

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Cabinet 17 November 2021
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Report title	Relighting Our Council	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Ian Brookfield Leader of the Council	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy	
Originating service	Strategy	
Accountable employee	Charlotte Johns	Director of Strategy
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Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board	14 October 2021
	Our Council Scrutiny Panel	2 November 2021

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Relighting Our Council vision and strategy, which sets out the high-level approach to develop a new flexible and agile operating model in order to best meet the needs of our city.
2. Approve the proposal to engage with the organisation and consult with the Trade Unions on the development of a fair, inclusive, and equitable 'Our employee/people offer'.
3. Approve the drawdown of £200,000 funding which has been previously set aside in the Transformation Reserve for the Our Assets Programme and the utilisation of other existing funding allocations to facilitate this strategy, as outlined in the financial implications.

Recommendations for noting:

The Cabinet is asked to note that:

1. In line with this high level Relighting Our Council strategy, further work will be done to develop a new workspace strategy, new employee offer and Our People Strategy, new

staff sustainable travel policy and new digital strategy to ensure the delivery of better outcomes for local people.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the high-level approach to 'Relighting Our Council', which has been developed in consultation and engagement with staff and key stakeholders.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 On 17 March 2021, Cabinet approved the refreshed Relighting Our City recovery commitment, to guide the Council's approach as we emerge and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes key priorities, activity and actions developed from extensive consultation with a wide range of key stakeholders including local people, businesses, partners, and employees.
- 2.2 As part of this engagement, there was learning and reflection on how the Council operated throughout the pandemic, and how we could take this forward to ensure how we operate best supports the delivery of the outcomes we are seeking to deliver for our city.
- 2.3 First and foremost we are a public services organisation, and everything we do will be based on delivering the very best possible services for our city. In order to deliver our Relighting Our City and Council plan ambitions, there is a need to consider how we have a workforce enabled to deliver for the future, maximising the use of our assets, digital and other technologies. The Relighting Our Council strategy document at appendix 1 sets out our high-level approach to achieve this.
- 2.4 This item was considered as pre-decision scrutiny on 2 November by the Our Council Scrutiny Panel and will therefore not be available to call in once a decision is made by Cabinet.

3.0 Relighting Our Council

- 3.1 There are a number of key benefits which we are seeking to achieve through developing a new way of working at the Council. Specifically, we want to improve productivity, efficiency and effectiveness to ensure value for money in how we deliver services for local people. Working in a new way, utilising digital and other technologies will also support the delivery of our climate change commitment, reducing carbon emissions related to work related travel and the resulting rationalised and more efficient buildings. We also want to improve staff health and wellbeing, supporting work-life balance so we can meet the objectives in the Our People Strategy to attract and retain the right employees with the right skills and experience to deliver for our city.
- 3.2 Our approach has been developed through regular, continued engagement with key stakeholders, including:

- Relighting our city engagement – over 2500 people
- Two life in lock down surveys – 1270 (May 2020) and 763 (November 2020) respondents
- Equalities forums – ongoing conversation with our four staff equality forums
- Operational Managers Network workshops – over 120 participants
- Health and wellbeing workshops – over 200 participants and 50 questionnaires
- Our Council Scrutiny Panel – November 2020 and October 2021
- Management survey – April – May 2021
- Leadership survey – September 2021
- Feedback from our city partners
- Ongoing trade union engagement

3.3 This engagement led to the development of guiding principles which will continue to shape our approach, which are:

- As a public services organisation, everything we do is - and will continue to be - focused on delivering Relighting Our City, improving outcomes, and providing high quality services for the City of Wolverhampton.
- As we have throughout the pandemic, we will continue to be led by public health guidance with the health, safety and wellbeing of our city and workforce the priority.
- Evolution not revolution – this is about an ongoing approach of responding and adapting how we operate as a council, to take forward the things we have learnt in the pandemic and will continue to learn and respond.
- Our approach is focussed on maintaining flexibility and agility, trust and accountability, positivity and productivity to best serve our city and residents.

