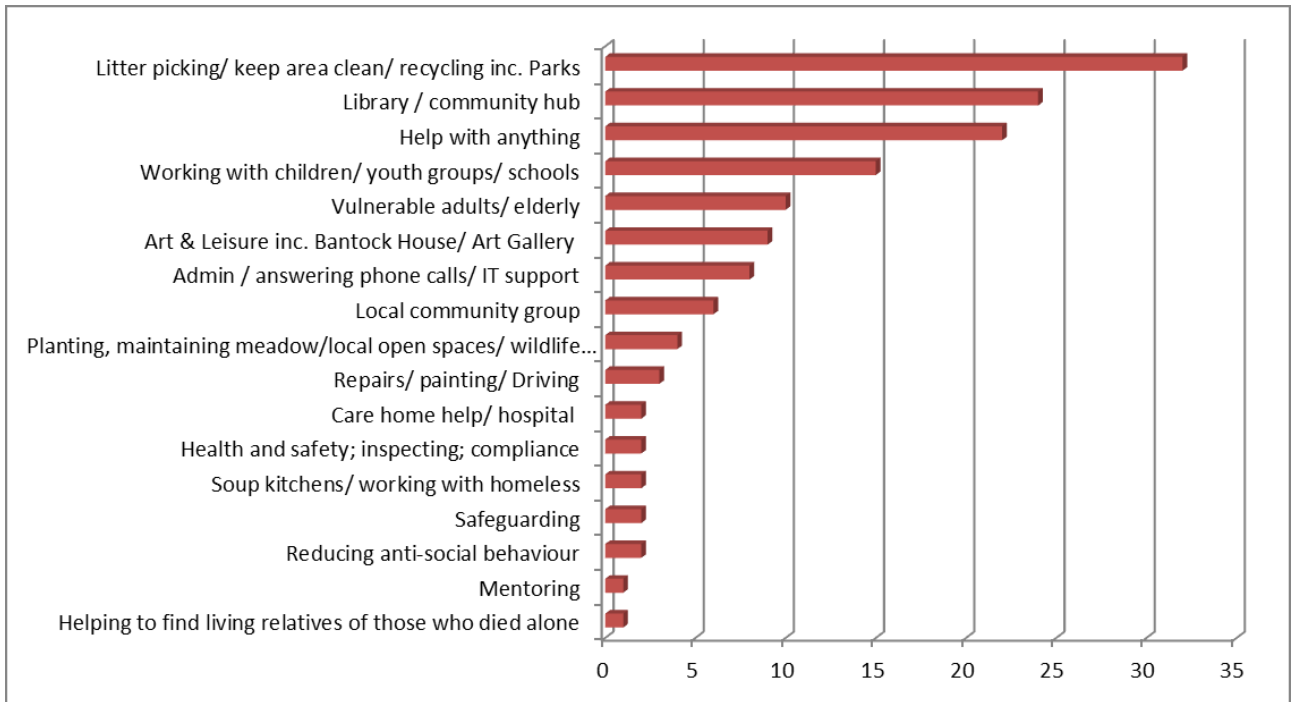
Of those who didn't agree with Council services being run by volunteers, there were a number of comments/ concerns about impact on jobs:

“Free labour rids the number of jobs.”

“It is important that services are delivered by those staff and professionals who know what they are doing and it is difficult for residents to volunteer and live on nothing.”

Of the remaining comments they could be grouped under the headings identified in Fig. 1:

Fig. 1 – What would you be prepared to volunteer to do?



Litter picking and keeping the local areas clean was the most frequent area identified where people would like to volunteer; this was followed by libraries/community hubs. 22 people said they would help with anything, e.g.

“Anything I am capable of doing.”

The two areas where people would most like to volunteer are also identified in the survey as areas where savings could be made in order to protect cuts to other services.

It is also worth noting that 8 people also volunteered to do some sort of administrative role and a number of people volunteered specific professional skills:

“Compliance consultancy, Health and Safety.”

Overall, respondents reported that although they supported the view to volunteer to help reduce the cost of running services, respondents clearly felt they did not have enough time to do so.

4.3 Reducing the level of cuts and replacing those with cuts to other services

Respondents stated that:

“All of my choices relating to Total Protection are to ensure the safety of residents. If cuts were to be made in any of these areas it would be detrimental to all residents.”

“I would like to see the council encourage people to get involved with volunteering in sectors such as environment, sports & leisure, and the arts, where I think people with the relevant skills will be inclined to want to help out.”

“Make use of community centres which do not cost a lot of money and where empty spaces can be used, use the supermarkets which have space available.”

Respondents felt that protecting services aimed at the elderly and younger people in the City ought to be a priority for the Council. They thought that this proposal would have implications for the overall safety of residents. They were also concerned that residents would not be able to access alternative facilities and that the proposal may have a disproportionate effect on some groups such as the elderly.

4.4 Raising Council Tax

276 of 580 respondents (47.59%) stated that they would be willing to pay more Council Tax if that rise reduced the level of cuts to services. To quantify the proposed increase, the impact of each 1% increase would be the equivalent of an additional £10.40 per year based on the average property value (Valuation Band B) in Wolverhampton. Of those 276,

135 (49%) would be willing to pay an extra 1% taking the increase to 3%
74 (27%) would be willing to pay an extra 2% taking the increase to 4%
65 (23%) would be willing to pay an extra 2+% taking the increase to 4+%

16-24 year olds responded most positively to paying more Council Tax with 70% saying yes followed by 35-44 year age group with 57%. Only 36% of 65+ year olds responded yes to paying more.

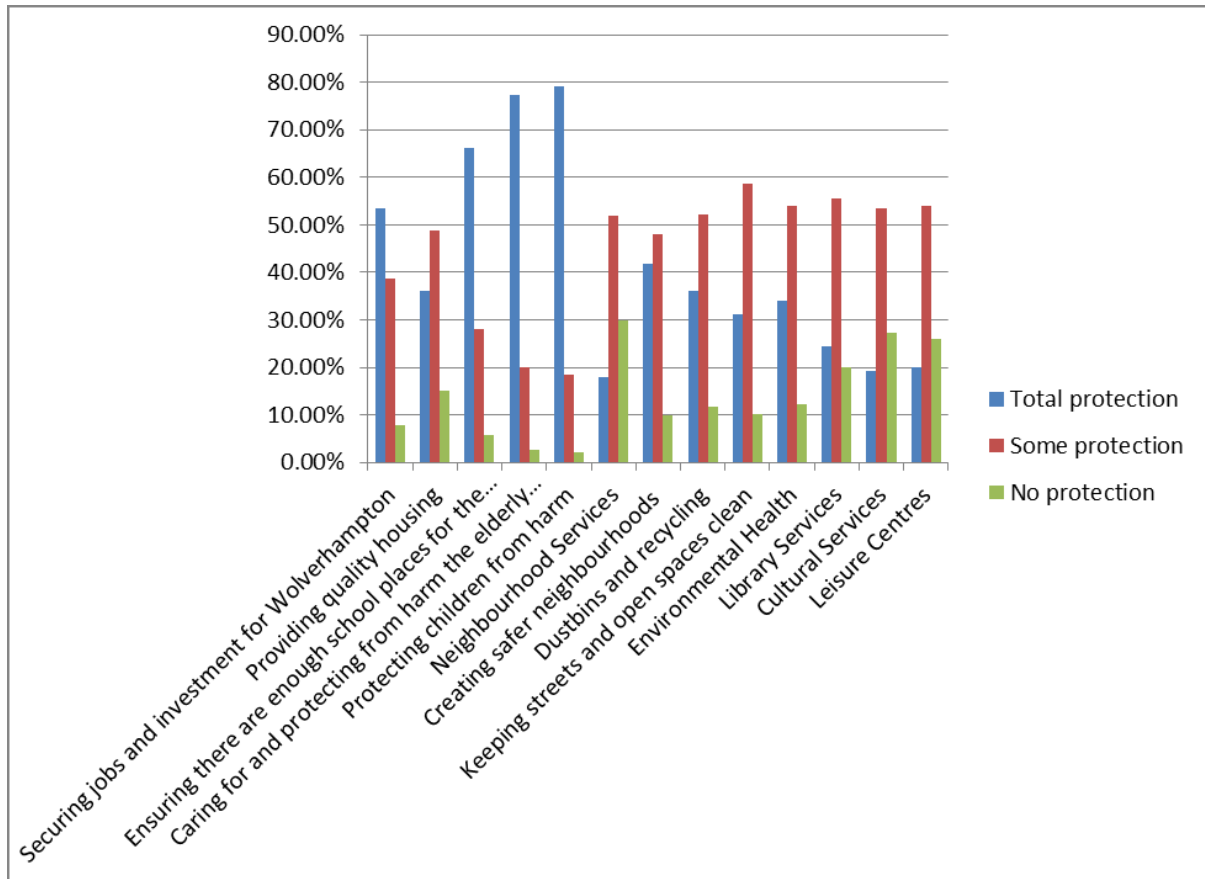
5.0 General comments unrelated to specific savings proposals

- 5.1 The survey showed that the majority of people (429 of 578, 74.18%) were in agreement with the principle that the council should focus its resources on protecting children from harm, caring for and protecting from harm the elderly and vulnerable adults and ensuring there are enough school places for the city's children. Participants were concerned about the impact of the savings on the most vulnerable and that the savings might have unintended outcomes particularly related to the most vulnerable in the City.
- 5.2 Respondents were interested in the Council's overall approach to managing the budget challenge. Some participants felt that the Council's back office costs and duplication could be reduced still further and that partnering arrangements with other local authorities should be considered. A partnership approach to addressing the challenges that the City faces was advocated by many and it was felt that the community had an important part to play in this.
- 5.3 Many participants would like to see an increased focus on prevention, which they said would ultimately save money, and some individuals raised concerns about their ability to comment meaningfully on the cuts based on the information provided.
- 5.4 68 suggestions were made for saving money on staffing costs, particularly through the survey. This included changing terms and conditions, reducing staffing hours, reducing the number of consultants in the Council, capping or reducing salaries (with some advocating that this should be set above a certain salary level) and working from home.

6.0 Findings from the quantitative (statistical) consultation

- 6.1 This section summarises the statistical data from the survey. The questionnaire garnered 591 responses and will be used as the total response base. It should be borne in mind that this is not a sample survey of residents or staff, so the results reported in this section are not necessarily a representative sample due to self-selection.
- 6.2 Services were presented to respondents and each respondent could nominate whether a service deserved total protection, some protection or no protection from cuts.
- 6.3 As there are 87 saving proposals, Fig. 2 summarises those where respondents felt each deserved total protection, some protection and no protection from cuts. Some of the topics were mentioned in the qualitative budget consultation.

Fig. 2 – Should the Council protect the following services from cuts?

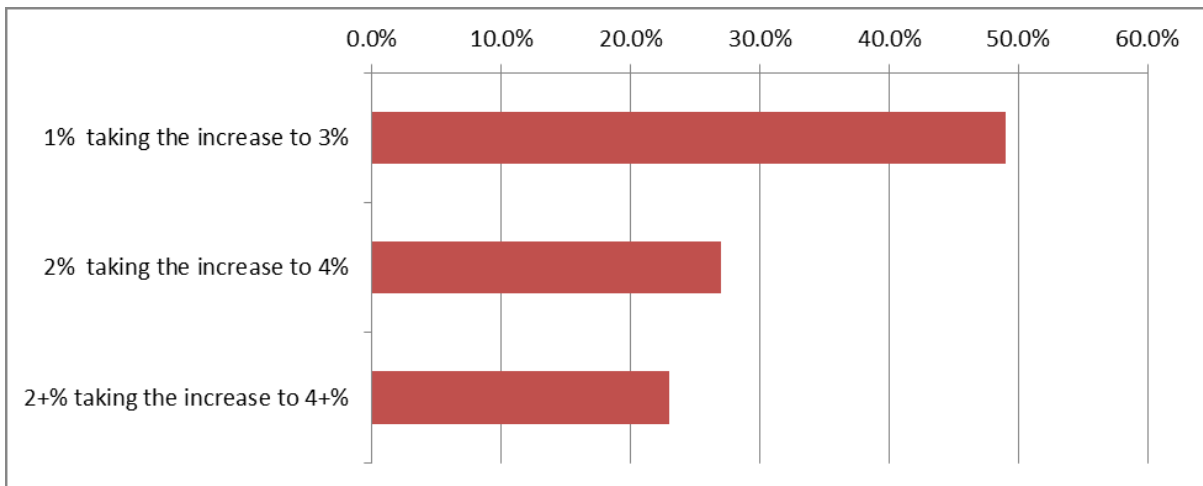


- 6.4 Respondents who answered “Should the Council protect the following services from cuts?” were able to specify that the Council should Protect children from harm; Care for and protect from harm the elderly and vulnerable adults and Secure jobs and investment for Wolverhampton. These were the three most common themes.
- 6.5 Respondents were also asked, if they were willing to volunteer, which service they wished to volunteer for. However, 75% of respondents stated that they would not be willing to give up some of their own time as a volunteer to help reduce the cost of running services. Overall, respondents reported that although they supported the view to volunteer to help

reduce the cost of running services, those providing feedback clearly did not have enough time to do so.

- 6.6 Respondents who said they would pay more Council Tax were then asked precisely how much extra they would be willing to pay. It was stated in the question heading that the impact of each 1% increase would be £10.40 per year based on the average property value (Valuation Band B) in Wolverhampton.
- 6.7 **Please note:** the percentages in Fig. 3 are percentages of the overall respondents who said “yes”. For instance, 150 respondents who said “yes” would be willing to have a 1% rise in their Council Tax bills, the most-selected response. However, respondents who said “yes” were only 47.6% of all respondents to the question, so percentages need to be viewed in context.

Fig. 3 – How much extra Council Tax would you be willing to pay?



7.0 Views on specific service cuts

- 7.1 Seven stakeholder meetings were held and covered a range of topics and gave attendees the opportunity to ask questions, gain clarification, and raise concerns or issues. Given the broad spread of the 87 proposals, only relevant topics were discussed by stakeholders and the community during the meetings. The topics discussed are therefore likely to reflect the issues of most importance to the participants. All of the groups did have access to the public facing budget proposals prior to the meetings via the Council’s website and hardcopies of the budget proposals were made available on request. The public, community groups and key stakeholders often did not have the time to gain an understanding of the difference between controllable and non-controllable costs, or between statutory and discretionary spend.

8.0 General comments about the savings

- 8.1 The survey showed that the majority of people were in agreement with the principle that the Council should focus its resources on protecting children from harm, caring for and protecting from harm the elderly and vulnerable adults and ensuring there are enough school places for the city’s children. Participants were concerned about the impact of the savings on the most vulnerable and that the savings might have unintended outcomes particularly related to the most vulnerable in the City.

- 8.2 Respondents were interested in the Council's overall approach to the budget challenge. Some participants felt that the Council's back office costs and duplication could be reduced still further and that partnering arrangements with other local authorities should be considered. A partnership approach to addressing the challenges that the City faces was advocated by many and it was felt that the community had an important part to play in this.
- 8.3 Many participants would like to see an increased focus on prevention, which they said would ultimately save money, and some individuals raised concerns about their ability to comment meaningfully on the cuts based on the information the Council provided.
- 8.4 A number of suggestions were made for saving money on staffing costs, particularly through the online survey. This included changing terms and conditions, reducing staffing hours, reducing the number of consultants in the council, capping or reducing salaries (with some advocating that this should be set above a certain salary level) and working from home.

9.0 Managing the Budget Challenge – a partnership approach

- 9.1 The Third Sector Partnership said that the Third Sector should be considered part of the solution as well as a factor in the economic regeneration of the City. They said that they generated income for the City which could be reinvested into preventative services. However, the threat to the Third Sector's funding was impacting on their ability to generate income. Suggestions were made including taking a Cooperative Council approach, mergers with neighbouring authorities, attracting more external funding, selling Council assets and reducing the numbers of senior managers and consultants within the Council.

10.0 Managing the Budget Challenge – the budget consultation process

- 10.1 Some respondents raised concerns about the ability to comment meaningfully on the proposals based on the information, or lack thereof, provided.

11.0 Managing the Budget Challenge – savings ideas

- 11.1 Several savings ideas were suggested by participants including: maximising opportunities to attract external funding into the City (from Europe, for instance), turning street lights off in certain areas after midnight, selling Council assets, reducing the wages of the Managing Director and senior employees, stopping the refurbishment of the Civic Centre, turning down/off the heating in public buildings, reducing weekly household bin collections to fortnightly and reducing the number of Councillors per ward from 3 to 1.

Appendix 2 – All responses to Should the Council protect the following services from cuts?

Service	Total Protection		Some Protection		No Protection	
	Percentage	Rank	Percentage	Rank	Percentage	Rank
Securing jobs and investment for Wolverhampton	53.54%	4	38.69%	10	7.77%	10
Providing quality housing	36.13%	6	48.69%	8	15.18%	5
Ensuring there are enough school places for the city's children	66.15%	3	27.98%	11	5.87%	11
Caring for and protecting from harm the elderly and vulnerable adults	77.20%	2	20.03%	12	2.76%	12
Protecting children from harm	79.20%	1	18.54%	13	2.25%	13
Neighbourhood Services (i.e. Neighbourhood Wardens)	18.04%	13	52.01%	7	29.95%	1
Creating safer neighbourhoods (i.e. tackling anti-social behaviour)	41.90%	5	48.10%	9	10.00%	9
Dustbins and recycling	36.11%	7	52.08%	6	11.81%	7
Keeping streets and open spaces clean	31.29%	9	58.57%	1	10.14%	8
Environmental Health (i.e. clean and safe places to eat; protecting people from excessive noise)	33.91%	8	53.91%	4	12.17%	6
Library Services	24.39%	10	55.57%	2	20.03%	4
Cultural Services (i.e. art galleries; Bantock House)	19.34%	12	53.48%	5	27.18%	2
Leisure Centres	20.00%	11	54.09%	3	25.91%	3

Responses by age to Should the Council protect the following services from cuts?

