

Attendance

Members of the Cabinet

Cllr Ian Brookfield (Chair)
Cllr Stephen Simkins (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Obaida Ahmed
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Steve Evans
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal (Virtually)
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Linda Leach
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi (Virtually)

Employees

Tim Johnson	Chief Executive
Emma Bennett	Executive Director of Families
John Denley	Director of Public Health
Charlotte Johns	Director of Strategy
Claire Nye	Director of Finance
David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
Laura Phillips	Deputy Director of People and Change
Laura Gittos	Head of Governance
Julia Cleary	Systems and Scrutiny Manager
Dereck Francis	Democratic Services Officer

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**
Resolved:
That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 July 2021 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 **Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Report**

The recommendations contained in the report, Local Government Social Care Ombudsman Report, were moved by Councillor Ian Brookfield and seconded by Councillor Stephen Simkins.

Councillor Beverley Momenabadi reported on the circumstances of a Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) decision report and on a proposed Council/regional adoption agency response. The LGSCO report related to a complaint about an individual who made an inquiry about wishing to adopt a child in the city. It was noted that a number of factors are taken into consideration when individuals, couples or families wish to adopt a child. Numerous assessments are made at different stages around suitability, experience with children and the ability to provide a loving stable home. Unfortunately, not everyone who applies is suitable to adopt a child. With regards to the complainant, an initial assessment was made in May 2019 the outcome of which was not to invite the individual to proceed with the assessment process for adoption. The LGSCO found that the Council should have progressed to allow the individual to register her interest even though the Council knew she was assessed as being not suitable. One of the reasons that the Council did not progress to a register of interest was because it did not want to create a false sense of hope for the person applying. Following the LGSCO report, a small change had been made around the recruitment process and people's ability to register an interest at any anytime during the process. Councillor Momenabadi added that the Council is fully committed to increasing its numbers of adopters in the city and Mark Tobin, Head of Service and the adoption team do an incredible job of ensuring that a diverse range of adopters are recruited and assessed, but they would always recruit in a way which puts children first and does not create a false sense of hope for individuals who for whatever reason may not be suitable. She asked Cabinet to endorse the Council's and the regional adoption agency service response to the LGSCO decision report.

Resolved:

That the City of Wolverhampton Council and the regional adoption agency service response to the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman finding be endorsed.

6 **Severn Trent's Commonwealth Legacy Forest**

Councillor Steve Evans requested Cabinet support the principle of the Severn Trent Commonwealth Legacy Forest, including Tiny Forests that would complement the Council's wider support for the Commonwealth Games and the benefits they would bring to the city and region. He also sought delegated authority to enter into any relevant agreements to enable planting to take place on proposed sites should they be accepted and the terms of planting. In doing so he reported that the Legacy Forest and Tiny Forests would support action the Council had already taken through the Wolverhampton Tree and Woodland Strategy, the Climate Emergency Declaration; planting of over 2,000 trees in a number of open spaces across the city during 2020-2021 with plans to plant a further 20,000 trees during 2021/2022; and planting of the second Tiny Forest in the city at Moseley Road Open Space in Bilston.

Cabinet commended Severn Trent and the Council on the continuing campaign to green the city as far as possible and to make the city carbon neutral.

Resolved:

1. That the Council support the principle of the Severn Trent Commonwealth Legacy Forest and proposing sites for both the Legacy Forest and Tiny Forests on land owned or managed by the Council.
2. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for City Environment and Climate Change, in consultation with the Director of Governance, to sign any relevant agreements to enable planting to take place on the proposed sites, should they be accepted and the terms of planting be considered acceptable to the Council.
3. That it be noted that the report seeks delegated authority in the case of sites being proposed and accepted but does not commit to Council to providing sites for the Commonwealth Legacy Forest or Tiny Forests, should sites not be identified and selected or should the terms of planting not be acceptable to the Council.

7 Revised Affordable Rents Policy for all New Build Wolverhampton Council Housing

The recommendations contained in the report, Revised Affordable Rents Policy for all New Build Wolverhampton Council Housing, were moved by Councillor Ian Brookfield and seconded by Councillor Stephen Simkins.

Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal reported on the salient points of the report on a proposal to amend the Council's current Affordable Rents Policy in order to protect the Social Rents of existing secure council tenants where they are being displaced as a result of council regeneration schemes. The report also proposed that for those council tenants who have a wish to return to new build properties within the regeneration area and have been temporarily decanted to a property acquired through the Market to Affordable Housing Conversion programme, that a Social Rent is charged for the duration of the decant period.

Resolved:

1. That Social Rents are applied to new build council properties only when allocated to a returning tenant(s) who are displaced as a result of an approved council led regeneration programme. This is only applicable for new build properties built without using grant funding.
2. That Social Rent is charged on properties purchased through the Market to Affordable Housing Conversion Programme only when the property is allocated to an existing tenant(s) who is required to temporarily decant to assist in the progression of the approved council led regeneration programme.
3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing, in consultation with the Director of City Housing and Environment, to authorise future amendments to the City's Affordable Rents Policy for new build council housing.

8 **Help to Own Scheme Update and Governance**

The intention to make a key decision on the report 'Help to Own Scheme Update and Governance' at the meeting was not published in advance as required by the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. The decision was urgent and could not be reasonably delayed for the following reasons:

- The Governance structure and approvals process for the scheme has been drawn up and requires urgent approval to ensure proper management control and governance of the Help to Own Scheme.
- Variations need to be made to correct and clarify legal documentation prepared for the establishment of the scheme to ensure all contracts are correctly drawn up.

In light of the above, consent had been obtained for the key decision to be made at the meeting under the General Exception provisions.

The recommendations contained in the report, Help to Own Scheme Update and Governance, were moved by Councillor Ian Brookfield and seconded by Councillor Stephen Simkins.

Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal reported on the salient points of the update report on the high level of interest in the Help to Own scheme since its launch in April 2021, and on a proposed governance structure and approvals process for the scheme. Help to Own was a new affordable housing product being delivered in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority, which provided a rental solution to local residents that gave long term tenure security, the benefits of home ownership without the risks and complete flexibility to leave whenever the tenant wished.

Cabinet commended the scheme as a great example of the Council working with external partners to address the housing demand in the city and help local people to get onto the property ladder. Thanks were extended to the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority, Andy Street for his support to the scheme.

Resolved:

1. That the governance structure and approvals process identified in the report be approved. Key decisions, as listed, would be reported to Cabinet for approval. Other operational decisions as noted are delegated to the Director of Finance and the Chief Operating Officer acting on behalf of the Council as a member of the Help to Own partnerships, and otherwise to the appointees to the scheme Management Board.
2. That the minor amendments to correct and clarify certain of the transaction documents signed on 16 April 2021 to establish the scheme and delegation to the Director of Finance and Chief Operating Officer of authority to approve on behalf of the Council as a member of HTO2 LLP be approved.
3. That it be noted that this is the first six monthly update on the scheme and shows a strong initial performance with 352 applications for the 100 houses. Of these 70 have been approved to date, 50.% from key workers and 61% from Wolverhampton residents.

[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

4. That it be noted that the first 23 houses are expected to be delivered and occupied in September with the balance delivered in tranches over the following 6 months. Loans would be drawn down from the facility with the West Midlands Pension Fund to fund the purchase of each tranche.