3.4 The Council delivers a wide range of complex services and to support the development of a new way of working, we have assessed all job roles in our organisation to group them into three work styles – fixed, field and flexible. The scope for working in different ways will vary dependent upon the role, individual, team and service – however the principles of our approach mean that managers will be empowered to determine how best to meet business need and outcomes for local people.

3.5 This report sets out the high-level approach and principles for Relighting Our Council, and there are a number of key areas of work which we will continue to develop to deliver an operating model which best ensures the delivery of outcomes. This includes but is not limited to;

- Our people and workforce, including HR policies, employee terms and conditions, and culture change;
- How we use our assets and workspaces to ensure their use is optimised as well as facilitating the rationalisation of buildings and therefore improved value for money;
- The utilisation of digital and other technologies;
- Work to meet our climate change commitment to be net carbon neutral as a Council by 2028;
- Ensuring our approach is fair and inclusive.

3.6 Whilst this report sets out the high level approach to Relighting Our Council, a key part of how we will work is that if things do not work, or changes need to be made, we will do so, continually engaging with our employees and key stakeholders. Ongoing review of performance will be undertaken through the council's performance management framework including operational and city outcome data.

3.7 Initial performance data includes:

- 16% reduction in sickness absence (excluding Covid) during 2020/21 compared to 2019/20, a reduction of 4645.93 days of absence.
- The total number of days worked from home by employees whilst self-isolating in 2020-2021 was 3028.93. This would have amounted to an additional 10% increase in sickness absence if those employees had been unable to work from home.
- Reduced call abandonment rate in customer services (7.8% in September 2021 compared to 9.8% in September 2019), with work ongoing to reduce this further and activity to provide customer service support in the community such as blue badge surgeries.
- 23% increase in adult carer conversations in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20.
- Continued improvement in children's social care visits and reduction in social care cohorts.
- Google mobility metric data shows a general upward trend in retail and recreation activity and an increase in visits to places such as supermarkets and pharmacies to pre-pandemic levels.
- Approximately 26 tonnes of carbon per week saved from staff travel in the first lock down of 2020, demonstrating an opportunity to make longer term savings which will contribute to our climate change reduction.

3.8 **Our Assets**

3.9 Relighting Our Council will impact on how we use our asset estate, and the assets workstream will ensure:

- a rationalised property estate which delivers:
 - better outcomes for Wolverhampton residents, partners and communities, with the right Council land and property assets in the right place, and that they are being used in the right ways to benefit people in the City
 - improved value for money and reduced future liabilities
 - a reduction in carbon emissions and a positive contribution towards our climate change commitment

- the optimal use and availability of all Council assets to facilitate an accessible, quality working environment for colleagues to undertake their role as efficiently and effectively as possible, across the whole City to best suit their needs and working pattern. This will facilitate improved productivity, as well as enabling colleagues to be closer to communities and our customers.
- 3.10 Although all assets are within scope for review, the Civic Centre will continue to be our organisational headquarters. The review of the Civic Centre, along with all other retained assets, will focus on ensuring that the building and space provides a fit for purpose working environment, to support the new ways of working as well as a City Centre venue for customers and communities.
- 3.11 Work is also underway to maximise the use of, and opportunities available, from the space available within the Civic Centre. As Cabinet will be aware, we have already progressed, at pace, some of those opportunities by making space available to key partners within the Civic Centre, those being the Black Country Clinical Commissioning Group and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Not only does this present an opportunity to build on, and develop, working relationships with key partners, it increases footfall in the City and improves value for money through a combination of income and cost sharing.
- 3.12 Such opportunities will continue to be explored, although it is important to note that any further release of space to partners will only be agreed when we are confident that this will not impact on our vision for a rationalised estate and an accessible working environment for colleagues, that meets the need of our city, and is in line with the developing workspace strategy.
- 3.13 **Our Employee/People Offer**
- 3.14 Throughout engagement with employees, managers and trade unions a number of questions were raised about the potential impact of Relight our Council on:
- The flexible working model including home working arrangements
 - Removal of core hours
 - Impact on flexi leave/TOIL
 - Homeworking allowance
 - Mileage claims and travel time implications for employees travelling from home to the office
 - Sustainable travel including car parking
- 3.15 To address these questions, we propose:
- Where a change to terms and conditions of employment may be required, the council will consult using collective bargaining with recognised trade unions.