	Total Protection					
	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Securing jobs and investment for Wolverhampton	65.00%	57.30%	53.04%	51.24%	47.47%	36.07%
Providing quality housing	65.00%	44.94%	34.78%	29.75%	34.34%	21.31%
Ensuring there are enough school places for children	75.00%	70.79%	69.57%	59.50%	60.61%	60.66%
Caring for and protecting elderly and vulnerable adults	70.00%	83.15%	72.17%	72.73%	77.78%	73.77%
Protecting children from harm	75.00%	83.15%	80.87%	78.51%	74.75%	67.21%
Neighbourhood Services	20.00%	14.61%	21.74%	19.01%	13.13%	14.75%
Creating safer neighbourhoods	15.00%	42.70%	44.35%	44.63%	36.36%	34.43%
Dustbins and recycling	15.00%	31.46%	42.61%	34.71%	34.34%	34.43%
Keeping streets and open spaces clean	25.00%	42.70%	33.91%	28.10%	17.17%	26.23%
Environmental Health	35.00%	39.33%	32.17%	29.75%	25.25%	36.07%
Library Services	45.00%	24.72%	21.74%	16.53%	25.25%	21.31%
Cultural Services	45.00%	22.47%	20.00%	9.09%	18.18%	16.39%
Leisure Centres	40.00%	26.97%	26.09%	10.74%	18.18%	8.20%

	Some Protection					
	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Securing jobs and investment for Wolverhampton	30.00%	37.08%	38.26%	36.36%	40.40%	49.18%
Providing quality housing	30.00%	33.71%	50.43%	50.41%	46.46%	60.66%
Ensuring there are enough school places for children	20.00%	23.60%	25.22%	30.58%	32.32%	31.15%
Caring for and protecting elderly and vulnerable adults	30.00%	12.36%	24.35%	20.66%	20.20%	22.95%
Protecting children from harm	25.00%	12.36%	14.78%	19.83%	18.18%	29.51%
Neighbourhood Services	40.00%	59.55%	43.48%	47.11%	57.58%	45.90%
Creating safer neighbourhoods	55.00%	49.44%	45.22%	46.28%	49.49%	55.74%
Dustbins and recycling	70.00%	53.93%	46.09%	53.72%	50.51%	52.46%
Keeping streets and open spaces clean	55.00%	48.31%	53.04%	59.50%	70.71%	63.93%
Environmental Health	50.00%	51.69%	53.91%	56.20%	59.60%	47.54%
Library Services	30.00%	53.93%	53.91%	61.16%	49.49%	67.21%
Cultural Services	25.00%	50.56%	53.04%	61.98%	47.47%	49.18%
Leisure Centres	40.00%	51.69%	52.17%	61.16%	42.42%	57.38%

	No protection					
	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Securing jobs and investment for Wolverhampton	5.00%	3.37%	6.09%	10.74%	11.11%	9.84%
Providing quality housing	5.00%	17.98%	13.91%	16.53%	19.19%	13.11%
Ensuring there are enough school places for children	5.00%	2.25%	5.22%	8.26%	7.07%	6.56%
Caring for and protecting elderly and vulnerable adults	0.00%	2.25%	2.61%	4.13%	2.02%	3.28%
Protecting children from harm	0.00%	2.25%	1.74%	1.65%	4.04%	1.64%
Neighbourhood Services	40.00%	22.47%	33.04%	31.40%	28.28%	34.43%
Creating safer neighbourhoods	30.00%	6.74%	10.43%	7.44%	11.11%	9.84%
Dustbins and recycling	15.00%	12.36%	10.43%	9.92%	15.15%	8.20%
Keeping streets and open spaces clean	20.00%	5.62%	12.17%	8.26%	12.12%	8.20%
Environmental Health	15.00%	6.74%	13.91%	10.74%	14.14%	14.75%
Library Services	25.00%	19.10%	21.74%	20.66%	24.24%	8.20%
Cultural Services	30.00%	24.72%	26.96%	27.27%	32.32%	29.51%
Leisure Centres	20.00%	20.22%	21.74%	27.27%	36.36%	29.51%

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Cabinet Meeting

4 February 2015

Report title	2015/16 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2018/19	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Andrew Johnson Resources	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Keith Ireland, Managing Director	
Originating service	Delivery	
Accountable employee(s)	Mark Taylor	Director of Finance
	Tel	01902 556609
	Email	mark.taylor@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel	22 April 2015

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the changes to the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 to 2018/19, previously approved by Cabinet on 22 October 2014.
2. Approve the key budget parameters, as set out in Appendix B.
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) to agree the composite rate for employer's contributions with West Midlands Pension Fund.

Recommendations for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note:

1. That the Council is now faced with finding further savings totalling £40.6 million over the next four years, with an immediate focus on identifying as much of the projected £3.5 million deficit for 2015/16.
2. That the Council continues to undertake detailed analysis in order to identify and predict the likely number of Looked After Children in future years. Ensuring the safeguarding of Looked After Children is of utmost importance to the Council. The work that is being undertaken will help inform the level of savings that may be achieved in this area in 2015/16 and beyond; a significant reduction and reprofiling of these savings is anticipated. A further update will be reported to Cabinet as part of the final budget report on 25 February 2015.
3. That in order to balance the 2015/16 budget it is anticipated that £3.5 million of general balances will be required, unless further savings are identified. If the Council were to use £3.5 million of general reserves to balance the budget in 2015/16, this would breach the Council's policy of maintaining a minimum of £10 million in general reserves.
4. That further detailed technical work will continue prior to the next update to Cabinet on 25 February 2015, with the aim of reducing the call on general reserves as much as possible to ensure that the Council's policy of maintaining a minimum of £10 million in general reserves is not breached.
5. That work will start immediately to identify additional savings to address the projected £15.6 million budget deficit for 2016/17. Savings required may be in excess of the projected budget deficit in 2016/17 in order to replenish general reserves to £10 million. An update on progress will be reported to Cabinet in June 2015.
6. That it is particularly challenging to project key assumptions over the medium term period, however they have been adjusted based upon the information available at present and professional judgement. Budget assumptions therefore remain subject to significant change, and could result in alterations to the financial position facing the Council.
7. A new Adult Social Care Savings Board is to be established, and will be chaired by the Director of Finance, to monitor performance and delivery of previously approved Adults savings.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with an update on the 2015/16 budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period to 2018/19. This is the third report of this nature during 2014/15.

2.0 Summary

- 2.1 The Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period 2014/15 to 2018/19 was approved by Council on 5 March 2014, with a budget deficit of £11.8 million projected for 2014/15 rising to £59.2 million by 2018/19.

- 2.2 A budget strategy to address the projected budget deficit was approved by Council at that meeting, and throughout the first seven months of 2014/15 significant work has taken place to identify new savings proposals to achieve the strategy for 2015/16.

- 2.3 Extensive budget preparation work has been on-going in recent months for the 2015/16 budget. That detailed work in conjunction with adjustments arising as a result of changes in assumptions, as detailed in sections 4 and 5 below, have been incorporated into this update to the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- 2.4 The Council is now faced with finding further savings totalling £40.6 million over the next four years, with an immediate focus on identifying as much of the projected £3.5 million deficit for 2015/16. The budget position reported to Cabinet in October identified that savings totalling £36.7 million were required over the medium term period to 2018/19; the budget adjustments have increased the budget deficit by £3.9 million over the medium term, largely due to additional Treasury Management budget of £3 million required as a result of increasing interest costs as well as pressures arising from a reduction in projected Birmingham Airport dividends and compliance with Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding.

- 2.5 If the Council were to use £3.5 million of general reserves to balance the budget in 2015/16, this would breach the Council's policy of maintaining a minimum of £10 million in general reserves.

- 2.6 In order to address this issue further detailed technical work will continue prior to the next update to Cabinet on 25 February 2015, with the aim of identifying additional savings to reduce the projected budget deficit in 2015/16 and therefore reduce the call on general reserves.

3.0 Background

3.1 2014/15 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 3.1.1 The Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period 2014/15 to 2018/19 was presented to Council for approval on 5 March 2014. After taking account of savings proposals identified during the 2014/15 budget setting process, equating to £66.7 million

over the 5 year period to 2018/19, a budget deficit of £11.8 million was projected for 2014/15 rising to £59.2 million by 2018/19.

- 3.1.2 Given the extremely challenging financial position the Council finds itself in, following successive cuts in government grant, a strategy to address the projected budget deficit over the medium term was approved by Council in March 2014.
- 3.1.3 The strategy focused on identifying £25 million of savings for 2015/16, with the aim to accelerate as many of those savings as possible into 2014/15, to reduce the call on general balances. At this point, an additional £35 million of savings were required as part of the medium term strategy to address the budget deficit.
- 3.1.4 During the first seven months of 2014/15 significant work has taken place to identify new savings proposals to achieve the approved budget strategy for 2015/16. Cabinet received two reports during this period in June and October 2014. Savings proposals totalling £27 million were reported to, and approved for consultation by, Cabinet on 22 October 2014.

3.2 2014/15 Forecast Outturn

- 3.2.1 On 11 November 2014, Cabinet (Resources) Panel received the quarter two revenue budget monitoring report for the current financial year. This report projected a net overspend of £3.3 million for the year. The projected overspend has arisen primarily as a result of the continued increase in the numbers of Looked After Children placements.
- 3.2.2 Although the Families R First programme continues to make progress and the numbers of Looked After Children has held steady since March 2014, Cabinet (Resources) Panel were informed that trends were being monitored and that the current savings target for Looked After Children may need to be revised.
- 3.2.3 In order to support the savings programme in rebuilding general reserves, Cabinet approved in October, that expenditure during the remainder of 2014/15 be restricted to that which is essential to enable the Council to undertake its planned level of services.

4.0 Medium Term Financial Strategy – Key Assumptions

- 4.1 Due to the financial challenges facing the Council, it continues to be increasingly important to consider next year's budget as part of a Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Medium Term Financial Strategy addresses the four year period to 2018/19, due to the continued challenges in projecting financial resources available to the Council beyond this time frame. The major budget assumptions used in the preparation of the Medium Term Financial Strategy are set out in Appendix B. Specific assumptions are set out in more detail below.
- 4.2 It is particularly challenging to project key assumptions over the medium term period, however they have been adjusted based upon the information available at present and professional judgement. It is important to note that budget assumptions remain subject to

significant change, which could therefore result in alterations to the financial position facing the Council.

4.3 Pay Related Pressures

- 4.3.1 The projected increase arising from pay related pressures is detailed in Table 1 below. The table details the estimated impact of pay awards, increases in employer's national insurance and pension contributions and other known pay related pressures.

Table 1 – Pay Related Pressures

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Pay Award	1,995	2,673	2,700	3,376
Employers Pension	2,935	4,811	10,156	(784)
National Insurance	-	672	-	-
Annual Increments	1,949	1,248	750	750
	6,879	9,404	13,606	3,342

- 4.3.2 As in previous years, a composite rate for employer's contributions to the pension fund, incorporating future service and deficit recovery costs, will be agreed with West Midlands Pension Fund. It is recommended that authority be delegated to the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) to agree this rate with the Fund.

4.4 Budget Pressures and Developments

- 4.4.1 Table 2 below details budget growth that has been incorporated into the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Table 2 – Summary of Budget Pressures and Developments

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Inflationary Pressures	2,486	2,616	3,119	2,923
Demographic & Demand Pressures	3,250	2,170	2,170	2,170
Developments	50	743	-	-
	5,786	5,529	5,289	5,093

4.5 Treasury Management

- 4.5.1 An additional £3 million has been incorporated into the Medium Term Financial Strategy for treasury management. This reflects increasing interest costs due to the Housing Revenue Account repayment of debt, resulting in the HRA benefitting from a greater benefit from internal borrowing.

4.6 Council Tax

- 4.6.1 The Council Tax Base and NNDR (Business Rates) Net Rate Yield 2015/16 report was presented to Cabinet on 14 January 2015. Cabinet approved that the Council Tax Base for 2015/16 is to be set at 59,103.95 Band D equivalents with a 1.99% increase in Council Tax.
- 4.6.2 It is projected that income from council tax will rise in subsequent years, based upon the latest collection rates and tax base. Projections assume that Council Tax will continue to increase by 1.99% in future years, whilst the tax base is anticipated to rise by 0.5% each year.

4.7 Localised Business Rates

- 4.7.1 As detailed in paragraph 4.6.1 above, the Council Tax Base and NNDR (Business Rates) Net Rate Yield 2015/16 report was presented to Cabinet on 14 January. It is currently forecast that £37.1 million of business rates will be retained by the Council in 2015/16. This forecast has been developed following input from the Revenues team, but remains preliminary at this stage.
- 4.7.2 The underlying forecast for localised business rates for the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy reflects nil growth in the tax base, a reduction from the previously assumed 0.2% growth.
- 4.7.3 At the time of setting the 2014/15 budget, Cabinet were informed that the underlying forecasts for localised business rates reflected a positive increase arising from the regeneration aspirations for the city over the medium term, as well as known developments such as Sainsbury's and Tesco. This was however set against an average decline in business rates in Wolverhampton of 0.26% per annum over the previous six years, after allowing for the inflation increase in the multiplier, this therefore continued to be an ambitious assumption.
- 4.7.4 Further to this, there are additional issues that the Council is faced with which has resulted in the reduction in forecast income from localised business rates. Overall the city has seen a decline in rateable values (RV) and this trend is forecast to continue. This trend is being driven by businesses appealing their RV, in addition to demolitions within the city required to facilitate regeneration. We are also finding that larger units are being split into a number of smaller units; detailed work is currently taking place to determine the impact of this on the overall RV and the amount the Council can retain. Further to this, the number of properties in the city that qualify for unoccupied relief has increased significantly year on year and this trend is forecast to continue.
- 4.7.5 The assumed increase in the tax base when setting the 2014/15 budget was 0.2% per annum, in light of the reduction that has been experienced during the year, for the reasons set out above, combined with the recent announcement by Tesco, it is no longer considered prudent to assume any growth in the tax base, therefore, a freeze in tax base is now being assumed annually.

4.7.6 It is important to note that the forecast for localised business rates remains optimistic as the tax base is continuing to decline annually. The Council continues to work hard to regenerate the City; the freeze reflected in this assumption does not therefore reflect the regeneration aspirations of the Council.

4.8 Revenue Support Grant

4.8.1 The announcement of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement on 18 December 2014 resulted in an increase of £677,000 to the anticipated Revenue Support Grant receivable for 2015/16. This was reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2015.

4.8.2 With the absence of further information from the Government regarding the Council's Revenue Support Grant funding for future years, and the particularly challenging environment in which we find ourselves, it is difficult to project government funding. These projections over the medium term therefore remain subject to potentially significant changes until the actual level of grant is notified by the Government in December each year.

4.8.3 We are however, actively seeking opportunities to discuss issues faced by the Council with the Government, and ways in which they may be able to provide support. Following discussions with Department for Communities and Local Government representatives during 2014, a capitalisation direction application to capitalise redundancy costs was submitted to the Government on 13 January 2015, to coincide with a meeting with Kris Hopkins MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The Ministers acknowledged receipt of this application at the meeting and agreed to review the application.

4.8.4 Further to this, discussions were also raised in relation to the business rates consultation, which addresses business rates avoidance and legislation, as significant sums are being lost. At the Ministers request, he has been copied into the response to this consultation and has also received a letter from the Cabinet Member for Resources addressing the issues surrounding capital schemes where investment is funded through a Tax Increment Financing approach.

4.9 Top Up Grant

4.9.1 The top up grant is calculated as the sum of money required to bridge the gap between the underlying need of an authority as measured by formula grant and its combination of other grants receivable from central government.

4.9.2 The top up is fixed for a period of up to ten years but rises with in line with the RPI over that time. The projections for top-up grant have been adjusted to reflect the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2015/16, as reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2015, and anticipated rises in line with inflation for future years.

4.10 New Homes Bonus

4.10.1 New Homes Bonus has been recalculated following input and updated information from the Planning team. This has resulted in a reduction in New Homes Bonus and Adjustment Grant of £491,000 over the four year period to 2018/19.

4.10.2 The table below details the adjustments to corporate resources required as a result of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2015/16, announced on the 18 December 2014, as reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2015:

Table 3 - 2015/16 Provisional Settlement Details

	MTFS	Settlement	Difference	
	Assumption		Over/(Under)	
	£000	£000	£000	%
Top Up Grant	36,198	35,899	(299)	(0.8)
Revenue Support Grant	61,990	62,667	677	1.1
New Homes Bonus	3,202	3,203	1	0.0
	101,390	101,769	379	0.4

4.11 Specific Grants

4.11.1 Specific grants for each year have been reviewed and adjustments have been built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Further detailed information will be presented to Cabinet in the final budget report on 25 February 2015.

4.12 Fees and Charges

4.12.1 The 2015/16 budget position has been updated to take into account anticipated levels on income following adjustments to fees and charges approved by Cabinet on 9 December 2014.

5.0 Savings Proposals

5.1 New savings proposals totalling £27.0 million were reported to Cabinet on 22 October 2014, as detailed in the table below.

Table 4 – Savings proposals identified during the 2015/16 Budget Process

	2014/15	2015/16	Later Years*	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Savings proposals reported October 2014	1,885	25,169	(64)	26,990

* figures reported in brackets represent a reduction to previously approved savings proposals in later years due to these being accelerated and implemented in earlier years.

- 5.2 These savings proposals have been subject to budget consultation, which was completed on 15 January 2015. The Budget 2015/16 – outcome of consultation report will be presented to Cabinet at this meeting. Further detailed analysis and any consequential revisions to savings proposals in response to budget consultation feedback will be incorporated into the final budget report to be presented to Cabinet on 25 February 2015.
- 5.3 As detailed in paragraph 3.2, the latest revenue budget monitoring report presented to Cabinet (Resources) Panel on 11 November 2014 projected a £3.3 million overspend for the current financial year, primarily as a result of the continued increase in the numbers of Looked After Children.
- 5.4 Families R First continues to make progress. The number of Looked After Children has begun to reduce since December, although this is slow. Given the anticipated overspend in 2014/15, the Council continues to undertake further detailed analysis in order to identify and predict the likely number of Looked After Children in future years. Ensuring the safeguarding of Looked After Children is of utmost importance to the Council. The work that is being undertaken will help inform the level of savings that may be achieved in this area in 2015/16 and beyond; a significant reduction and reprofiling of these savings is anticipated. A further update will be reported to Cabinet as part of the final budget report on 25 February 2015.
- 5.5 Further to this, savings proposals within the Adults area are being closely monitored as they are also very challenging. A new Adult Social Care Savings Board is to be established, and will be chaired by the Director of Finance, to monitor performance and delivery of previously approved Adults savings.
- 5.6 It is proposed to reprofile previously approved saving proposals for the Civic Halls and Lighthouse Media Centre. The revision to these savings proposals will result in savings being made in later years, rather than in 2015/16 as originally anticipated. The revision to savings proposals has been reflected in section 6 below.

