

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (29 September 2016)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2016 be approved, and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**
Housing Services Review

Cllr Angus queried the late withdrawal of the Housing Services Review report that was on the agenda item for the panel meeting on 29.9.16.

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, briefed the panel of the outcome of the discussion with Chris Hale. The panel was advised that following discussions with colleagues at the time across the Council it was considered that more work was needed before a report detailing the policy change could be submitted to the panel. A key factor in the decision was a change in the original remit of the housing policy review to provide a more inclusive consideration of operational issues that could be delivered through arrangements with Wolverhampton Homes. The review remit was extended to include consideration of the wider opportunities for other areas of the Council, for example, in the People Directorate, and the delivery of assisted technology solutions.

It was agreed that in these circumstances that the report should be deferred to a future panel meeting to ensure all the relevant information about the implications from the review is included. Unfortunately, it was not possible to present this report at the last meeting due to need for this work to be done. The service is committed to bringing the report to the panel for information at the panel meeting on 23.3.17, with a recommendation that the panel receive a further report on progress at a future panel meeting.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to add the report to the agenda for the panel meeting on 23 March 2017.

5 **Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 - 2019/20**

Martin Fox, Finance Business Partner, provided a summary of the budget report and highlighted the key points about the savings proposals detailed in the attached appendixes.

Cllr Steve Evans, Cabinet Member City Environment, introduced the report to the panel. The Cabinet Member City Environment gave apologies for Cllr Bilson Cabinet Member Housing and City Assets and explained that he would cover items within this portfolio, but may need to ask colleagues to respond to any specific questions about this service area.

The panel were invited to comment on the draft budget proposals as part of the formal budget consultation process.

Cllr Ian Angus made a general comment about that the lack of detail in the report about the implications or options being considered to achieve the target figure for budget reduction or income generation proposals. As a result it was difficult to make detailed comments on the proposals. The Cabinet Member explained that more information on specific proposals can be provided if needed. A summary of the panel

discussion and comments about the budget reduction and income generation proposals is given below.

Facilities Management

Tim Pritchard, Head of Corporate Landlord, introduced the savings proposal and explained that the aim was to get better value for money through improved efficiency, while trying to mitigate against the effects of the reduction in available resources. The Head of Corporate Landlord commented on the customer led review of services which involve conversations with business owners about their experiences of the services and also explain the impact of proposed changes. The aim is to deliver a better customer experience. The Head of Corporate Landlord was confident that the budget reduction target was realistic and offered to bring forward detailed proposals to a future meeting of the panel.

Commercial Estate Income

The Cabinet Member City Environment commented on the reduction in letting times for void properties - and congratulated staff at Wolverhampton Homes for the work done to reduce the time from 60-70 days in the past, to an average of 15 days now. The improvement has increased the level of income. The same approach will be applied to the letting of commercial buildings with the aim of getting empty properties re-let more quickly. In addition, improvements have been made to the collection of bad debts in order to minimise the loss of income to the Council, for example, agreeing repayment plans with residents and business owners to pay the bad debt.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment commented on the success of Wolverhampton being among the top 20 Councils considered as being attractive to invest in by private sector developers and the interest in the area generated by regeneration work across the city. The Head of Corporate Landlord commented on the work being done to better align systems and processes using local intelligence and more effective management of the estate - including where necessary the disposal of properties.

Corporate Landlord Review Phase 2

The Cabinet Member City Environment explained the reasons for deleting the vacant posts in the service. The Head of Corporate Landlord was confident that the budget reduction figure was achievable.

Review of Homelessness and Tenancy Sustainment Services

The Cabinet Member City Environment commented on the work done to improve the help available to homeless applicants and considered that Wolverhampton is performing better in this area compared to neighbouring authorities. The Cabinet Member City Environment commented on the opportunities to work with Wolverhampton Homes to look at how existing support services can be delivered in a different way.

Reduce Leisure subsidy

The Cabinet Member City Environment commented on the transformation of the leisure offer available in Wolverhampton and the investment in new facilities and equipment to offer a better customer experience.

The Cabinet Member City Environment commented on the increase in membership to 6,200 and the introduction of WV Active app, as examples of the success of the service and rebranding work. The proposals will build on this success and the Cabinet Member City Environment that with other planned changes so that in the future the service will no longer need a subsidy. A panel member expressed concern about the level of budget reduction proposed and suggested that a lower figure should be set, for example £350,000 as a more realistic figure. The panel sought an assurance that the target was achievable.

Lisa Taylor, Head of Service The Hub, commented that WV Active the target is realistic as current prices and the quality of the offer is very competitive. The Head of Service gave examples of changes to timetabling of session, the introduction of taster sessions, and the popularity of events held at Aldersley Leisure Village as evidence.

The Head of Service accepted that the reduction in the level of subsidy would be a challenge to meet for the service but was confident with a growing membership and other planned changes that the savings target will be met, for example the promotion of offers aimed at people under 16. The Head of Service explained that the service has a stretch target to increase membership to 8000. The panel agreed to receive a report detailing progress against this target at a future meeting.

Review of Waste and Recycling

The panel commented it was important that as the proposal relates to an important frontline service that the implications of the changes are communicated effectively to the public.