- To consult with trade unions and engage employees and managers about the proposal to remove core hours with working hours being agreed between a manager and employee to best meet business needs and employee health and wellbeing.
- To engage with trade unions, employees and managers about how new ways of working may or may not impact on travel time, mileage claims and flexi/toil arrangements to ensure they are fair, inclusive and equitable amongst all workstyles.
- In relation to the homeworking allowance – employees have been able to claim tax relief through HMRC for the 2021/22 financial year. Nationally, as part of the pay claim for 2021/22 there have been negotiations around the introduction of an allowance for homeworking. Discussions are on-going but the council will continue to monitor these and implement any nationally agreed changes to terms and conditions and consider any local arrangements at that time.
- To conduct a benchmarking exercise against other Local Authorities to consider their operating models, new ways of working and impact to employee terms and conditions.

3.16 Human Resources, Organisational Development and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team will jointly engage with the workforce to coproduce a fair, inclusive and equitable employee/our people offer which will support the council to continue to attract candidates that have the right skills and experience to support our diverse community effectively.

3.17 Following the outcome of the engagement, the employee/our people offer will be subject to consultation with trade unions.

3.18 **Digital**

3.19 Throughout the pandemic, improving how we utilise technology has been a key aspect of how we have operated as a council to serve our city. We will continue to deploy kit, systems and technology to ensure that staff can work effectively, maximising efficiency.

4.0 **Evaluation of alternative options**

4.1 Option one would be to adopt the high level Relighting Our Council approach, to continue to ensure that the Council operates in a way that maximises outcomes for local people, learning from the experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic and adopting modern, best practice ways of working.

4.2 Option two would be to revert to pre-pandemic ways of operating as a Council, which would not maximise the benefits outlined in this report. The Covid-19 pandemic is not over, and in line with our principle of being led by Public Health guidance and ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of our city and workforce, continue to operate Covid safe measures such as social distancing in our workspaces. During engagement with employees, it has been identified that this approach may negatively impact on not only the health and well-being of our employees and/or improved productivity but also our ability to attract and retain talented employees.

5.0 Reasons for decisions

5.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the Relighting Our Council strategy, in order to deliver the benefits associated with the approach – namely improved productivity and effectiveness, providing value for money, reducing our carbon emissions and improving employee health, wellbeing, recruitment and retention.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 A key benefit of the approach is to provide value for money, and further work as outlined in relation to implementing the Relighting Our Council approach is anticipated to have a positive impact on the council's medium term financial strategy.

6.2 In order to deliver the revised Relighting Our Council programme plan associated resource costs totalling £311,000 are anticipated. These will enable the facilitation of the programme, providing additional capacity and expert capability, in a timely manner to support the delivery of the Council priorities. These costs are summarised against key workstreams and deliverables in table 1 below and can be accommodated within existing resource approvals and therefore there is no additional request for funds at this stage.

6.3 Table 1: Associated resource costs

Area	Resource costs £000
Relighting Our Council Programme coordination and performance	150
Our People	104
Sustainable Travel	57
Total resource costs	311

6.4 On 1 July 2020 the Cabinet Member for Resources, in consultation with the Director of Finance, in line with delegated authorities approved the allocation of £245,150 from the Transformation Reserve to the Our Assets programme providing resources to enable the acceleration of the programme following the Covid-19 outbreak and related restrictions.

6.5 With the Our Assets programme now forming a key workstream of the Relighting Our Council programme plan the remaining balance of £32,000 of the £245,150 allocation can be utilised and continue to support the delivery of key Council priorities. The same applies to the £200,000 transferred to reserve to fund future asset development and transformation work supporting the Our Assets programme. This was approved by Cabinet on 16 June 2021 as part of the Reserves, Provisions and Balances 2020-2021 report.