6.0 Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 6.1 The table below details projections for the period to 2018/19; incorporating extensive budget preparation work that has been on-going in recent months for the 2015/16 budget, in addition to those adjustments arising as a result of changes in assumptions, as detailed in sections 4 and 5 above.
- 6.2 The Council is now faced with finding further savings totalling £40.6 million over the next four years, with an immediate focus on identifying £3.5 million for 2015/16 in order to balance the budget. The budget position reported to Cabinet in October identified that savings totalling £36.7 million were required over the medium term period to 2018/19; the budget adjustments therefore have resulted in an additional pressure of £3.9 million over the medium term.

- 6.3 As stated in the paragraph above, in order to balance the 2015/16 budget it is anticipated that £3.5 million of general balances will be required. Further detailed technical work will continue prior to the next update to Cabinet on 25 February 2015, with the aim of reducing the call on general reserves as much as possible. Further to this, work must start immediately to identify additional savings to address the projected £15.6 million budget deficit for 2016/17. It is proposed that an update on progress will be reported to Cabinet in June 2015.
- 6.4 It is important to note that the updated projected budget deficit assumes the achievement of prior savings proposals amounting to £46 million over the four year period to 2018/19, in addition to the implementation of all savings proposals that have been subject to budget consultation, as detailed in section 5.
- 6.5 Appendix A analyses the changes that have taken place since October 2014, whilst the Council's proposed budget for 2015/16 and the medium term forecast is shown at Table 5 below. It is important to note that the budget and medium term forecast is subject to further detailed work in particular relating to Looked After Children and the identification of additional savings including revisiting the approach to the provision for the redemption of debt (MRP), and will be reported to Cabinet on 25 February 2015.

Table 5 - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 to 2018/19

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Previous Years Net Budget Brought Forward	247,550	225,834	230,150	242,796
Increasing Cost Pressures				
- Pay Related Pressures	6,879	9,404	13,606	3,342
- Treasury Management	6,681	3,589	1,603	1,792
- Budget Growth	5,786	5,529	5,289	5,093
- Full year effect of prior years savings	(17,917)	(9,757)	(9,128)	(9,211)
- Net impact of change in specific grants	1,574	267	261	150
- Savings Proposals - October 2014	(24,719)	(4,716)	1,015	765
	(21,716)	4,316	12,646	1,931
Net Budget (Before Use of Resources)	225,834	230,150	242,796	244,727
Projected Corporate Resources				
Council Tax	(80,951)	(83,081)	(85,158)	(87,287)
Revenue Support Grant	(62,667)	(51,960)	(41,742)	(31,216)
Enterprise Zone Business Rates	(989)	(1,532)	(2,394)	(2,800)
Collection Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	(1,041)	720	-	-
Top Up Grant	(35,899)	(36,739)	(37,599)	(38,479)
Localised Business Rates	(37,119)	(37,973)	(38,846)	(39,740)
New Homes Bonus	(3,202)	(3,957)	(4,267)	(4,254)
New Homes Bonus Adjustment Grant	(496)	(72)	(439)	(331)
	(222,364)	(214,594)	(210,445)	(204,107)
Projected Annual Change in Budget Deficit/(Surplus)	3,470	12,087	16,795	8,270
Projected Cumulative Budget Deficit	3,470	15,556	32,351	40,621

7.0 General Fund Reserves / Specific Reserves

7.1 The following table sets out the projected level of general balances at 31 March 2015:

Table 6 – Projected General Balances at 31 March 2015

	£000
Balance as at 1 April 2014	(27,000)
Budgeted Use of General Balances	9,942
In year Minimum Revenue Provision saving transferred into General Balances	(4,400)
Quarter Two Projected Overspend	3,272
Transfer to the Efficiency Reserve (to fund redundancy costs)	7,500
Projected Balance as at 31 March 2015	(10,686)

7.2 As can be seen from the table above, it is projected that redundancy costs in the region of £7.5 million will be incurred during 2014/15. It is worth noting that the redundancy costs for 2014/15 are an estimate, and are subject to change dependent upon the number and nature of applications.

7.3 As reported to Cabinet on 25 February 2014, the Council continues to make progress with the voluntary redundancy (VR) exercise having sought volunteers for redundancy/early retirement during late 2013 and it is still anticipated that reductions of up to 2,000 full time equivalent staff will be required over the medium term period to 2018/19. The Council continues to work towards this, with 715 people having had their application for VR accepted since May 2013.

7.4 In addition to this, the table below sets out the general balance projections over the medium term and the additional savings now required, to maintain the minimum level of £10 million required within the Reserves Policy.

Table 7 – Projected uncommitted General Fund Reserves

	2014/15 £000	2015/16 £000	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000	2018/19 £000
Balance brought forward	(27,000)	(10,686)	(7,216)	8,340	40,691
Revised Projected budget deficit	9,942	3,470	15,556	32,351	40,621
Other Adjustments*	6,372	-	-	-	-
Balance carried forward	(10,686)	(7,216)	8,340	40,691	81,312
Shortfall against £10 million minimum	-	2,784	18,340	50,691	91,312

*Other Adjustments – as per table 7 above

- 7.5 As can be seen from the table above, in order to balance the 2015/16 budget, it is projected that £3.5 million would be required from general balances. Furthermore, this would reduce general balances to less than £10 million in 2015/16, resulting in a breach of the Council's policy to maintain a minimum of £10 million in general reserves.
- 7.6 In order to address this issue, further detailed technical work will continue prior to the next update to Cabinet on 25 February 2015, with the aim of identifying additional savings to reduce the projected budget deficit in 2015/16 and therefore reduce the call on general reserves.
- 8.0 Budget Risk Management**
- 8.1 The overall level of risk associated with the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2015/16 to 2018/19 continues to be assessed as Red. The six main areas of risk are summarised in the table at Appendix C.
- 9.0 Budget Consultation and Scrutiny**
- 9.1 The Council's budget consultation took place from 27 October 2014 to 15 January 2015, in order to inform the 2015/16 budget and the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Budget 2015/16 – outcome of consultation report to be presented to Cabinet at this meeting discusses the findings. The final outcome of budget consultation will be taken into account in the Cabinet's final budget recommendations to Council in March 2015.

10.0 Financial implications

- 10.1 The financial implications are discussed within the body of the report.
[MH/27012015/X]

11.0 Legal implications

- 11.1 The Council's revenue budgets make assumptions which must be based on realistic projections about available resources, the costs of pay, inflation and service priorities and the likelihood of achieving any savings proposals.
- 11.2 The legal duty to spend with propriety falls under S.151 Local Government Act 1972 and arrangements for proper administration of their affairs is secured by the S.151 Officer as Chief Financial Officer.
- 11.3 Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Financial Officer to report to the Council when it is making the statutory calculations required to determine its council tax. The Council is required to take this report into account when making its budget decision. The Chief Financial Officer's report must deal with the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of the reserves for which the budget provides. Both are connected with matters of risk and uncertainty. They are inter-dependent and need to be considered together. In particular, decisions on the appropriate level of Reserves should be guided by advice based upon an assessment of all the circumstances considered likely to affect the Council.
- 11.4 The relevant guidance concerning reserves is Local Authority Accounting Panel Bulletin 77, issued by CIPFA in November 2008. Whilst the Bulletin does not prescribe an appropriate level of reserves, leaving this to the discretion of individual authorities, it does set out a number of important principles in determining the adequacy of reserves. It emphasises that decisions on the level of reserves must be consistent with the Council's MTFS, and have regard to the level of risk in budget plans, and the Council's financial management arrangements (including strategies to address risk).
- 11.5 In addition, section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires the Chief Financial Officer to '...make a report ... if it appears to him that the Authority, a committee or officer of the Authority, or a joint committee on which the Authority is represented':
- (a) has made or is about to make a decision which involves or would involve the Authority incurring expenditure which is unlawful,
 - (b) has taken or is about to take a course of action which, if pursued to its conclusion, would be unlawful and likely to cause a loss or deficiency on the part of the Authority, or
 - (c) is about to enter an item of account the entry of which is unlawful.
- 11.6 The Chief Financial Officer of a relevant Authority shall make a report under this section if it appears to him that the expenditure of the Authority incurred (including expenditure it

proposes to incur) in a financial year is likely to exceed the resources (including sums borrowed) available to it to meet that expenditure.

- 11.7 These statutory requirements will have to be taken into account when making final recommendations on the budget and council tax requirement for 2015/16.
[JB/27012015/J]

12.0 Equalities implications

- 12.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the council has a statutory duty to pay due regard to the impact of how it carries out its business on different groups of people. This is designed to help the council identify the particular needs of different groups and reduce the likelihood of discrimination, the nine equality strands covered in the legislation are:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and Civil Partnership (this strand only applies to employment and not to service delivery);
- Pregnancy and Maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or Belief;
- Sex, and
- Sexual Orientation.

The strands include everyone

- 12.2 In relation to determining the overall revenue budget for the Council there is always a difficult balance to be struck in deciding the levels at which to invest, reduce expenditure and raise income set against the often competing needs of different groups within the Wolverhampton community.
- 12.3 In order to address these complex issues the Council operates an open and consultative approach to budget and council tax determination. Year-on-year and medium term spending forecasts are provided to every household and business ratepayer within the city as part of the documentation which accompanies the council tax demand.
- 12.4 Budget consultation meetings have been held with the education community, the business community, the voluntary sector, communities of interest and trade unions. The Council's budget consultation approach has also included an online survey in order to gain feedback on budget and service priorities.
- 12.5 In determining the budget for 2015/16 considerable focus has been placed on the development of savings proposals. Proposals were considered against the standard corporate process of initial equality screening or via a surgery approach. Where necessary a full equality analysis will be conducted.

- 12.6 The Council is facing a particularly challenging short and medium term financial environment in which savings must be generated and a tight control on spending maintained. This means that a greater focus than ever is necessary to ensure that core equalities commitments are met.
- 12.7 In summary the council's annual budget and medium term financial strategy supports a range of services designed to meet key equalities objectives. A cumulative equalities analysis will be conducted on the overall budget proposals, including the overall impact of job losses. This is will be made available on the Council's website.
- 12.8 Councillors should also be aware that under the Equality Act 2010, they must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) when making budget decisions. What this means in practice is that Councillors must consciously think about the three aims of the public sector equality duty as part of the decision making process, the three aims are to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - Advance equality of opportunity by removing or minimising disadvantages, meet differing needs and encouraging participation, and
 - Foster good relations between people from different groups.
- 12.9 The Act does not require the council to treat everyone in the same way; sometimes different treatment is required, for example, be making reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of disabled people.
- 12.10 Consideration of equality issues must influence the decisions reached by public bodies including:
- How they act as employers;
 - How they develop, evaluate and review policy;
 - How they design, deliver and evaluate services, and
 - How they commission and procure from others.
- 12.11 The Brown Principles, established as a result of a legal case concerning Post Offices closures in 2008, provide an important checklist that should be considered when making decisions:
- Decision makers must be made aware of their duty to have due regard to the identified goals;
 - Due regard must be fulfilled before and at the time that a particular decision is being considered, not afterwards;
 - The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind. It is not a question of ticking boxes;
 - The duty is cannot be delegated; it must be fulfilled by the organisation in question rather than through the use of an external body to do it to the organisation;
 - The duty is a continuing one, and

- It is good practice to keep an adequate record showing that it has considered the identified needs.

13.0 Environmental implications

- 13.1 Environmental implications will be addressed on a case by case basis as part of individual savings proposals.

14.0 Human resources implications

- 14.1 In line with the Council's statutory duties as an employer under the Trade Union Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, an HR1 form was issued to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills identifying the intention to reduce the workforce by up to 1,000 jobs across the Council in the period up to December 2014. In this period around 715 VR applications were accepted. A further HR1 has been issued covering the period to 31 March 2016 identifying the intention to reduce the workforce by a further 1000 through both voluntary redundancy and savings proposals which will result in compulsory redundancies.
- 14.2 Reductions in employee numbers will be achieved in line with the Council's HR policies. Compulsory redundancies will be mitigated as far as is possible through seeking voluntary redundancies in the first instance, and through access to redeployment. Given the volume and range of savings being proposed, there will be reductions in services and employee numbers which will require fair and due process to be followed regarding consultation, selection and implementation of any compulsory redundancies. The accelerated timetable for achieving savings in the light of the financial settlement is likely to require the Council as an employer to utilise the statutory 45 day and 30 day consultation periods for some service reductions, rather than the best practice position of allowing, where possible, 90 days.
- 14.3 The Council will ensure that appropriate support is made available to employees who are at risk of and selected for redundancy, and will work with partner and external agencies to provide support. Proposals to move service delivery from direct Council management to private, community or third sector providers may have implications under the TUPE regulations.
- 14.4 There is on-going consultation with the trade unions on the impact Council's budgetary position and the proposals being made to meet the challenges posed by it.

15.0 Schedule of background papers

- 15.1 Budget 2015/16 – outcome of consultation, report to Cabinet, 4 February 2015.

Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2018/19 - Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement Update, report to Cabinet, 14 January 2015.

Council Tax Base and NNDR (Business Rates) Net Rate Yield 2015/16, report to Cabinet, 14 January 2015.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2014/15 – Quarter Two 2015/16, report to Cabinet (Resources) Panel, 11 November 2014.

Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2018/19, report to Cabinet, 22 October 2014.

Managing the Budget Cuts – The Next Phase, report to Cabinet, 25 June 2014.

5 Year Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2018/19, report to Council, 5 March 2014.

APPENDIX A

Medium Term Financial Strategy: Analysis of Changes since October 2014

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Projected Budget Challenge - October 2014	3,096	12,429	27,882	36,749
Changes to growth projections:				
Pressures				
Black Country Transport Director	-	27	-	-
Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards	230	-	-	-
Birmingham Airport Dividends	239	235	6	10
Treasury adjustments	-	500	1,000	1,500
Internal Insurance Fund	-	200	200	-
	469	962	1,206	1,510
Inflationary				
Corporate Inflationary Contingency	(613)	-	-	-
Internal Insurance Fund	200			
Property - reduction in budgeted income arising as a result of economic impact on market prices	210	-	-	-
Street Lighting Energy Contract Inflationary increase	140	-	-	-
External Domiciliary Care Contract inflation	63	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-
Changes to savings projections:				
Reprofiling of Civic Halls saving	385	-	(150)	(235)
Reprofiling of Lighthouse Media Centre saving	30	(10)	(10)	(10)
Revision/reprofile of Looked After Children Savings				
New savings proposals including the provision for the redemption of debt (MRP)				
	Subject to further detailed work. An update will be reported to Cabinet on 25 February 2015.			
	415	(10)	(160)	(245)
Changes to Corporate Resources projections				
Adjustment to Corporate Grants	22	645	684	(867)
Adjustment to Council Tax	(1,510)	(167)	(67)	(67)
Adjustment to NNDR	1,277	371	392	412
Adjustment to Collection Fund (Surplus)/Deficit	(441)	1,161	(720)	-
Adjustment to Enterprise Zone Business Rates	142	(209)	7	(1,340)
	(510)	1,801	296	(1,862)
Total Changes since October 2014	374	2,753	1,342	(597)
Add: Cumulative Budget Adjustments	-	374	3,127	4,469
Projected Budget Challenge - January 2015	3,470	15,556	32,351	40,621

Budget Preparation Parameters

The following key parameters have been reflected in the budget and medium term projections.

	2015/16 Forecast Budget	2016/17 Forecast Budget	2017/18 Forecast Budget	2018/19 Forecast Budget
Council Tax Annual Increase (Council element)	1.99%	1.99%	1.99%	1.99%
Growth in Council Tax Base	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
Pay Awards	1.5%	2.0%	2.0%	2.5%
Price Inflation (excl. Gas, Electricity and NNDR)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Price Inflation (Gas)	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%	5.1%
Price Inflation (Electricity)	6.0%	6.0%	6.0%	6.0%
Price Inflation (NNDR)	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%
Borrowing Interest Rate (PWLB 25 year rate)	4.8%	4.8%	4.9%	5.0%
Return on Investments	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
NNDR Income Annual Increase	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%
Growth in NNDR Tax Base	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Increase/(Decrease) in Top-Up Grant	1.9%	2.3%	2.3%	2.3%
Increase/(Decrease) in Revenue Support Grant	(27.9)%	(17.1)%	(19.7)%	(25.2)%

General Fund Budget Risks 2015/16 – 2018/19

Risk	Description	Level of Risk
Financial and Budget Management	Risks that might materialise as a result of the impact of non-pay inflation and pay awards, staff vacancy factors, VAT rules, loss of ICTS facilities, treasury management activity and the impact of Equal Pay and budget management failure.	Amber
Transformation Programme	Risks that might materialise as a result of not identifying savings, not delivering the savings incorporated into the budget and not having sufficient sums available to fund the upfront and one-off costs associated with delivering savings and downsizing the workforce.	Red
Income and Funding	Risks that might materialise as a result of income being below budgeted levels, claw back, reduction to government grant or increased levels of bad debts.	Red
Service Demands	Risks that might materialise as a result of demands for services outstretching the available resources.	Amber
Third Parties	Risks that might materialise as a result of third parties and suppliers ceasing trading or withdrawing from the market.	Amber
Government Policy	Risks that might materialise as a result of changes to Government policy including changes in VAT and personal taxation rules and, in particular, from the Care Bill	Red

Details of the risk control measures that are in place in order to manage and mitigate the risks as far as possible have been published on the Council's Website and can be found via the following link <http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/budgetsavings>.