The panel agreed to consider the budget savings proposals in more detail following the presentation about the waste management strategy discussion item.

Environmental Service Efficiencies

The Cabinet Member City Environment reassured the panel that the proposals would not involve a reduction in the frequency of grounds maintenance or the street cleansing service.

The Cabinet Member City Environment explained the proposals will look how the grass services provided the Council and Wolverhampton Homes could be better used to reduce costs, particularly where it involves the maintenance of shared grass areas. The aim of the changes was for both services to work better together.

The panel expressed concern about implications of budget reductions on highway maintenance and the impact on response times of 3-4 weeks in dealing with requests from the public to deal with pest complaints. The Cabinet Member City Environment reassured the panel that the Council was continuing to investing in proper

resurfacing of roads rather repairing pot-holes to provide more cost effective solution. The Cabinet Member City Environment explained that the provision of pest control is a service that will continue to be offered, however there are discussions about the level of public contribution.

Review of Transport/Fleet

No panel comments

Highways Management

No panel comments

Active Management of Car Park Usage

The Cabinet Member City Environment commented that the Council has a number of car parks that it manages across the city. The majority of city centre parks are however managed by private companies. The proposals will consider car parks at the edge of the city and how we can make better use of them and options that will generate income. For example, moving from a flat rate car park fee to a different charging structure to reflect their use by drivers wanting to park for the day.

The panel agreed to receive a report detailing the impact of the proposals after implementation at a future meeting.

Savings in Regulatory Services through Agile Working

The Cabinet Member City Environment commented that the introduction of new technology and changes in working practices gives opportunities to deliver regulatory services in a different way. The Cabinet Member City Environment advised the panel the contract for Kingdom Services had been extended. The panel expressed concerns about the working practices of Kingdom Security in some areas of the city. The panel were advised that representatives of Kingdom Security have been invited to attend to give evidence to future meeting.

Develop Commercial Opportunity for the use of Existing Facilities at Northcote Farm

The Chair commented that there is a need to consult with local residents and users of the facility about the proposals being considered and also how this will be communicated. The Cabinet Member City Environment explained that the Council does not run the facility but there was a view of the need to look at what could be done to increase visitor numbers and to build on its popularity.

The panel were advised that responsibility for Northcote Farm was in remit of Cllr John Reynolds Cabinet Member for City Economy, who could provide more detailed information, if required. The Cabinet Member City Environment explained that the existing facilities will need to be improved as they are currently limited.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the draft budget proposals to be included in the feedback report presented to Scrutiny Board.

2. Reduce Leisure subsidy - The panel agreed to receive a report detailing progress against the membership target for Aldersley Leisure Centre at a future meeting.
3. Active Management of Car Park Usage The panel agreed to receive a report impact of the proposals, if implemented as stated, at a future meeting of the panel.
4. Tim Pritchard, Head of Corporate Landlord, to bring forward detailed proposals about the proposals for generating efficiency savings and increasing income as a result of changes to facilities management activities to a future meeting of the panel.

6 **Waste Management Strategy Consultation**

Ross Cook, Service Director – City Environment, Place, briefed the panel on the proposed changes to current waste and recycling strategy. The Service Director commented that the service has consulted with a number of groups about the plans and had received a lot of interest and feedback. In total, 200 responses had been received from the public to the online survey. The Service Director outlined the proposals to achieve the previously agreed savings target detailed in MTFS, and also additional savings target of £1.2 million, which is subject to consultation.

The panel discussed the suitability of increasing the size of non-recyclable waste container from 140 litres and the provision of either same size or larger unit of 240 litre capacity.

Cllr Evans commented that the provision of a garden waste collection is not a statutory service. Cllr Evans, Cabinet Member for City Environment, explained that the collection service is available to 108,000 properties in Wolverhampton, but is not used by 28,000 homes – approximately 65% of homes. The Cabinet Member for City Environment summarised the cost and efficiency services that the alternative service would provide. The panel queried the number of green waste collection bins that would be provided to each household. The Cabinet Member for City Environment explained that additional bins could be provided but the criteria would need to be agreed to avoid possible misuse.

The Service Director explained the reasons for the removal of the food waste collection service, which was proved to be unpopular with and expensive to provide. The Service Director commented that at the start of programme, 12,000 tonnes was being collected, but this had fallen to 3,000 tonnes and was therefore no longer financially sustainable.

The panel discussed the possible location recycling centre/super site and the possible criteria. The Service Director commented that a feasibility study would be done to identify a suitable location. The panel queried if the introduction of a charge for garden would lead to more complaints about fly tipping. The Cabinet Member for City Environment commented that evidence that the introduction of a charge would not affect the behaviour of people who currently fly tip, as they would be unlikely to use the current collection service.

The panel discussed concerns about delays in the collection hazardous by specialist team provided by the contractor Amey and there was agreement that changes are needed to better meet the expectations of the public.

Resolved:

1. The panel welcomed the report and noted the progress towards the development of a new waste recycling strategy for Wolverhampton.
2. The panel comments on the proposed service changes to be included as part of the Council's budget consultation exercise.

The meeting closed at 20:15