6.6 In addition to this, on 21 April 2021, as part of the Covid-19 Allocation of Grant Funding report, the Cabinet Member for Resources, in consultation with the Director of Finance approved the allocation of £170,000 to provide additional project and programmes

support. Of this allocation a balance of £79,000 is available that can also be used to fund the resource costs associated with the Relighting Our Council Programme plan.

- 6.7 Table 2 below summarises the existing funding allocations, mentioned in paragraphs above, that will be used to accommodate the £311,000 associated resource costs.

Table 2: Existing funding allocations to be utilised

Funding element	Funding amount £000
Our Assets programme – remaining balance	32
Transformation reserve drawdown - Our Assets Programme	200
Covid-19 allocation of grant funding – project and programmes support – remaining balance	79
Total resource costs	311

- 6.8 This report seeks approval to draw down £200,000 of funding which has been previously set aside in the Transformation Reserve for the Our Assets Programme and the utilisation of other existing funding allocations to facilitate this strategy.
- 6.9 Further additional resources required for the delivery of the programme in order to facilitate actions, outline projects within key workstreams will be subject to further business cases, identifying investment and associated benefits (financial and non-financial) for decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis.

[TT/22102021/S]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 Whilst the Relighting Our Council approach will involve working differently in the future, the Council will continue to deliver all statutory and legal requirements.
- 7.2 There are no specific legal implications arising from the high level Relighting Our Council strategy, however specific implications from further work to develop and implement the approach such as Human Resource implications for employees, will continue to be appropriately managed. The proposals of Relight our Council may involve some changes to employee terms and conditions of employment when the details are considered. However, this will be managed through appropriate engagement with employees, key stakeholders and trade unions and formal consultation. [DP/25102021/B]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 An equalities analysis for Relighting Our Council and the development of the resource booking system for staff to book desks and meeting rooms, has been undertaken and mitigations to any negative impacts identified. The Council's four equalities staff forums have been involved in the consultation and engagement, and the Age and Disability Staff

Forum integral to the testing and development of the resource booking system. Equalities, fairness and inclusion are a core value of the organisation and will continue to drive the approach.

- 8.2 Equality Forum groups will also have an integral role in shaping the fair, inclusive, and equitable 'our employee/people' offer.

9.0 All other implications

- 9.1 The Relighting Our Council approach is in direct response to the implications that have arisen from the Covid-19 Pandemic, and has implications across the Council, including climate change, Human Resources, Corporate Landlord, Health and Wellbeing which will continue to be considered and managed as part of the programme to further develop and implement a new way of working at the Council.
- 9.2 Regarding HR implications, forthcoming reports will include a new 'employee/our people offer' for all staff (after engagement and consultation), and a refreshed Our People strategy considering staff development, reward and recognition, staff attraction, recruitment and retention and health and wellbeing pledges. Specific policy updates will include a new sustainable staff travel policy and mileage claim system.
- 9.3 Regarding Corporate Landlord implications, forthcoming reports will include a new workspace strategy, as part of the Our Assets programme including maximising the use of our estate and continuing to let space to partners to improve outcomes and generate income.
- 9.4 Regarding digital and technology implications, forthcoming reports will include a new Digital Wolves strategy setting out how as a city and as a council we can harness the benefits for local people.
- 9.5 Regarding climate change, work will continue to contribute to the delivery against the climate change action plan to meet our commitment to be next carbon neutral as a Council by 2028, with regular progress reports to Cabinet.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

- 10.1 Our Council Scrutiny Panel – Relighting Our Council – 2 November 2021
- 10.2 Cabinet - Reserve, Provisions and Balances 2020-2021 – 16 June 2021
- 10.3 IEDN – Covid-19 Allocation of Grant Funding - 21 April 2021
- 10.4 IEDN – Allocation of Transformation Reserve – 1 July 2020

11.0 Appendices

- 11.1 Appendix 1: Relighting Our Council Strategy Document