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Cabinet Meeting

4 February 2015

Report title	Scrutiny Review of Welfare Reforms Unclaimed Benefits		
Decision designation	AMBER		
Cabinet member to give management response	Cllr Andrew Johnson Resources		
Key decision	No		
In forward plan	Yes		
Wards affected	All		
Review Chair	Cllr Rita Potter		
Review Members	Cllr Ian Angus Cllr Ian Claymore Cllr Jasbinder Dehar Cllr Valerie Evans		Cllr Jasbir Jaspal Cllr Peter O'Neill Cllr Tersaim Singh
Lead Scrutiny Review Officer	Deb Breedon Tel. Office: 01902 551250 Email:Deborah.Breedon@wolverhampton.gov.uk		
Link Officer	Anthony Ivko, Service Director, Older People Tel. Office: 01902 555310 Email: Anthony.Ivko@wolverhampton.gov.uk		
Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board Executive Team	20 November 2014 14 January 2015	

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Receive the report of the review group (Appendix 1) and consider the following recommendations:

R.1.To request the City's Inclusion Board to receive the report of the review group and to consider the feasibility of developing a partnership forum to oversee development of a co-ordinated advice and support strategy for the City.

The aim of the partnership forum would be to focus on unclaimed benefits, in-work and out of work, to maximise incomes and defend benefit entitlement in the City.

The review suggests the following are considered for inclusion in terms of reference:

- a) To develop options for a hub and spoke framework and a coordinated. Advice and support strategy relating to income maximisation and defending benefit entitlement.
- b) To carry out a mapping exercise of existing mechanisms for access to information, advice and support relating to benefits and income maximisation across the City.
- c) To consider operational issues: process, communication, support accessibility and equality monitoring.
- d) To align advice and support for welfare rights and benefits with employability and skills and link into existing signposting, advice and guidance networks.
- e) To identify and prepare joint funding bids for advice and support in the City.
- f) To promote case studies to the wider public to raise awareness and encourage people who may recognise themselves in the scenario to seek advice and find out if they could be claiming benefits or back claiming if there has been a genuine problem or mistake made.

- R.2 To accelerate delivery of the Wolverhampton Digital Inclusion Strategy and Customer Services Strategy to enable access to the use of social media, information portals and mobile devices as tools to promote income maximisation, to signpost job seekers and people on benefits to relevant and accurate information.
- R.3 That each Community Hub should develop information stations which offer advice about benefits, work training and volunteering opportunities, and that a pilot hub be developed to provide advice and support 'drop in' sessions at Ashmore Park Community Hub.
- R4 That City Direct continues to develop and update the website relating to advice and support about benefits and income maximisation. That work with customer focus groups is undertaken to review what the Council website holds and that issues arising from research and development are built into future service planning.
- R5 That an internal canvass of Council employees is undertaken to recruit volunteers with awareness of benefits and working in a social care environment. Welfare rights training is available for volunteers and the Councils staff volunteering policy enables employees two days per annum to work with the CAB or other voluntary sector organisations.

- R6 That partners work to develop evaluation of volunteering work to give recognition of the additional skills, experience and confidence that volunteering can afford individuals and as a pathway into employment which can be taken into account as part of the claimant commitment when seeking employment opportunities.
- R7 That the Welfare Rights Team develop the work with law students in defending benefit entitlement and contact Wolverhampton University and College to discuss students from health and social care training courses getting involved. That students be offered opportunity to receive training and work experience in a volunteer capacity relating to benefit maximisation.
- R8 The Inclusion Board receives the response and considers the implications of the Department of Works and Pensions Freedom of Information analysis relating to the impact of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) sanctions in Wolverhampton
2. Approve the executive response to the review recommendations (Appendix 2).
 3. Refer the Cabinet response to Scrutiny Board for it to track and monitor the implementation of the agreed recommendations.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The report presents the findings and recommendations of the scrutiny review of 'Welfare Reform –Unclaimed Benefits'. Cabinet is requested to receive the report and agree the executive response.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The [Scrutiny Review of Welfare Reform-communications](#) was reported to Cabinet 22 May 2013, the review focussed on the [Welfare Reform Act 2012](#) and communicating information about changes to benefits. In 2013/14 the Scrutiny Board agreed to review welfare reform with a focus on implementation of Universal Credit (UC).
- 2.2 Universal Credit (UC) is six benefits rolled into one and it is expected that there will be some adjustment needed for claimants moving from weekly to monthly direct payments. UC pilots have been held in local authorities nationally and although roll out for Wolverhampton has not been confirmed it is likely to be mid to late 2015.
- 2.3 Welfare reforms, arising from the Welfare Reform Act 2012, caused a fundamental change to many of the City's most vulnerable residents with many finding change confusing and the reduction in income hard to deal with. Most benefit claimants have adjusted to benefit changes, but every resident can face unexpected life or legal events that can cause them to struggle with living expenses. When left unchecked a regular shortfall in income can spiral into debt and other difficulties.

3.0 Context

- 3.1 There is a huge amount of information already available about debt, benefit changes, entitlement and income maximisation, if you know what you are looking for and where to look. However the breadth of national helplines, websites and local advice points can be both confusing and frustrating.
- 3.2 The Council has a duty to ensure that information and advice is accessible to all. This review recognised the need for organisations across the City to work in partnership to map out what already is in place and what initiatives are happening to develop advice and support mechanisms to make the best possible use of resources and to move towards a customer centric approach.
- 3.3 Resident's health and wellbeing is important with some of the city's most vulnerable residents being in need of, or at risk of needing, social care. Many residents need specialist Welfare Rights, debt or housing advice and some will need legal assistance to defend their benefit entitlement or fight sanctions or eviction.
- 3.4 The review group felt that many of the people entitled to benefits (in-work and out of work) are the same cohort of people seeking employment opportunities, who may have low skill levels or may be long term unemployed and identified a need to bring together advice and support for this cohort of people about what is available, if they are entitled to claim and who to contact.

- 3.5 Issues identified during the evidence gathering sessions have fed directly into service planning and delivery. As a result some adjustments have already been implemented on the website and work streams have been informed. The findings of the review have fed into a workshop held on 27 November involving a broad range of stakeholders to start developing Wolverhampton's response to the rollout of Universal Credit, known as Universal Support Services (formally Local Support Services), to support local residents through triage; Digital Inclusion and Personal Budgeting Support .
- 3.6 Universal Credit will require claimants to apply for and manage their account online, receive their payments monthly in arrears and pay their rent direct to their landlord. It is anticipated that some residents will require additional support, for example if they do not have access to or lack the skills and capability to get online.
- 3.7 The correlation between deprivation, debt, unemployment and benefits means that often people will need more than one service. There is a need to be able to distinguish between general advice and specialist services. The Council's transformation programme and Customer Services Strategy highlights the need to move towards enabling customers and partners to access services, advice and support and to signpost others to it.
- 3.8 Funding for voluntary organisations advice continues to be under funding pressure, making it imperative that we co-ordinate bids, resources and services to make best use of resources.
- 3.9 Should community representatives be utilised as a part of the final solution, there would be a need to cover some of the volunteer's expenses, be they City Council or wider community based.
- 3.10 Risks to vulnerable residents that have been identified as part of the review include: potential mortgage rate rise and implementation of Universal Credit (UC). UC has the potential to increase debt/homelessness and bed & breakfast costs in the City. Landlords may consider changing portfolios from benefit claimants to working tenants.
- 3.11 The impact of sanctions on those claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) is not fully recognised. People 'fall off' the statistics for claiming JSA but may have no other form of income. Increases in discretionary grant loans and discretionary housing grants from Wolverhampton Homes may be an indication of increasing indebtedness in the City.
- 3.12 Based on the evidence received the review group made eight recommendations. The review group want people to have the tools, information and support, to be able to help themselves or to be signposted to advice and support if they have specific needs or seek expert knowledge. The review group focused on the need to develop a co-ordinated advice and support framework and strategy across the City and to be able to signpost individuals to the advice they need and to encourage people to help them-selves to information and guidance.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 Funding has been identified from the public health budget to commission works identified in the executive response to recommendation one. Although not yet detailed, budget of £20,000 has been allocated from the Public Health Interventions Reserve to cover the work.
[AB/22012015/K]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The Welfare Reform Act became law in March 2012 and introduced major changes to the way people receive housing and other welfare benefits. The Care Act requires us to provide information and advice.
- 5.2 The legislation governing Welfare Reforms is available via the following link:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/simplifying-the-welfare-system-and-making-sure-work-pays/supporting-pages/welfare-reform-act-2012-regulations>
- 5.3 The Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010 (the Act) when exercising its functions, including those relating to Welfare Reform. At the time when decisions are taken about the Council's policy on Welfare Reform, the Council will need to have regard to the matters set out in section 149 of the Act.
[RB/22012015/Z]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 The Welfare Reform equality assessment undertaken in November 2013 provides an analysis of the impact of welfare reform measures on individuals and households in Wolverhampton, as well as the consequential impacts on the Council, its partners and other service providers concerned for the welfare of those affected.

7.0 Environmental implications

- 7.1 There are no environmental implications as a direct result of this report.

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 An internal canvass of Council employees is recommended to recruit volunteers with experience of benefits and working in social care environment to work with the CAB and to receive relevant welfare rights training. The Employee Volunteering Scheme give Council workers the chance to volunteer in the community in Wolverhampton for up to two working days per annum.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 9.1 There are no corporate landlord issues as a direct result of this report.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

- 10.1 Communicating information about Welfare reforms in the City was subject of a scrutiny review in 2013 following implementation of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Empowering People and Communities is a key theme of the Wolverhampton City Strategy. With the following priorities for action:
- Undertaking early intervention and prevention
 - Supporting financial inclusion
 - Encouraging healthier lifestyles and independence at all stages of life
 - Supporting more people to be active within their communities
 - Encouraging the voluntary and community sectors

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Appendix 1

Scrutiny Review: Welfare Reform – Unclaimed Benefits

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1. Preface

Last year welfare reforms brought big changes to the benefit system. Many residents struggled to manage budgets and the reduction to household income put more pressure on family finances and vulnerable individuals. The Council and partners put in place help and support for people during the transition.

There will be further changes into 2017 with the transition from weekly to monthly benefit payments and implementation of Universal Credit. More help is needed to reach out to people through a range of channels to offer help and support to all residents including those who have never asked for or needed help before.

We know everyone's needs and circumstances are different, working people with a zero hour contract and people who are self-employed can struggle because working hours are unpredictable and incomes can vary from week to week. Entitlement for benefits would also vary and notifying change of circumstances can be too much trouble, people simply do not claim their entitlement.

We know that some people do not think they can claim for financial support because they have a job, or their partner has a job, or they are retired or have savings; some simply do not want to be thought of as 'scroungers'. My advice is to ask for advice from the right people and do not listen to people who think they have all the answers. Every individual has a right to have their request for advice and support considered on its own merits, confidentially and professionally.

I want to get a clear message out to everyone especially our most vulnerable residents, working or not, that the range of benefits and credits are a means to help individuals and families get through difficult periods and back on their feet. We want to help people before debt and circumstances lead to them facing lives in poverty, eviction and homelessness. We want to help people claim their entitlement and we have concentrated our efforts on how to improve advice and support to maximise benefits and defend benefit entitlement.

I want to thank witnesses that have contributed to the review, your evidence and perspectives have made the review group think about what is available and of the emerging issues and challenges.

Councillor Rita Potter, Chair of the Scrutiny Review

2. Summary of Report

The review group met on six occasions to hear evidence from witnesses in relation to welfare reforms and unclaimed benefits, with particular focus on customer advice and support mechanisms, current pressures, resource reductions and the current and future development programmes and opportunities in Wolverhampton. This report shines a spotlight on information and advice for the residents of Wolverhampton about maximising benefit income and defending benefit entitlement. It gives an indication of the pressures for Wolverhampton and seeks to understand the issues and challenges for residents, the Council and partner organisations from different perspectives.

A summary of witness evidence is given in relation to services provided and the current mechanisms, initiatives and projects to make improvements to information advice and support available.

The report provides an insight into the correlation between indebtedness, unemployment and unclaimed benefits, highlights the need for awareness about eligibility for benefits and explores the impact of changes to Job seekers allowance (JSA) and getting people off benefits and back into work to reduce the high number of long term unemployed and JSA claimants in Wolverhampton.

The report highlights how valuable resources are reducing in the City, cuts to funding for voluntary organisations, service reductions in the Council and reductions for partner organisations means there is a reduction in advice and support and a need to maximise available resources across the City.

The report details that the Council's transformation programme and customer services strategy highlight the need to move towards enabling customers and partners to access services, advice and support themselves and to signpost others to it.

The report makes seven recommendations to Cabinet to work in partnership to develop access to information through a number of channels and deliver a joined up and co-ordinated advice and support strategy for the City. It also considers exploring funding and co-ordinated bids to support the framework in preparation for the implementation of Universal Credit by 2017.

3. Introduction

3.1 'Welfare Reform' was identified as a topic for a scrutiny review during 2013-14, to consider the implementation of Universal Credit.

3.2 The core principles of a scrutiny review are:

- Setting up a review only when it is clear that it would have resonance with Wolverhampton residents and workers.
- Applying scrutiny only to issues where there is a real and legitimate opportunity to influence.

- Understanding when a 'narrow and deep' method of scrutiny is of greater value than one that is 'broad and shallow'.
- Being flexible in the conducting of scrutiny to ensure that it is tailored to the different demands of each situation.

3.3 Directly or indirectly welfare reforms impact on the majority of people and families in Wolverhampton. The roll out of benefit changes is on-going with Universal Credit (UC) to be implemented in spring 2015.

3.4 The impact of the welfare reform changes to benefit rules fell wider and deeper than first thought and the demand for advice on benefit changes was addressed in the short-term last year by a Council funded helpline. Funding for the helpline has now ended and other council funding reductions to several voluntary organisations across the City has had an adverse impact on capacity to sustain advice and support mechanisms in their current form.

3.5 The review group were concerned that there may be problems with the implementation of UC and highlighted the need for partners and third sector to work together to put a plan in place.

3.6 This is a changing world and digital and technological links and social media can be powerful tools to communicate with a target cohort of people. This has been evidenced by the Adult and Community Portal.

3.7 Welfare reform is a broad topic in times of reducing resources and indebtedness however it was agreed that the review group could focus its efforts and have influence on benefit maximisation and defending benefit entitlement, particularly in terms of advice and support in the City for those people who are:

- struggling to make ends meet or in debt
- not fully informed about what and how they can claim
- or who are not claiming their benefit entitlement.

3.8 The review group is aware that the Council has a duty to promote wellbeing and wanted to focus its efforts on how to maximise benefits advice and support. The agreed lines of enquiry were:

1. What do we know about advice and support that is currently available to people relating to debt and benefit entitlement in Wolverhampton, what is the take up of that service and what more is needed?
2. What more can be done to raise awareness of benefit entitlement and maximise benefits?
3. Is there an advice and support strategy for the City and if so, how can it be improved?
4. How should advice and support be provided?

4.0 Context

4.1 Wolverhampton

4.1.1 The following points about Wolverhampton highlight the challenges the City faces:

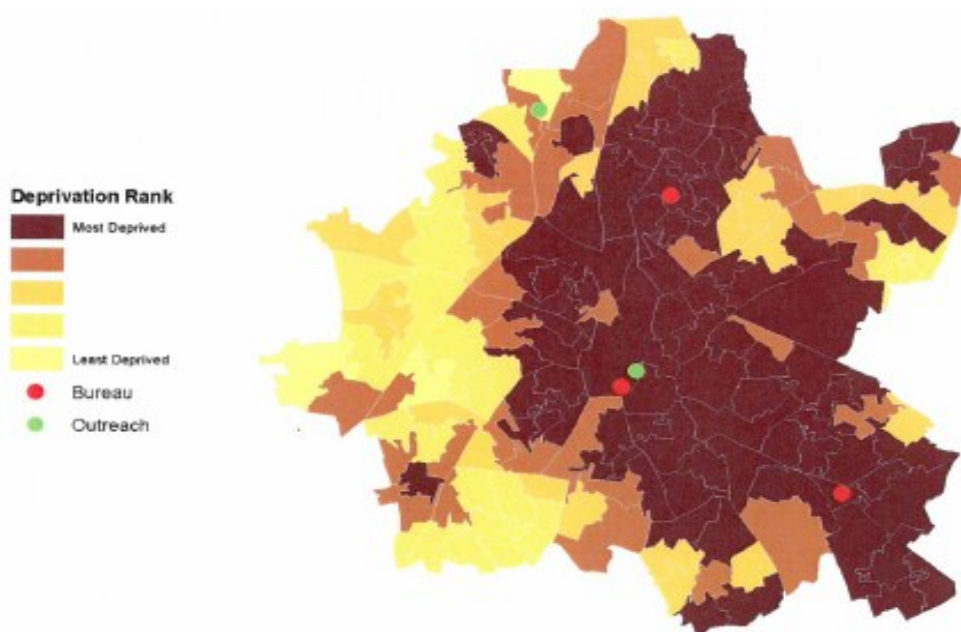
- Total population: **251,557 (unrounded)** (2013 Mid-Year Estimate)

- Total households: **102,177 (unrounded)** (Census 2011)
- Unemployment rate: **5.7% of those aged 16-64** (July 2014)
- Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents: **35.5%** (Census 2011)
- Life expectancy for males is **77.4 years** and for females is **81.7 years** (2010-2012 averages)
- % children attaining 5 A*-C GCSEs incl. English and Maths: **61.0%** (2013)
- One in three children living in poverty
- Highest infant mortality rate in the Country
- 9th over indebted population in the Country
- 37.1% of our population is in debt
- 5.5% of the working age population is currently claiming job seekers allowance (JSA)
- an unknown number of people not employed and not claiming JSA
- High level of youth unemployment

More information can be found about Wolverhampton by following the following link <http://www.wolverhamptoninprofile.org.uk/>

4.1.2 Deprivation

The map provided by CAB shows indices of multiple deprivation and location of CAB Bureau offices and outreach team.



4.1.3 Key out of work benefits by gender: Wolverhampton

Moves to get people off benefits and into work has shown progress but despite a drop in the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in the city during 2013-14 (down 320 to 8,797 August 2014) Wolverhampton's claimant rate of 5.5 per cent of its working population is the highest in the UK. (*Wolverhampton Council Unemployment briefing September 2014*)

This report is PUBLIC
[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

Measure	Nov-11	Feb-12	May-12	Aug-12	Nov-12	Feb-13	May-13	Aug-13
JSA claimants – male	7,710	8,220	7,860	7,730	7,570	8,080	7,740	7,110
JSA claimants – female	3,910	4,070	4,080	4,340	4,310	4,420	4,270	4,170
ESA & Incapacity Benefit claimants – male	7,570	7,380	7,220	7,060	6,930	6,840	6,660	6,660
ESA & Incapacity Benefit claimants – female	5,720	5,700	5,570	5,570	5,460	5,330	5,320	5,390
Lone Parents on IS claimants – male	120	120	120	100	100	100	90	100
Lone Parents on IS – female	3,650	3,620	3,590	3,420	3,210	3,180	3,190	3,170
Other income related benefit claimants – male	770	720	710	710	690	680	680	680
Other income related benefit claimants – female	290	300	290	260	240	230	270	260
% - male residents	20.1%	20.5%	19.8%	19.4%	19.0%	19.5%	18.9%	18.1%

4.1.4 Wolverhampton has high numbers of youth unemployment, Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) claimants and rising numbers of older people. Certain skill levels and educational attainment is low and there is a shift towards short term, shorter hours or zero hour contracts for lower skilled jobs, which in turn could add to individual's insecurity and questioning whether it is worth working at all. Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) do not follow up information on unclaimed benefits; they record details about people claiming JSA. (*Wolverhampton Council Unemployment briefing September 2014*)

4.2 Welfare Reform Act 2012

4.2.1 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 became law in March 2012. The Act introduces major changes to the benefits system particularly for people of working age. Implementation started in April 2013 to deliver radical structural reforms to the benefit system for people of working age.

4.2.2 Welfare reforms have caused a fundamental change to many of the City's most vulnerable residents, those in need of care, those in debt, those whose health and well-being is directly affected by reducing benefits. Many of our residents have adjusted to the benefit changes but find reduction in income hard to deal with and confusing.

4.2.3 The welfare reform impact analysis undertaken in November 2013 provides an analysis of the impact of welfare reform measures on individuals and households in Wolverhampton, as well as the consequential impacts on the Council, its partners and other service providers concerned for the welfare of those affected.

4.2.4 There will be further change with the implementation of Universal Credit taking place before 2017. Universal Credit (UC) is six existing benefits rolled into one which will be paid direct to the claimant in a monthly payment.

4.2.5 Residents and service providers will need to be aware of the changes, how they will be affected and who to contact. Some of our most vulnerable residents in need of, or at risk of needing, social care may need specialist Welfare Rights advice, debt or housing advice and some will need legal assistance to defend their benefit entitlement or fight sanctions or eviction.

4.3 Unclaimed Benefits

- 4.3.1 BBC News in February 2012 reported that billions of pounds, ranging from pension credit to jobseeker's allowance (JSA), go unclaimed nationally each year. We do know how many people claim benefits in Wolverhampton and the types of benefit claimed but there are no figures to show who does not claim benefits that they are entitled to or to tell us if people are claiming the right benefits.
- 4.3.2 It is believed that many people do not question if they are eligible for benefits due to stigma about claiming benefits, myths or simply that they do not know what benefits are available, where to find information or who to ask. It is not known how many people do not pick up the phone or use the internet to ask for advice.
- 4.3.3 There is correlation between indebtedness, unemployment and unclaimed benefits (Indebted lives – The complexities of life in debt, MAS report (November 2013)).

5.0 Findings

5.1 Summary of witness evidence

The review group requested witnesses to present evidence relating to current mechanisms and resources for advice and support relating to the welfare reforms and benefit maximisation.

5.1.1 Welfare Rights Service (WRS)

The WRS is based in the Council's Community Services department and helps to maximise benefit entitlements of vulnerable Wolverhampton residents requiring care services and those that would potentially require such services. WR officers are also based in social work teams across Wolverhampton and there is a take-up team based at Heantun House. WR officers also provide a Macmillan WRS based at New Cross Hospital in association with Macmillan Cancer Support and a Renal Unit WRS in partnership with the Royal Wolverhampton Hospital Trust.

The WR service has transformed following a restructure and reconfiguration of service from 1 May 2014. Funding for the Benefits Helpline and Response Team (BHART) has ended as part of the reconfiguration of services; however BHART also provided a training outreach service to benefit information and advice giving organisations in Wolverhampton and produced information and detailed guides for residents and advisers which can still be found on the Council website. The BHART work has provided the foundations for a Coordinated Benefits Advice Strategy.

The WRS and Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) have developed two projects (one with the University of Wolverhampton Law Faculty the other with inter-faith groups) to respond to a high demand for help to challenge DWP benefit decisions, help with appeals and the growing number of appeals to tribunals. The projects involve trained volunteers:

- 30 students or ex-students underwent an intense training programme provided by the WRS to enable them to represent appellants at tribunal hearings who are challenging DWP decisions about their capability for work in Employment and Support Allowance cases;
- About 30 volunteers underwent benefit awareness training to become 'Appeal Companions' who will help appellants by accompanying them to hearings in non-complex cases where their chances of success increase significantly by the appellant being in attendance at the hearing.

The WRS compiled a list of local organisations which are included in a directory of advice and support services in the City, has carried out a skills audit to determine training and resource needed and is working with Local Advice Wolverhampton (LAW) and legal support to defend benefit entitlement.

WRS has established a training programme for voluntary organisations which will run September – December 2014. A summary and schedule of training events and can be accessed by contacting the Council's welfare rights service [here](#).

The Welfare Rights Service are opening dialogue with the Local Advice Wolverhampton (LAW) project which broadens the range of advice from benefits advice to respond to enquiries on debt, housing and employment issues.

5.1.2 Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB)

CAB outlined that the period since 2010 has been one of unprecedented change and setbacks for the legal advice sector, both nationally and locally, and indicated that the demand for advice has altered:

- In 2008-09 there was a doubling of demand for employment and housing advice as people lost jobs in the recession and downturn and then struggled with tenure.
- Debt remained the most frequently requested subject from circa 2006 to 2013.
- Welfare rights, benefits, tax credits, sanctions and the changes to the system like spare room subsidy and Universal Credit (UC) have increased a need for a wide ranging service around navigating benefits system changes.
- From 2014 the CAB is strongly predicting an increase in housing advice demand as mortgage rates rise.

The reduction in capacity and resource for the CAB has resulted in free legal aid relating to benefits, employment and debt, supplied within the city by CAB being abolished. However a reduced advice stream relating to 'supply of debt' has been re-contracted via the national Money Advice Service (MAS) until 2017. Several local geographic advice agencies operating at the general advice level have completely closed including:

- Heath Town Community Focus
- AWAAZ
- Blakenhall Advice Centre

Most others have been cut back services including:

- Age UK, Refugee & Migration Centre(RMC)
- CAB
- the Haven

Others are unable to grow or develop services, such as SEWA and BASE 25.

A general advice telephone number for the City is retained by the CAB but it is not a free phone number. Existing CAB resource from Bilston has been relocated to operate the reduced function, Public Health has boosted the helpline to help families, and the former LDGS Hardship grants scheme also funds CAB to offer a filtration and signposting function.

A range of information leaflets and posters were shared with the group to demonstrate what information is currently available. An income maximisation poster produced by CAB in 2012-13 was highlighted as an excellent source of information for all front line works and the review group indicated that it should be refreshed with links and contact details added.

5.1.3 Local Advice Wolverhampton (LAW)

LAW is a two year project funded by the Big Lottery Advice Service Transition Fund (until 2015). CAB is the lead agency and all services are supported by Wolverhampton CAB. The project aims to improve advice services in the City to make them more robust and offer quality advice in the four core areas to more people, for less cost, in a sustained way.

In addition, the project offers IT support and training to allow partners to make best use of their existing systems or introduce new ones that are fit for purpose so as to allow for more efficient monitoring, recording, and use of electronic media.

There are four core areas of advice are:

1. Benefits
2. Housing
3. Employment (law)
4. Debt

Thirteen local, voluntary sector advice agencies have agreed to work in partnership to meet the outcomes of the project. A comprehensive training programme will be compiled for volunteers and staff within the partnership which will form the basis of the offer.

The overall outcomes of the project are:

- (a) Advice organisations collaborate effectively with each other and other agencies to improve service outcomes for customers.

The deliverables on this outcome are:

- Increased access to support using multiple channels of advice such as telephone, video calling and web portal
- Steering & practitioner groups to facilitate collaboration and share good practice

- Fast track referral services
- Training for staff on the core advice areas & IT
- Volunteer recruitment & training
- Shared assessment process
- Improved monitoring procedures
- Form filling service

(b) Local advice services are resilient and well equipped to meet future needs, with more modern and enterprising business models and more diverse sources of funding.

The deliverables on this outcome are:

- Assistance to achieve Advice Quality Mark
- Increase organisational capacity by 20%
- Review current funding & business models
- Increase organisational efficiency by 20%

The business model for LAW is working, but there is no funding going forward the aim of the CAB LAW project is to embed the work of the LAW project. The second stage of the project is to put together collaborative bids and to look at the business model.

5.1.4 **Wolverhampton Homes (WH)**

WH provides advice and support for social housing tenants and works in partnership with the Council and Voluntary Sector. To achieve there is a wide range of work being done by WH to provide advice and support across the City. CAB advisers are based in WH offices across the City and are commissioned to provide advice and support to social housing tenants. There has been an increase in the requests for advice, support and financial assistance particularly since JSA sanctions have been introduced as people are struggling to pay rents due to benefit reductions.

There are a number of interventions to support tenants if they are taken ill and need housing benefit support.

The 'Better off in Wolverhampton' (BOW) project is a debt advice project funded in anticipation of the introduction of Universal Credit (UC). WH has commissioned CAB to provide budget advice for new tenants. UC is not yet implemented but the 'Are you ready' sessions are ready to roll out when it does.

5.1.5 **Department of Works and Pension (DWP) Family in Focus (FIF) Officer**

A DWP officer has been seconded to Wolverhampton City Council's Communities Directorate, Families in Focus (FIF) project, since June 2013. The officer works with 810 troubled families in Wolverhampton to help people reach out to families and build their trust and help them back into work when the family is stable. The officer can access the same database as the jobcentre to check details.

The FIF officers identified several common issues with the FIF families:

- Many do not read, or even open the post, either putting it to one side or throwing it straight into the bin if it is a brown envelope or officially postal marked.
- Many are not claiming the right level of benefit or the right benefit.
- People do not register a change in circumstances and miss out on benefits or face sanctions as a result.
- There is a lack of basic English and Maths skills.
- Many of the families lurch from crisis to crisis.
- They just want to get out of the job centre interview situation and say yes to everything.
- Home life is unsettled
- They share urban myths e.g. 'someone down the street or around the corner has told lone parents they are better off not working'.
- Most have not found out about benefit changes and how it affects them.

The DWP employee has full access to the DWP database including client information to assist with responding to enquiries on a case by case basis and he works with WRS, WH, DWP, Council tax and others to support families before any issues arise and to ensure they maximise income and prevent any reductions in their entitlement to benefit.

The secondment ends 31 March 2015, however it is suggested that some of the good practice carried out could be captured in case studies and that the success stories should be promoted to the wider public, raising awareness and encouraging people who may recognise themselves in the scenario to seek advice and find out if they could be claiming benefits or back claiming if there has been a genuine problem or mistake made.

The secondment has been successful so far and there is learning to be taken from it, the correlation between areas of deprivation, the need for advice and support and the location of many of the FIF families highlights the need to link benefits and income maximisation with employability and skills, and therefore getting people into employment.

The review group welcomed the dedicated resource for FIF and suggested that other dedicated DWP resource should be seconded for older people, young people and people with disabilities.

5.1.6 DWP Jobcentre Plus (JCP)

In Wolverhampton there are three job centres (Chapel Court; Molineux House and Bilston) and 24 job clubs, plus job advice that is available at libraries. Job centre offices have recently been transformed to reflect the new ways of working with job coaches; self-serve job search equipment has been removed from the public area and is being replaced with wise access devices and internet access. There is website to assist the public <https://www.gov.uk/> which gives information about finding employment, how to claim benefits and about the customer journey.

At Molineux House 20 computers have been installed to give access to jobseekers in the 'Job Centre Zone'. The transformation of services and technology is necessary to underpin the welfare reform changes particularly Universal Credit, it is anticipated that all of the relevant equipment will be in place by the end of 2014 and that from 28 January 2015 the public will have access to the upgraded facilities.

DWP employees are now job coaches and work face-to-face with clients through interviews and training.

DWP helping people into work and off benefits

The number of working-age people claiming JSA in Wolverhampton is at its lowest since 2008; however the city is still the joint-worst area nationwide alongside Hull with 5.7 per cent of working-age claimants. Due to low skills and literacy levels finding work can be quite a challenge for some people in Wolverhampton, there is work available if you know where to look, have the right skillset or have access to support to find work or gain skills. Jobcentre Plus (JCP) advised that 30% of vacancies are placed on the universal jobs list, other vacancies can be found on the internet, in newspapers and advertised in local businesses but there was some concern that there is no comprehensive list of all current vacancies in Wolverhampton.

There is support available to apply for jobs, complete CVs and use technology in order to move off benefits. JCP job search zones are taking place in pilot areas across the City and are so far proving to be a big success; clients welcome the one-to-one coaching, help with improving their CV's and universal job match. JCP also works closely with recruitment agencies and companies moving to expanding in or making redundancies in the area. Knowledge of skills and availability is crucial in sign posting the opportunities.

Work Coaches

Each client has a work coach (replacing the 'job advisor' role), work coaches are based at job centres and can advise and support clients to develop a working knowledge of on-line processes, and they help the client access internet information. Work coaches develop a working relationship with the client, improve computer and internet skills which help the individual to apply for jobs, but also to access information and apply for benefits, housing and other essential services. Approximately 86% of job seekers allowance claims are on-line and people are getting used to the digital way of working. The area manager is also working with partners to help more vulnerable clients and job coaches have a working knowledge of disabilities and signpost clients to advice and support. People will not be asked if they have mental health issues and work coaches will only know if advice or support is needed or if the person tells them. Some clients choose not to confide in the work coach in case it impacts on their chance of getting a job. The strong message to customers should be to be completely open with the work coach so that the appropriate advice and support can be signposted.

Other Partners

The voluntary sector and housing partners also work closely with JCP and with people who want to get back into employment. Wolverhampton Homes Learning Employment and Achievement Programme (LEAP), job and skills events across the City from voluntary sector organisations are organised to help people back into a working environment. JCP, Wolverhampton University and College have developed many more initiatives including apprenticeships and training for younger people and people who want to re-train. JCP has a training programme for up to nine months for 18-25 year old people and the work coaches' work with individuals.

JCP works with the Local Authority regeneration team to direct local people to new local jobs. JCP are advised of redundancies in the Wolverhampton area and can put measures in place to give a rapid response, setting up targeted advice and support. Employers also make contact with the local authority to keep them in the loop about business, employment and the local economy. A section 109 agreement with investors in the City secures a number of work places for the hardest to help, making sure they are given specific training in 'sector based work academy' and prepared for interviews.

Claimant Commitment:

- The claimant commitment is drawn up between work coach and customer
- Clients sign an agreement around what they will do to get a job and how they will demonstrate they are meeting the commitment.
- Job coaches support the customer to meet their commitment.
- Clients are required to meet with the job coach at least every two weeks.
- If they do not attend when asked to the work coach can bring into question their commitment to getting work.

The Wolverhampton Partnership Manager is working with partners to roll out the message about claimant commitment. Wolverhampton Homes (WH) has received four workshops as they are keen to work with JCP to support their tenants to maximise income.

Change of rules for claiming Job Seekers Allowance - JSA:

Sanctions were introduced by Department of Works and Pensions last year to encourage long term unemployed into employment. Data about the numbers of sanctions in Wolverhampton is not readily available and has been requested from JCP; the data is collected by job centres and people attend the nearest job centres which may be cross Local Authority borders.

The review group highlighted the importance of understanding the changes to rules for claiming JSA and to get job seekers back onto the JSA list. People who are not on the list do not receive benefits.

Only new claimants are signing a commitment at this time, existing claimants of JSA (stock customers) are still working under the old system but will eventually be required to sign a claimant commitment.

Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) do not follow up information on unclaimed benefits; they record details about people claiming JSA.

JSA Sanctions:

After 28 January 2014 the work coach became responsible for looking at the commitment and seeing if the client is doing what they say they will be doing to find work. If a 'doubt' is raised by the work coach, and if the client has signed a job seekers agreement or claimant commitment in which they have agreed to carry out certain actions, the client will receive written notification of the reason for sanction.

- The work coach will call in the client, explain why they have been sanctioned and discuss the options
- Sanctions are for four weeks, 13 or 26 weeks
- The client must continue to meet the commitment even when they are not receiving payment or further sanctions will occur
- They are advised of their right to apply for hardship payment and there is a dedicated line for those who want to claim

Some clients decide not to continue with the commitment, these people are not eligible for JSA payment and are not registered as seeking employment. Some of these stop attending because they find employment or move out of the area, others do not and remain out of work but not on benefits. If the client chooses not to attend a meeting with the job coach JCP do not chase up the client. People under sanctions and not receiving benefit are advised of their right to apply for hardship payment and there is a dedicated help line for assistance. When sanctions are applied the JSA claimants are removed from the 'out of works list'.

Sanctions data is not available for Wolverhampton by ward or constituency, the data is collected by job centres and these may be cross local authority border because people attend their nearest job centres.

Claimants with communication and language barriers:

Extra support is available through the changes to JSA for the hardest to help group(s). Many people for whom English is not their first language are offered an English language test which reveals if there is a need for help and support.

JCP suggests to people who are mandated for help and support to bring with them a friend or relative who can act as interpreter, there is a translation and interpretation service but this suggestion is less formal. Help with language is available and people work with a provider commissioned by the JCP. What is said during the work coach session may be misinterpreted due to language barriers and there may be cultural or religious reasons for the 'doubt' arising.

5.1.7 Wolverhampton City Council (WCC) - City Direct

City Direct advised the review group that the council is committed, as part of its overall transformation, to the creation of a customer services organisation where

the customer is the centre of the business model. A recent customer services review found that City Direct has been very effective in creating a positive customer environment. There are development needs which involve gaining a better understanding of customer needs. The review found there is a commitment to the Council's Customer Services Strategy fully endorsed by Cabinet and Strategic Executive Board and that this change is happening. Some of the key benefits for providing a first point of contact for advice and support at City Direct are:

- Customer centric approach
- One point of contact (consistency/missed calls and customer satisfaction)
- A new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to input data, send texts and emails (if people are already on the system) to target advice and support
- Baseline data collecting, mapping and planning for the City
- Warm transfers, a technique from the first point of contact, speaking to the caller gives sense of security, determine their preference, and gather data accurately about purpose of call and postcode this will help to target hotspots and signpost.
- Potential for 'link and push notification'
- Migrating areas of service into the contact centre
- Performance monitoring and mapping, how many benefit calls, how many transfers, to which advice or support
- Calls transferred from Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), Jobcentre Plus to City Direct or the contact centre

The Council is consistently developing ways of working improve the customer experience and its efficiency, these include:

- Strengthening service level agreements and commissioned services
- Future proofing and a flexible approach
- Channel shift
- Webpage
- Customer knowledge e.g. meals on wheels drivers can feed back – know your customers to advise and support.
- Important from a customer services perspective to bring together records, build a picture through hard data
- Important from a policy perspective to future proof advice and support in the City
- The Wolverhampton Credit Union has had an office in the Civic Centre since 8 September 2014.

The Council website will have an improved network and links to relevant information advice and support, including a link to the Wolverhampton Information Network (WIN).

5.1.8 **WCC Wolverhampton Information Network (WIN)**

The portal will provide residents and staff with a comprehensive online information directory that will enable them to find accurate and robust information, advice and

guidance about adult social care services and community information in Wolverhampton and nationally. The benefits of WIN are:

- It can update information quickly to ensure users always have accurate information at their disposal
- The website will be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- The cost implications are minimal and sustainable over the long term
- It is open to a wide audience;
- It provides links to other services and activities, such as NHS Choices;
- It provides an opportunity for users to feed back any concerns or queries and for them to be signposted to the right service as quickly as possible;
- It supports existing information resources, both inside and outside of the Council;
- It is a modern way for people to access information about services;
- It can easily be shaped to meet the needs of those who lives can be transformed by being able to find the right information at the right time.

5.1.9 WCC Community Hubs

There are currently four Community Hubs, 12 Community Centres and Blakenhall Community Healthy Living Centre in the city. With the exception of Blakenhall Community and the Healthy Living Centre, the majority of the centres are managed by volunteers who operate as a Community Association and manage and operate the centre on a day-to-day basis (including bookings and membership) and receive the income from hirers.

Recent estimates on numbers of elderly people attending community buildings are in excess of 1500 per week; when including other age groups, this number could easily increase by a further thousand.

The ability of these centres to support the delivery of additional activities will vary from centre to centre and is entirely dependent on the strength and depth of the volunteer base. The thriving centres have a highly organised volunteer base and manage to find the right balance between being business minded while still retaining the community focus.

The Council's vision for Community Hubs was that they should help transform community services and facilities. This would include the delivery of universal advice and information services; supporting in particular the Council's priorities for action in respect of:

- providing suitable sites and facilities for "undertaking early intervention and prevention"
- "supporting financial inclusion" by promoting a refreshed information and signposting strategy

Many of the centres offer informal support and guidance and with additional training and support volunteers could extend this offer further. Some Community Associations have their own websites and use social media to target their

audience. They also have effective local networks and an understanding of their local community.

Not all of the Community Associations have the capacity or infrastructure to offer more than they do at the moment and so this will restrict the opportunity to roll out the vision to all buildings and some buildings may be unsuitable for delivery due to size and availability of rooms and lack of IT. Further to these recent changes to the Licence Agreement for Community Hubs and Centres means that they are required to become more business minded as they are being expected to contribute increasingly to their centre running costs.

5.2 Funding streams for advice and support in the City

Funding for advice and support for benefit maximisation is very scarce at the current time. The main funding sources available are around prevention i.e. helping people improve their financial capability and moving people off benefits, rather than fund crisis response i.e. face-to-face advice.

- **LAW project:** The lottery funded advice transition funded LAW project offers an excellent opportunity for building capacity in the advice sector by upskilling other providers to give general advice
- **Black Country European Investment Strategy (BCEIS) 2014-20:** will inform the allocation of European funding between 2014 and 2020. Under the priority 'promoting social inclusion', a European Social Fund (ESF) intervention, specifically around financial inclusion linked to the rollout of Universal Credit has been included. The intervention aims to fund activities that build financial capability including the ability to budget and manage personal and family finances in advance of the rollout of Universal Credit. WCC is in discussions with the Big Lottery to match BCEIS fund amounting to £4 million across the Black Country over 4 years, therefore available funding is extremely limited. Activities are unlikely to start until the late 2015. Funding is related to outputs that relate to the number of participants engaging in positive activities that address barriers to work or widen participation in training.
- **Local Support Services Framework (LSSF):** as part of the preparation for the rollout of Universal Credit, DWP are working with local authorities and partners with the aim of producing a Local Support Services Framework bringing together digital and financial inclusion with employment and skills support targeting those affected by the rollout of Universal Credit.
- **The Big Lottery** funds a range of provision – they are already funding 'Better off in Wolverhampton': financial capability targeting young social housing tenants and 'Local Advice Wolverhampton' through the Advice Transition Fund. Given two existing schemes are relevant, we would not expect any more specific funding, however opportunities may arise by embedding financial inclusion in other funded opportunities such as Aging Better.
- **Community Trusts:** are small pots of money available given to predominantly to smaller voluntary and community sector organisations. These sources of

funding are becoming increasingly competitive and often focus on addressing the causes not the symptoms.

5.3 Advice and support mechanisms

5.3.1 There are multiple ways to access advice and guidance relating to benefits and debt if you know where to look and you have the means and abilities required to access the information, advice and support.

5.3.2 Information and advice is available in in many forms:

- Leaflets
- Posters
- On the internet
- Information points
- By making an appointment to speak to someone.

The way that people seek information depends on many factors; whether they are young, old, confident, worried; whether they can speak or read English; whether their preferred mode of communication is on the internet, the telephone, face to face; and on the level or complexity of information or advice they are seeking.

5.3.3 People can check for themselves using income calculators, advice lines, benefits maximisation tools and guides or they can ask someone to help them, if they know what they are asking or looking for. The next step would be to contact someone to gain more detail or to apply for assistance.

5.3.4 People seeking advice and support about benefits have often reached a point where they can no longer manage financially on their current income due to unforeseen circumstances or a spiralling cycle of debt. Individuals and families may be living in poverty or in debt; many may be out of work, on low or reduced pay or in part-time work and many may be eligible for Job seekers allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), working tax or pension credits.

The review group identified that there is a need to consider aligning advice and support for welfare rights and benefits with employability and skills to help people through the period between jobs or while they are developing new skills to find employment.

5.3.5 Channels of advice (*November 2013, Indebtedness report MAS*)

The Money Advice Service (MAS) carried out research relating to how people want to communicate relating to the eight segments of the over-indebted population (National)

Segment	Name	No.of people (National)	%of over-indebted population
1	Struggling students	1m	11.3 %
2	First time workers	0.9m	9.8 %

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[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

3	Optimistic young workers	1.1m	12.5 %
4	Low wage families	0.8m	9.3 %
5	Stretched families	1.4m	16.3 %
6	Working worried families	1.7m	19.4 %
7	Benefit dependent families	1.8 m	20.2 %
8	Uncomfortable Retirees	0.1m	1.1 %
	Total over-indebted population	8.8m	

Summary of key findings:

- To deliver advice to all those people that need it all channels of delivery need to be used.
- For people making first contact there was a fairly even spread across a number of channels with telephone (32%) being most popular, face-to-face (31%) and email (29%).
- When it comes to disclosing financial or personal information the spread alters to face to face (49%), email (21%) then telephone (20%).
- 79% of the over indebted population would be happy to use the full range of advice delivery channels, but 21% would not access advice if face-to-face was not available to them.

	Face-to-face	Email	Post	Telephone	Website	Don't know
Struggling students	38 %	31 %	11 %	31 %	26 %	6 %
First time workers	39 %	32 %	11 %	32 %	22 %	4 %
Optimistic young workers	31 %	31 %	9 %	34 %	25 %	5 %
Low wage families	33 %	31 %	14 %	27 %	26 %	6 %
Stretched families	33 %	31 %	7 %	34 %	20 %	4 %
Working worried families	26 %	29 %	6 %	33 %	24 %	4 %
Benefit dependent families	31 %	28 %	9 %	38 %	20 %	5 %
Uncomfortable Retirees	31 %	24 %	8 %	26 %	12 %	3 %

The table highlights that young people are more likely to want to access debt advice face-to-face in the first instance perhaps reflecting their lower level of confidence in managing their money than older people. There is a high preference expressed for email advice that is currently not being met.

The results of the research pose a number of questions about what people need from advice, how they want to access it and how the sector will need to adapt to meet their needs. The report does not focus on use of social media for information, advice and support. *(November 2013, Indebtedness report MAS)*

5.3.5 Two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through. The scrutiny review group identified several information channels in Wolverhampton:

- Telephone
- Internet
- Leaflet / poster
- Reception points face to face enquiry
- Face to face advice
- Formal interview

5.3.6 The Local Advice Wolverhampton (LAW) project team and Welfare Rights Service (WRS) are currently compiling directories to determine where and what advice and support can be accessed across the City.

Initially there seemed to be some duplication and gaps in intelligence about which organisations provide which services. The WRS directory will include contact details and the range of information advice and support in relation to benefits maximisation and defending benefit entitlement. The LAW Directory will go broader and include contacts for advice on debt and housing matters.

Initial mapping of organisations:

Helplines and information portals	General advice	Specialist advice
<p>National helplines Gov.uk Debt Advice foundation – benefits advice guide Turn2us benefits calculator MAS Housing Care – first stop for older people Gingerbread – Income support – new requirements</p> <p>Adviceguide.co.uk (CAB), Adviceuk.org.uk, Turn2us.org.uk, benefitadvice.org.uk, homegroup.org.uk and more.</p> <p>Local helplines– Wolverhampton.gov.uk; Wolverhamptonhomes.org.uk; Ageuk.org.uk/Wolverhampton; Local Advice Wolverhampton (LAW)</p>	<p>Council CAB Wolverhampton Homes (WH) LAW project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACC1 • Base 25 • Job Change • BME Utd • RMC • YMCA • Bilston Resource • Age UK • SEWA UK • CAB • Royal British Legion • Whitmorean Advice Centre • University Legal Advice Centre • Wolverhampton Sickle Cell and 	<p>Welfare Rights Service Money Smart Plus (WH) DWP Job Centre Plus Legal advice and University Law students</p>

City Direct Adult and Community Portal CAB helpline	Thalassaemia Project Community Hub Families in Focus DWP advisor CAB Helpline	
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- 5.3.7 The review group felt that information for those self-serving must be current and in a format(s) that is easily understood. The review group felt that language on helplines, websites and at advice points, both nationally and locally can be confusing and frustrating and can put people off. Some of our most vulnerable people need to be signposted to the right advice in the first instance and have information explained to them, but with support they can be encouraged to help themselves in the future.
- 5.3.8 The report demonstrates the barriers and opportunities to discovering what information advice and support is available. We do know how many people claim benefits and we do know the types of benefit and who would be eligible. But there are no statistics to inform the review group who do not claim benefits, there is no data to tell us if people are claiming the right benefits, or how many do not pick up the phone or access the internet to ask if they are eligible for additional payments.
- 5.3.9 Often residents will need more than one service and there are a number of initiatives and developments already underway to help them find what they need. However there is a need to co-ordinate and not duplicate advice and support and to be able to distinguish between general advice and specialist services. Any person making contact for advice should be assessed and signposted to the right service or benefit advice for them, training and tools will help this process as part of the strategy and framework.
- 5.3.10 There is good practice across the City, with lots of benefit information, advice and support available but the Council and partners need to reach out to more people, people those who fall in the gaps between benefits and employment, those in poverty or at risk of falling into debt. Web pages and advice leaflets seem to expect people to have a basic knowledge of benefits and are dotted with jargon.
- 5.3.11 many of the projects related to advice and support are funded, as such initiatives and funding streams are often stand alone and have to produce pre-determined outcomes. This often means that projects for advice and support are disparate across the City and not co-ordinated. There may be areas of duplication and some gaps. More intelligence about existing advice and support is required, as follows:
- Mapping and data
 - Training
 - Signposting and joining up (making the links)
 - Targeted face to face sessions
 - Co-ordination of current network
 - One telephone number

5.3.12 The helpline for advice about benefits (BHART) is no longer funded by WCC and the CAB has retained the telephone number for general enquiries. CAB lines are staffed 9:00-17:00 on weekdays, are under staffed and callers often hear engaged tone.

A dedicated telephone line for debt and benefits advice would benefit the City but further discussion would need to take place as part of the transformation of systems in the Councils 'City Direct' hub could indicate the future direction for information and advice first point of contact.

Witnesses confirmed that it is possible for telephone enquiries about debt or benefits to City Direct to be diverted to a special number by automated mechanism (i.e. bins, bulky collections or pests press one, for debt or benefit enquiries press two...) and details of the caller can be logged on the new CRM system, building a customer file and helping to build a picture in areas of the City, hotspots of activity where additional focus such as a 'pop up shop' may be needed. We have to be sure that the capacity of the helplines can handle the calls, that we are not missing calls, and that the website is accessible. Organisations best placed to lead should lead and the actions and leads across the City should be co-ordinated.

5.3.13 The Council's website should hold the key information and links for people in Wolverhampton to 'self-serve, check their benefit eligibility and how to maximise their income. The website should signpost to other information nationally and locally, highlighting more specific advice and support in the City. The 'debt and benefits advice' webpage on Derby Council website was considered as best practice by the review group. There is a need to review the WCC website relating to advice and support for the cohort of people who need information about benefits, getting into work and income maximisation and the review group suggested considering the feasibility of testing how effective our site is by carrying out focus group sessions with service users

5.3.14 A co-ordinated approach to debt and benefits advice will prepare the Council, partners and volunteers for the introduction of Universal Credit as there is an expectation that enquiries will peak when it is implemented. When people need more support to access information, advice and support the mechanisms must be in place to maximise income and benefits for those most vulnerable. Future funding needs to be approached in a collaborative manner.

5.4 Suggestions for future development

5.4.1 Welfare Rights Service (WRS)

The WRS proposed to develop a co-ordinated benefits advice strategy with WRS as a Specialist Support Unit for organisations in Wolverhampton giving benefits information and advice. It is envisaged that the Welfare Rights Service will be the 'expert hub', providing training, advice and consultancy to organisations so they can resolve benefit issues for their customers and expand the reach of benefit maximisation across communities.

There are definite opportunities to extend the current offer of community centres and hubs to include advice and support about benefits maximisation as they offer a

non-threatening environment that is in the local community. CAB could provide 'pop up' advice units and triage assessments.

The WIN Information Portal is the tool that citizens can use to find solutions which will help them to lead the life that they want using their own resources or those within the community, or where necessary help them to quickly and easily identify and contact with other, more specialised sources of support such as Adult Social Care.

There are several tools available for all organisations to review and utilise such as income maximisation poster and signposting leaflets developed by CAB

5.4.2 Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

(i) The key features needed

It would seem that several key features are likely to be needed in any co-ordinated advice resource in Wolverhampton in the years ahead:

- A need to **protect the remaining services** and use a **larger group of volunteers** to deliver the assessment, signposting and entry levels of advice giving – this will require regular training cascaded to these volunteer very cost-effective learners/workers. Both the LAW project and WCC Benefits Unit are supplying this training in 2014/15
- A **telephone single point of contact** to act as a constant gateway into every advice service – the CAB is offering this, but needs increased capacity
- Better public and inter-agency **awareness of all services**, with strong use of the Signposting Chart and swift referrals to the right agency
- Co-development and **integration of the “big 3” social welfare law subjects** – debt, benefits and housing, recognising that most clients with these complicated cases have multiple advice subject issues, (e.g. a sanction creates both a benefit and debt advice need)
- More wider knowledge of basic **income maximisation techniques** – CAB would suggest a 'local tips' chart to prompt all frontline workers about extra sources of income for families and individuals; a national example from 2011 is attached (appendix A)
- An alert and responsive **“preventing homelessness”** local system that really helps both renters and private owners of property to avoid homelessness in the testing years ahead

(ii) Going forward – suggestions for delivering all key features

The continued existence of a number of valuable advice services in Wolverhampton offers almost all of the building blocks required to establish a truly co-ordinated market of services to cater for “legal events”. Indeed several **areas of strength** exist:

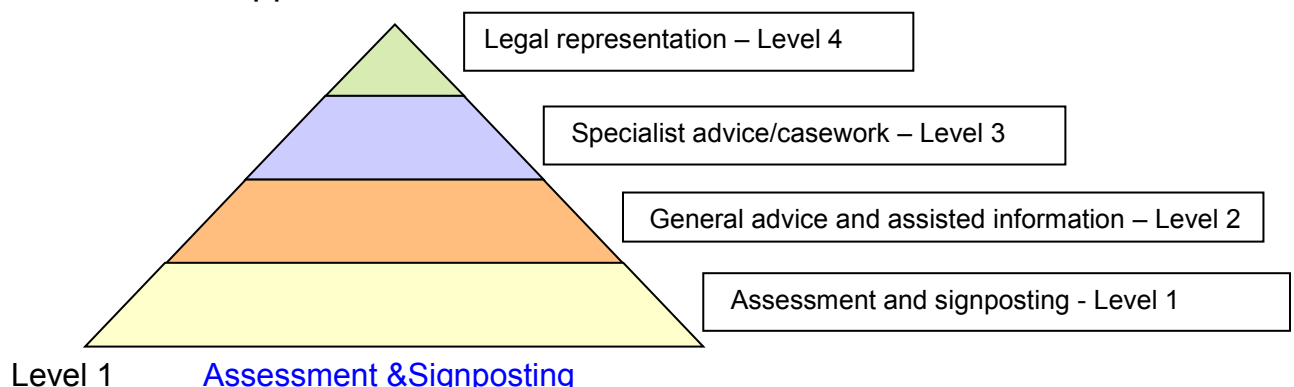
- The VCS providers co-operate well, and have another year of funding (the Local Advice Wolverhampton project) to catalyse better integration
- The three main social welfare areas (benefits, debt, housing) are still adequately staffed at specialist level, the latter two areas supported by stable non-Local Authority funds

- A telephone and good signposting systems are in place, although both need capacity building
- There has been a tradition of good working relations across the Housing advice agencies, resulting in better than forecast outcomes

(iii) However, in order to fully create a more co-ordinated network of local advice services, and to carry more capacity, CAB would **recommend the following changes:**

- Design and delivery of a whole systems income maximisation approach, using a Local Tips Chart, which encouraged the whole public service frontline to promote this approach
- Plan to recruit, train and sustain a larger cohort of volunteer advice givers in all agencies across the city, especially after the LAW project ceases in 2015. This will boost capacity in the entry level advice giving functions (signposting, assessment and general advice) meaning only the higher levels of advising (supervising advice, specialist casework and legal representation) were salaried roles. Such a move structurally reduces future calls for salaries funding, but still equips the city with a resilient workforce. This will require a supply of extra training in the “big 3” subjects and some resourcing, but such inputs could possibly be sourced from existing job preparation funding regimes (Talent Match, ESF) and may thus need minimal “teaching responsibility” from the accredited advice agencies.
- Widen the case take-up of the WCC Benefits Unit, so that meriting clients with a need for higher level Welfare Rights assistance could be referred from any Advice Assessing agency.
- Consider further ways to strengthen the telephone SPOC at CAB and use it to detect where home visits or “greatest need” clients were located; also concentrate CAB’s focus on Employment Law supply.

Advice and Support



Strong use of Signposting and Income Maximisation tools across all agencies, City Direct and public sector staff teams
Telephone “single point of contact” Advice Assessment 01902 572006 based at CAB and face to face Advice Assessment across all

CAB/Local Advice Wolverhampton agencies, meaning “no door is the wrong door” into the whole system

- Level 2 **General advice and assisted information**
Provided by: CAB (2014-16), ‘Local Advice Wolverhampton’ projects (to 2015), Trading Standards
General advice offered as Telephone call-backs or face-to-face across CAB and quality marked Local Advice Wolverhampton agencies
- Level 3 **Specialist advice/casework**
Provided by: Debt (CAB) – Money Advise Service (2014-17)
Housing (CAB) – Legal Aid contracts (2013-16)
Benefits (WRU) & Trading Standards – both WCC
specialist casework/advice in housing & debt (CAB) and benefits (WCC Benefits Unit) open to high merit referrals from all agencies
Other specialist casework by Trading Standards and Private Solicitors
- Level 4 **Legal Representation**
Criminal, Immigration and Family law (private solicitors, includes some legal aid) & Housing Litigation (CAB legal aid);
Prosecutions by Trading Standards could be included
Legal Representation by Private Solicitors (Crime, Family, Immigration) and CAB (Housing)

A view of a fully co-ordinated advice system (proposed)

6.0 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- 6.1 In terms of developing a co-ordinated advice and support strategy for the City the review group felt that there is a need to determine what a co-ordinated advice and support strategy should encompass. Specifically they asked is this purely about welfare reform and benefits or is it wider indebtedness and maximising income to individuals and families? There is a need to make the links to an individual’s life events and complete needs not just the benefit related issue and recognise the implication and effect of getting behind with a payment, losing money at work and then pointing them in the right direction at the earliest opportunity before they get into spiralling debt.
- 6.2 A co-ordinated advice and support strategy has a key role to play towards a strategic shift towards early intervention and prevention and in supporting self-direction. There is a need to carry out a mapping exercise to capture the multiple layers and interrelated mechanisms. A framework should be developed to support the strategy. Currently there are good mechanisms in isolation but the review group feel that benefits should not be looked at in isolation – ‘benefits’ impact on everyone in the City in one way or another, whether personally, for a friend or

relative the availability and quality of information can stop problems from escalating.

- 6.3 To work cohesively may require tackling some initial inertia and producing a cultural shift, so that different partners and departments work together rather than competitively. Multi-agency working was described as imperative, but requiring leadership and coordination. The benefits of a coordinated approach would bring include better use of resources; up to date, accurate and co-ordinated information; better mapping and intelligence across the City.
- 6.4 Information and advice needs to be agile and be accessible from a number of places for the cohort of residents who have debt and benefit enquiries. Specialist services lose knowledge about other related services and may not see the bigger picture. The review group felt that the key players at operational level need to pause and review what mechanisms they are individually developing and the number of interrelated meetings and projects that are in existence to become more joined up, reduce duplication and maximise use of resource Citywide.
- 6.5 The review group felt that bringing together the skills needed to bid for funding pots would be beneficial and that as there is more money available for advice and support for employment and skills it makes sense to join up advice and support services. The Government offered no additional funding for advice and support about benefit changes last year and the City has fewer resources now than when the review started in March 2014. The outcomes from any bid for advice and support will have a positive effect for residents as partners and front line staff join up to provide a co-ordinated advice and support network.
- 6.6 This is a changing world and digital technology such as mobile devices and social media can be powerful tools to communicate with a target cohort of people. The review group found that there are more people actively using social media mobile devices and feel that there is a need to accelerate delivery of the Digital Inclusion Strategy to capture the younger generation of job seekers and people on benefits to dismiss the rumours and myths about entitlements and sanctions to maximise benefits.
- 6.7 Community Hubs are run by community associations and tend to reach out to older and more vulnerable people who need support to use information technology and prefer face-to-face interaction. There is opportunity to work in communities to develop volunteering opportunities, but there is also a need to find a balance and work with job coaches and JCP to address the issue that some volunteers have experienced. That is that they are not fully meeting the JSA claimant commitment because volunteering is not considered to be actively seeking employment.
- 6.8 The Care Act 2014 places a duty on the local authority to ensure that information and advice is accessible to all. There is a need to make people aware of legislative changes that will have a direct effect on their income or benefits and the Council has a duty to ensure that information and advice is accessible to all.
- 6.9 Web pages often require a working knowledge of computers to navigate the pages. The Councils Welfare Reform page and benefits pages do not link to other advice

and support in the City and users have to shift from page to page. The pages are service driven not customer centric. The review group want to encourage people to help themselves to self-serve and the other advice and support mechanisms be in place to support them when they are not able or do not feel confident. Tools are available to help people and the first point of human contact is there to signpost to the right place if they need further advice.

6.10 There are a lot of good information and tools already available, the co-ordinated strategy requires a framework and for key players to get together to plan the next steps.

(a) Key Players identified:

- CAB
- City Direct (WCC)
- Wolverhampton Homes
- NHS – Hospital SW team
- Welfare Rights (WCC)
- Employability and skills (WCC)
- Adult and Social Care Portal (WCC)
- DWP – Job Centre Plus
- LAW
- Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council

(b) Framework:

Funding	Mechanisms	Governance	Tools
Existing resource	Virtual	Key players forum	Website / social media
New resource	Contact	Inclusion Board	Poster / leaflets
	Specialist		

(c) Identified requirements of the framework and key players to:

- work in partnership
- map out what already is in place
- consider how well current arrangements are operating
- consider what initiatives are happening to develop advice and support mechanisms
- make the best possible use of resources and to move towards a customer centric approach.

6.11 Developing an integrated framework for advice and support is a means to future proofing the Council and partners for the introduction of Universal Credit (UC), there is an expectation that phone lines will be busy when major benefit changes are implemented and this service will ensure that callers are able to get through and be signposted to advice, information or support. The review group suggested that the report and recommendations of this review group are passed to the Local Support Services Framework group for information when scoping the way forward for implementation of UC

- 6.12 The review group was concerned that the Department of Works and Pensions do not record the protected characteristic of people who are sanctioned nor of those who 'drop out of the system'. As a direct result there was no equality analysis of the information to indicate the impact of sanctions and where additional advice and support may be needed.

Shaping recommendations

- 6.13 Based on the evidence received the review group want to make recommendations to raise awareness of current information to help residents maximise income and defend entitlement to benefits in the City.
- 6.14 The aim of the review group is to review and improve mechanisms for advice and support in the City to encourage income benefit maximisation and to ensure that people are supported to defend their benefit entitlements. Making the links between an individual's complete needs, recognising the implications of getting behind with a payment for those about to fall into the poverty trap and point them in the right direction at the earliest opportunity before they get into debt.
- 6.15 The Review group want to address their findings by suggesting a network of key partners work together to develop a co-ordinated advice and support framework and strategy for the City and to make the best possible use of resource in the City and nationally to do that. They want people to have the tools be able to help themselves, to signpost people to advice, and to support those who need expert knowledge. The City Direct 'Find my nearest' function will be available towards the end of January 2015 to help people find the nearest help and support.
- 6.16 This review recognises the need for organisations across the City to work in partnership to map out what already is in place, how well current arrangements are operating and what initiatives are happening to develop advice and support mechanisms to make the best possible use of resources and to move towards a customer centric approach.

7.0 Recommendations

- R.1. To request the City's Inclusion Board to receive the report of the review group and to consider the feasibility of developing a partnership forum to oversee development of a co-ordinated advice and support strategy for the City. The aim of the partnership forum would be to focus on unclaimed benefits, in-work and out of work, to maximise incomes and defend benefit entitlement in the City.

The review suggests the following are considered for inclusion in terms of reference:

- a) To develop options for a hub and spoke framework and a coordinated. Advice and support strategy relating to income maximisation and defending benefit entitlement.
- b) To carry out a mapping exercise of existing mechanisms for access to information, advice and support relating to benefits and income maximisation across the City.

- c) To consider operational issues: process, communication, support accessibility and equality monitoring.
- d) To align advice and support for welfare rights and benefits with employability and skills and link into existing signposting, advice and guidance networks.
- e) To identify and prepare joint funding bids for advice and support in the City.
- f) To promote case studies to the wider public to raise awareness and encourage people who may recognise themselves in the scenario to seek advice and find out if they could be claiming benefits or back claiming if there has been a genuine problem or mistake made.

- R.2 To accelerate delivery of the Wolverhampton Digital Inclusion Strategy and Customer Services Strategy to enable access to the use of social media, information portals and mobile devices as tools to promote income maximisation, to signpost job seekers and people on benefits to relevant and accurate information.
- R.3 That each Community Hub should develop information stations which offer advice about benefits, work training and volunteering opportunities, and that a pilot hub be developed to provide advice and support 'drop in' sessions at Ashmore Park Community Hub.
- R4 That City Direct continues to develop and update the website relating to advice and support about benefits and income maximisation. That work with customer focus groups is undertaken to review what the Council website holds and that issues arising from research and development are built into future service planning.
- R5 That an internal canvass of Council employees is undertaken to recruit volunteers with awareness of benefits and working in a social care environment. Welfare rights training is available for volunteers and the Councils staff volunteering policy enables employees two days per annum to work with the CAB or other voluntary sector organisations.
- R6 That partners work to develop evaluation of volunteering work to give recognition of the additional skills, experience and confidence that volunteering can afford individuals and as a pathway into employment which can be taken into account as part of the claimant commitment when seeking employment opportunities.
- R7 That the Welfare Rights Team develop the work with law students in defending benefit entitlement and contact Wolverhampton University and College to discuss students from health and social care training courses getting involved. That students be offered opportunity to receive training and work experience in a volunteer capacity relating to benefit maximisation.

R8 The Inclusion Board receives the response and considers the implications of the Department of Works and Pensions Freedom of Information analysis relating to the impact of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) sanctions in Wolverhampton.

8.0 Contributors to the review

Chair : Cllr Rita Potter (Lab)

Membership:	Labour	Conservative	Other
	Cllr Ian Angus		
	Cllr Ian Claymore		
	Cllr Jasbinder Dehar		
	Cllr Valerie Evans		
	Cllr Jasbir Jaspal		
	Cllr Peter O'Neill		
	Cllr Tersaim Singh		

Witnesses:

Helen Winfield / Mark Perlic, Welfare Rights Team

Kevin Smith, DWP

Linda Bowen, Job Centre Plus

Donna Graham, Citizens Advice Bureau LAW project

Jeremy Vanes, Citizen Advice Centre

Officer Support

Anthony Ivko, Service Director Older People

Dr Keren Jones, Service Director City Economy

Sue Handy, City Direct Manager

Deb Breedon, Scrutiny Officer

EXECUTIVE RESPONSE:

WELFARE REFORM UNCLAIMED BENEFITS

Recommendation 1

To request the City's Inclusion Board to receive the report of the review group and to consider the feasibility of developing a partnership forum to oversee development of a co-ordinated advice and support strategy for the City.

The aim of the partnership forum would be to focus on unclaimed benefits, in-work and out of work, to maximise incomes and defend benefit entitlement in the City.

The review suggests the following are considered for inclusion in terms of reference:

- a) To develop options for a hub and spoke framework and a coordinated. Advice and support strategy relating to income maximisation and defending benefit entitlement.
- b) To carry out a mapping exercise of existing mechanisms for access to information, advice and support relating to benefits and income maximisation across the City.
- c) To consider operational issues: process, communication, support accessibility and equality monitoring.
- d) To align advice and support for welfare rights and benefits with employability and skills and link into existing signposting, advice and guidance networks.
- e) To identify and prepare joint funding bids for advice and support in the City.
- f) To promote case studies to the wider public to raise awareness and encourage people who may recognise themselves in the scenario to seek advice and find out if they could be claiming benefits or back claiming if there has been a genuine problem or mistake made.

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Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
The Inclusion Board is a voluntary partnership Board. The recommendations have been discussed with the Chair of the Board and the Chair of the Scrutiny Review. Concerns have been expressed that the recommendations are overly resource intensive and lack clear outcomes. It is proposed that they are amended as follows:	Funding has been identified from the public health budget to commission works identified in the executive response to recommendation one. Although not yet detailed, budget of £20,000 has been allocated from the Public Health Interventions Reserveto cover the work.	Dr Keren Jones

<p>The council to investigate if a small one-off budget can be identified to the Inclusion Board to commission the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A workshop with partners and ward councillors to complete a mapping exercise of benefits and support agencies.• Produce a series of posters that covers:<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Getting sorted: a framework of the benefits and advice available for particular needs.b) Wolverhampton Working Well: Next steps for pathways to employment of opportunities for social inclusion e.g. pensioners.• Disseminate posters to all those partners that have regular contact with vulnerable groups within the community e.g. doctor surgeries, schools, housing associations.• A training session for key agencies.• The Inclusion Board continue to review information and update on an annual bases.	<p>In preparation for the implementation of Universal Credit a workshop was held on 27 November involving a broad range of stakeholders to start developing Wolverhampton's response, known as Universal Support Services (formally Local Support Services), to support local residents through triage; Digital Inclusion and Personal Budgeting Support. The findings of this review has informed the workshop and highlighted the need for a co-ordinated advice and support strategy.</p> <p>Progress made by Welfare Rights Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Welfare Rights Service Specialist Support Team have been working with voluntary and community organisations to complete this mapping exercise and to coordinate a training programme (underway) with a consultancy resource in relation to benefits advice.• In relation to benefits advice, the Welfare Rights Service is working with LAW and other agencies to make sure that pathways to benefits advice is clear including on-line access.• The Welfare Rights Service has undertaken about 20 training courses on various key benefit issues (such as sanctions, Employment and Support Allowance etc.) for voluntary and community organisations which have, each, on average attracted about 13 workers/volunteers from key agencies.	
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Recommendation 2

To accelerate delivery of the Wolverhampton Digital Inclusion Strategy and Customer Services Strategy to enable access to the use of social media, information portals and mobile devices as tools to promote income maximisation, to signpost job seekers and people on benefits to relevant and accurate information.

Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
<p>This is in line with the Councils Digital Inclusion Strategy. A consultant is now on site working to implement findings of the recent review.</p>		
<p>A 'Find my nearest' tool will be coming to the Council website soon and will via a post-code look up signpost customers to the nearest places of interest and/or of assistance to them whether they are new or established in the area.</p>	<p>To be launched by 31st January 2015.</p>	<p>Sue Handy</p>
<p>The Council website will be made full 'mobile responsive' ensuring that customers accessing the corporate site via their mobile devices of electronic tablets will have access to all information contained within the desktop version with improved ease of use.</p>	<p>February 2015.</p>	<p>Sue Handy</p>
<p>A social media monitoring tool 'SocialSign On' has been procured and will allow Customer Services and Corporate communications to 'Isiten' to social media channels for issues, queries and to effectively tailor/target messages to audiences.</p>	<p>Staff in both the Channel Shift team and Corporate Communications are receiving training in December.</p>	<p>Sue Handy</p>

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[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

<p>Through the focus of ‘customer insight’ in the Customer Services Strategy, it is expected that utilising trends data from Google Analytics will provide more real-time feedback as to how customers access our digital services and we can engage with them to ask how we may best improve our digital offering.</p>	<p>50% of website forms have been ‘tagged’ with google analytics – this work is to be accelerated in the new year.</p>	<p>Sue Handy</p>
<p>An ‘event’s app being developed with ICTS will give the opportunity to promote advice events through the app stores.</p>	<p>Being procured ‘off the shelf’ with the view to being implemented by March 2015.</p>	<p>Andy Hoare/Ian Fegan</p>

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Recommendation 3

That each Community Hub should develop information stations which offer advice about benefits, work training and volunteering opportunities, and that a pilot hub be developed to provide advice and support ‘drop in’ sessions at Ashmore Park Community Hub.

Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
<p>The Welfare Rights Service training sessions will be made available to Community Hub volunteers in order to enable access help with claiming benefits to be available at the Community Hubs. The trained volunteers would also be offered support with helping Wolverhampton residents with benefit queries via the Welfare Rights Specialist Support Team. In addition, volunteering opportunities and access to help with the requirements of the actively seeking work rules whilst volunteering will be developed.</p>		<p>Anthony Ivko</p>

Recommendation 4

That City Direct continues to develop and update the website relating to advice and support about benefits and income maximisation. That work with customer focus groups is undertaken to review what the Council website holds and that issues arising from research and development are built into future service planning.


Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
<p>The review will feed into the future customer services target operating model.</p> <p>The website is managed centrally by Customer Services who hold expert Web Development Officers who ensure that content is written in Plain English, displayed in appropriate formats and that the 'site map' and search function within the site is optimal. The team are consistently focussed on further enhancing web content, bridging any gaps based on analytics recorded on each individual web page. User testing and the user experience are quintessential in driving forward the corporate website.</p>	<p>Last year the website achieved a 3* SOCITM rating. We are currently awaiting results of our annual assessment and hope to be celebrating a 4* rating in March 2015.</p>	<p>Sue Handy</p>
<p>A 'feedback' function is being planned to obtain 'live' customer feedback on web content – pages around advice/support for benefits could be targeted as part of this work.</p>	<p>To be confirmed.</p>	<p>Sue Handy</p>

Recommendation 5		
That an internal canvass of Council employees is undertaken to recruit volunteers with awareness of benefits and working in a social care environment.		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
Accept	Welfare rights training is available for volunteers and the Councils staff volunteering policy enables employees two days per annum to work with the CAB or other voluntary sector organisations.	Anthony Ivko / Martha Cummings

Recommendation 6		
That partners work to develop evaluation of volunteering work to give recognition of the additional skills, experience and confidence that volunteering can afford individuals and as a pathway into employment which can be taken into account as part of the claimant commitment when seeking employment opportunities.		
Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
Accept	<p>Some of this is already happening through the LAW project hosted by CAB. Of the groups participating in the project some of the 'funded Partners' are currently funded by the Council and will make for some obvious and natural partners.</p> <p>The Council is in the process of helping Community Associations develop a volunteer scheme which will address the needs of volunteers in relation to their own pathways to employment and also help equip them, through training, to deliver help and support to residents in the community.</p>	<p>Dr Keren Jones / Martha Cummings</p> <p>Anthony Ivko/Helen Winfield</p>

Recommendation 7

That the Welfare Rights Team develop the work with law students in defending benefit entitlement and contact Wolverhampton University and College to discuss students from health and social care training courses getting involved. That students be offered opportunity to receive training and work experience in a volunteer capacity relating to benefit maximisation.

Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
<p>Attached is a Law Student volunteer's testimony:</p>  <p>LAW STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership developed with the University of Wolverhampton Law Faculty • students briefed by Principal Welfare Rights Officer • More in-depth training on Employment and Support Allowance provided to students expressing a continued interest • Students interviewed, references sought and successful students appointed as volunteers • Judiciary welcomed project and District Judge attended a training session to brief law students • Students completed all training and checks and allocated to Welfare Rights Officer (WRO) Mentors • On-going training and support provided to students by WRO Mentors • Over the last three months 4 law student volunteers have represented at 19 appeals of which 17 have been allowed; 2 appeals have been disallowed (one of which is the subject of a further appeal to the Upper Tribunal) – a success rate of 90% • Discussions have started regarding the next intake of law students from Years 2 and 3 and extending the scope of representation from ESA to ESA, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Job-seekers Allowance/ESA Sanctions appeals. 	<p>Anthony Ivko/Helen Winfield</p>

Recommendation 8

The Inclusion Board receives the response and considers the implications of the Department of Works and Pensions Freedom of Information analysis relating to the impact of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) sanctions in Wolverhampton.

Comment	Timescale/progress so far	Officer Responsible
The request will be put forward to the Inclusion Board for consideration.	The request and proposed approach to be discussed at next Inclusion Board meeting on 12 th December. The decision of the Board will be feedback to the Chair of the Scrutiny Review. Two FOIs have been sent to the DWP and we are awaiting the response. We have asked for a breakdown of the number of people on ESA sanctioned by gender, age and ethnicity and the number of JSA claimants sanctioned by gender, age and ethnicity. We have also asked how many hardship claims have been made as a result of sanctions and how many have succeeded.	Dr Keren Jones



Cabinet Meeting

4 February 2015

Report title	Anti-Social Behaviour Service – Authorisations to support TUPE transfer	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Cllr Elias Mattu Leisure and Communities	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Linda Sanders, People Directorate	
Originating service	Community Safety	
Accountable employee(s)	Name	Karen Samuels
	Tel	01902 551341
	Email	Karen.samuels@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board	18 September 2014
	Vibrant, Safe and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel	2 October 2014
	Cabinet	12 November 2014

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Authorise the Council entering into a Business Transfer Agreement dealing with the transfer of employees from the Council to Wolverhampton Homes. The details of the Business Transfer Agreement are set out in paragraph 4.2 of this Report
2. Authorise the Council entering into a Service Contract setting out that Wolverhampton Homes will provide services to the Council in respect of Anti-social behaviour. The details of the Service Contract are set out in paragraph 4.3 of this Report.
3. Authorise the Council entering into any ancillary agreements necessary for transfer of employees to Wolverhampton Homes as set out in paragraphs 4.4 of this Report

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1. To provide the required authorisations to proceed with Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) transfer of staff and associated services currently delivered by Wolverhampton City Council to Wolverhampton Homes. In particular, to
- i) Enter into a business transfer agreement dealing with the transfer of Council employees from the Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) team.
 - ii) Enter into a service contract specifying the future delivery of services provided by Wolverhampton Homes to the City Council in respect of ASB.
 - iii) Enter into any required ancillary agreements necessary to complete the transfer of employees and services to Wolverhampton Homes.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Following a Scrutiny review of the city's ASB services during 2011 and 2012, Cabinet approval was secured in November 2012 for a pilot co-location of the Council and Wolverhampton Homes ASB teams to trial the feasibility of a single cross-tenure service to Wolverhampton residents. In May 2013, the new Wolverhampton ASB Team was launched with WH undertaking overall management responsibility of the service, delivered through a service level agreement (SLA) with WCC. Under this arrangement, Council employees previously assigned to the ASB Unit are seconded to WH.
- 2.2 A comprehensive review of the co-located ASB service was undertaken following a full year of delivery. The outcomes of the review were overwhelmingly positive, with service improvement, cost effectiveness and customer satisfaction clearly evidenced. The findings from the review were considered at Strategic Executive Board and at a meeting of the Vibrant, Safe and Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel (VSSC) on 2 October 2014 as a pre-decision item. At the meeting, Scrutiny Panel Members endorsed recommendations to sustain the current operating model and for the TUPE transfer of WCC staff within the ASB team to Wolverhampton Homes.
- 2.3 Cabinet agreed these recommendations at its meeting on 12 November 2015 which:
- i) Approved the preferred option which recommended:
 - Overall management of the city's anti-social behaviour service by Wolverhampton Homes under a contractual arrangement with Wolverhampton City Council;
 - Monitoring of the contract through a robust performance management framework;
 - Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) of Wolverhampton City Council staff to Wolverhampton Homes and a revised staffing model.
 - ii) Approved the proposal to retain the existing arrangements (within Regulatory Services) for the management of domestic noise complaints.
 - iii) Approved the proposal to procure a single supplier for legal services for anti-social behaviour legal work.

iv) Approved the application of a consistent approach to managing anti-social behaviour cases in Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) properties by the introduction of a city-wide anti-social behaviour policy.

2.4 The approvals detailed above were informed by the need to realise savings from the existing WCC ASB service whilst aiming to sustain the service improvement realised from the co-location; accepting the increasing demands of the service with the introduction of new ASB legislation (ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014) and recognising the need to implement a long term sustainable model of delivery for the city with addressed the human resources implications of managing staff within a single service employed by different employers with varying terms and conditions.

3.0 The Future Model of ASB Delivery

3.1 The option agreed at Cabinet on 12 November 2014 transfers overall management responsibility of the city's ASB service to Wolverhampton Homes under a contractual arrangement with the Council. The Council maintains oversight and influence over the service through contractual arrangements and service monitoring through a robust performance management framework.

3.2 The proposed structure retains the same number of posts, with existing Council employees TUPE transferring to Wolverhampton Homes. When fully implemented, the overall cost of the proposed new structure will realise savings of £78,000, but with a net increased cost to Wolverhampton Homes of around £11,000. This reflects that the funding provided by the Council will reduce as part of its approved financial reductions.

4.0 Implementation of Proposals

4.1 In order to formally progress implementation of the proposals detailed in section 3 above, further authorisations are sought from Cabinet to enter into the necessary contractual arrangements between the City Council and Wolverhampton Homes.

4.2 A Business Transfer Agreement will be prepared which will transfer the employees and provide the Council with the necessary indemnities. This includes:

- Transfer of undertaking and assets to Wolverhampton Homes subject to Cabinet endorsement of these proposals.
- Clarification of future liabilities and conduct of claims between the City council and Wolverhampton Homes.
- Transfer of the seven council employees currently employed to deliver services within the ASB team to include provision for remuneration, benefits and entitlements; equipment not exceeding a value of £5,000.
- Compliance with pre-transfer activities and provision of information.
- Clarification of indemnities and arrangements for resolution of disputes.

4.3 A service contract will be developed which details the level of service to be delivered by Wolverhampton Homes to the Council. The contract will include requirements for Wolverhampton Homes to deliver against a robust performance management framework which will be regularly monitored; provision will be made for termination of contract where issues of poor performance are not adequately addressed. The service contract shall not exceed a term of 15 years and will be subject to a 5 year cycle of review in addition to the regular monitoring arrangements. The service contract to include details regarding:

- Standards and components of the service to be delivered.
- Service obligations to include provision of ASB functions, advice and support, information exchange and compliance with ASB enforcement legislation.
- Engagement with service users, communities and stakeholders.
- Performance outcomes, monitoring and reporting
- Provision of legal services
- Arrangements for managing service complaints
- Provision for confidential exchange and requests for information
- Arrangements for review of the service following the 5 year period and provision for modification of the contract.

4.4 The need for further ancillary agreements has not yet been identified, however, authorisation is sought for these to be prepared and entered into to complete the transfer of employees and to support the new contractual arrangements between the Council and Wolverhampton Homes if required.

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 The 2015/16 estimated cost to the Council for the staff transferring under the TUPE arrangements is £236,000. This takes account of savings of £35,000 approved by Cabinet in October and achieved through a 50% contribution from Wolverhampton Homes to two posts fully funded by the Council in 2014/15. Wolverhampton Homes has agreed to meet the full costs of these posts in 2017/18 which will help deliver further savings identified in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. In addition to staffing costs the ASB service has a non-staffing budget of £7,500 and pays for legal fees of £10,000 which will also transfer over and form part of the agreed fee following the transfer. The costs will be adjusted annually to reflect pay awards and staff increments.
[MF/22012015/R]

6.0 Legal implications

- 6.1 Sections 5 and 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 require the Council and other responsible authorities to formulate and implement strategies to reduce crime and disorder in the area.
- 6.2 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (amended) requires the Council along with the other Responsible Authorities to exercise their functions with due regard to do all that they reasonably can by way of preventing crime and disorder, ASB, substance misuse and re-offending in the locality.
- 6.3 The ASB, Policing and Crime Act came into force from 20 October 2014 with the final delayed element due to be introduced early in 2015. A report on the new legislation was presented to Cabinet on 12 November 2014.
- 6.4 The Business Transfer Agreement will ensure that the employees are transferred to Wolverhampton Homes and that the Council is provided with the necessary protection.
- 6.5 The Service Agreement will ensure that the Services referred to in 4.3 are provided by Wolverhampton Homes to the Council on the terms referred to.
- 6.6 Both the Service Agreement and Business Transfer Agreement are in accordance with the Council's constitution. [RB/22012015/X]

7.0 Equalities implications

- 7.1 A full equality analysis has been completed which outlines the impact of proposed cuts to the Council ASB service from 2017/18. Whilst a higher than average number of women and disabled clients access the service, the retention of existing staffing levels under the agreed model mitigates any negative impact through potential loss of service.
- 7.2 The performance framework will continue to capture data regarding accessibility of the service to enable identification of mitigating actions. If the equalities' data reveals a lack of take-up from certain groups with protected characteristics, then targeted promotion of the service will be carried out amongst those groups of people.

8.0 Environmental implications

- 8.1 There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

9.0 HR implications

- 9.1 Wolverhampton ASB Team is a co-located service comprising of 7 Council and 13 Wolverhampton Homes staff. Council employees are seconded to Wolverhampton Homes but remain on Council terms and conditions which include a significantly higher basic salary level following Single Status. Since the implementation of the new ASB team, significant disparities have been highlighted between Council and Wolverhampton Homes terms and conditions and policies. When the TUPE transfer goes ahead,

Wolverhampton Homes would be in a position to renegotiate, after 12 months, terms and conditions from the collective agreement, provided that overall the employee's contract is no less favourable as a result. In addition, changes to transferred employees' terms and conditions as a result of the transfer itself are invalid; however, a change could be valid if the principal reason for it is, for example, an economic, technical or organisational reason, which brings about changes to the numbers or functions of the workforce.

10.0 Corporate landlord implications

10.1 The ASB Team will continue to be housed within WH premises. There are no corporate landlord implications relating to the proposals contained within this report.

11.0 Schedule of background papers

11.1 Report to Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel on 26 January 2012, ASB Service Review (Agenda Item 7).

11.2 Report to Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel on 13 September 2012, ASB Service Review (Agenda Item 5)

11.3 Report to Cabinet on 14 November 2012, ASB Service Review (Agenda Item 5D).

11.4 Report to VSSC Scrutiny Panel on 13 March 2014, Progress report on the Wolverhampton Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) Team and scoping paper for one year service review (Agenda Item 9).

11.5 Report to VSSC Scrutiny Panel on 2 October 2014, Report on ASB Service Review and options' appraisal for future service delivery (Agenda Item 5).

11.6 Report to Cabinet on 12 November 2014, ASB Service Review and options' appraisal for future service delivery (Agenda Item 5).



Cabinet Meeting

4 February 2015

Report title	Appointments to Outside Bodies	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Roger Lawrence Leader of the Council	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Kevin O'Keefe, Governance	
Originating service	Democratic Support	
Accountable employee(s)	Dereck Francis	Democratic Support Officer
	Tel	01902 555835
	Email	dereck.francis@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	None	

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Appoint a representative to serve on the Bilston Relief in Need Charity for a period of four years expiring in 2019.
2. Appoint Alderman Neville Patten to replace Alderman Carpenter as one of the Council's representatives on the Wolverhampton Buildings Preservations Trust until the Annual meeting of the Council in 2015.
3. Approved the appointment of Dr Keren Jones, Service Director, City Economy as a Director to the Board of the i54 Management Company in the place of Nick Edwards, Service Director, City Assets and indemnify the employee in her role on the Company.

4. Confirm the appointment of Dr James McElligott, Director of Education onto the Board of the Wolverhampton Youth Zone to the vacancy occasioned by the retirement of former Chief Executive, Simon Warren and indemnify the employee in his role on the Company.
5. Appoint Anthony Ivko, Service Director, Older People as a Governor on the Shadow Board of the Royal Wolverhampton Hospital NHS Trust.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To appoint representatives to serve on the outside bodies.

2.0 Background

Bilston Relief in Need Charity.

- 2.1 The Charity, which embraces a number of former Bilston Parish/Township Charities, was established by a scheme approved by the Charity Commission in 1983 with the objective of relieving, either generally or individually, persons resident in the Ecclesiastical Parish of Bilston who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress. The scheme provides for the appointment, amongst others, of two nominative trustees by the Council.
- 2.2 The term of office of one of the Council's current nominees, Cllr Phil Page, expired in December 2012, and the Cabinet is asked to make a nomination for a further four year term. The person appointed may be, but need not be, a member of the Council. The scheme provides that the Trustees shall hold at least two ordinary meetings in a year.
- 2.3 The Council's other nominee to this Charity is Councillor T H Turner, whose term of office ends in February 2016.
- 2.4 Cabinet is asked to make an appointment for a four year term of office ending in 2019.

Wolverhampton Building Preservation Trust

- 2.5 In June 2014 the Council appointed two representatives to the Wolverhampton Building Preservation Trust, Cllr Judith Rowley and Alderman Carpenter. By convention one of the representatives has been nominated by the Controlling Group and one from the Opposition Group.
- 2.6 The Opposition Group representative, Alderman Carpenter wishes to retire. The Conservative Group have approached Alderman Neville Patten to see if he would be happy to be appointed as a replacement for Alderman Carpenter if that was the wish of the Council. He is and the Conservative Group have asked that the replacement nomination be submitted for approval.
- 2.7 Cabinet is therefore asked to appoint Alderman Neville Patten as a replacement for Alderman Carpenter on the Wolverhampton Building Preservation Trust until the .Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2015 when nominations to the Trust will be considered along with other annual outside body appointments for the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

Employee appointments to companies, boards and trusts

- 2.8 Following the implementation of the Council's new senior management restructure a number of changes are proposed to employee appointments on companies and boards to reflect the changes at senior director level on the Council:

Company/ Board	Current appointee	Replacement appointment
i54 Management Company	Nick Edwards, Service Director, City Assets	Dr Keren Jones, Service Director, City Economy
Wolverhampton Youth Zone	Vacancy (following retirement of Simon Warren)	Dr James McElligott, Director of Education
Royal Wolverhampton Hospital NHS Trust	Vacancy (following the retirement of Corinne Miller)	Anthony Ivko, Service Director, Older People

3.0 Financial implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications to the Council as a result of putting forward the nominations for the Bilston Relief in need Charity and the Wolverhampton Buildings Preservations Trust.
- 3.2 In terms of the i54 Management Company, the annual insurance cost of indemnifying the Service Director, City Economy will be absorbed by the Management Company and recovered as an administration. As a result of this, a proportion of the insurance cost will be apportioned to void plots and met equally by Staffordshire and Wolverhampton until all plots are occupied. The impact on Wolverhampton City Council's budget will, however, be minimal (typically less than £500 per annum) and will be met within existing City Economy resources.
[MF/21012015/S]

4.0 Legal implications

- 4.1 It is a requirement of the i54 Management Company's articles that the Council appoints a Director.
- 4.2 By virtue of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order 2004 the Council are permitted to provide an indemnity where a Councillor or an employee acts as a director of a company at the request of the Council and therefore is acting in his capacity as a director
[RB/21012015/W]

5.0 Equalities implications

- 5.1 The report has implications for the Council's equal opportunities policy in that it concerns a charity that seeks to relieve the conditions of disadvantaged people in the community.

6.0 Environmental implications

6.1 There are no environmental implications to the Council as a result of putting the nominations forward.

7.0 Human resources implications

7.1 There are no human resources to the Council arising from the recommendation of the report.

8.0 Corporate landlord implications

8.1 There are no corporate landlord implications to the Council as a result of putting the nominations forward.

9.0 Schedule of background papers

9.1 Copy of charity deeds.

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