

Attendance

Members of the Cabinet

Cllr Ian Brookfield (Chair)
Cllr Stephen Simkins (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Obaida Ahmed
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Chris Burden
Cllr Steve Evans
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Linda Leach
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi

Employees

Tim Johnson	Chief Executive
Mark Taylor	Deputy Chief Executive
Emma Bennett	Executive Director of Families
John Denley	Director of Public Health
Charlotte Johns	Director of Strategy
Claire Nye	Director of Finance
Laura Phillips	Deputy Director of People and Change
John Roseblade	Director of Resident Services
Dereck Francis	Democratic Services Officer
Jacob Stokes	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 14 December 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023-2024 including Rent and Service Charges**

The intention to make a key decision on the report 'Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2023-2024 including Rent and Service Charges' 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 reason:

- The report was originally published in the Council's Forward Plan in October 2022, however did not pull through on subsequent published plans. The revised rents and rates are due to be in place from April, therefore all approvals are required in January to ensure the required notice period can be served to all parties.

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

Councillor Ian Brookfield declared a non pecuniary in the report as a Wolverhampton Homes leaseholder.

Councillor Bhupinder Gakhel presented the report on an updated Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2023-2024 for recommendation to Full Council. The Business Plan aimed to balance the provision of new homes for rent, whilst continuing to invest in better and safer homes programmes to the existing stock and improving and redeveloping housing estates. The report also provided, as an integral part of that Business Plan, a proposed HRA budget for 2023-2024, including proposed rents and service charges to take effect from 1 April 2023 and a proposed HRA Capital Programme for the period 2023-2024 to 2027-2028 for recommendation to Full Council.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to:

1. Adopt the Business Plan set out at Appendix 1 to this report as the approved Housing Revenue Account Business Plan including:
 - a. The revenue budget for 2023-2024 at Appendix 1 to this report.
 - b. The Capital Programme for 2023-2024 to 2027-2028 at Appendix 2 to this report that includes the following among the proposed investment plans;
 - £105 million for new homes
 - £67 million provision for estate remodelling
 - £39 million to complete the refurbishment of the Heath Town estate
 - £43 million remediation works to non-traditional properties including energy efficiency improvements
 - £114 million for programmes to high rise estates to include building safety improvements, infrastructure replacement, and external works to include energy efficiency.
2. Approve the implementation of an increase of 7% to social housing rents in accordance with the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 and to give 28 days notice to all secure and introductory tenants of the rent increase from 1 April 2023.

3. Approve the rates for garage rents and service charges set out in Appendix 3 to this report and formally notifies tenants.
4. Approve an increase to Shared Ownership rents of 7%.
5. Delegate authority to approve the final Management Allowances for Managing Agents in 2023-2024 to include a virement from the debt management repayment budget if required to the Cabinet Members for City Assets and Housing and Resources and Digital City in consultation with the Director of Finance and Director of City Housing and Environment to enable a full review of cost pressures.
6. Delegate authority to agree a financial assistance scheme for tenants experiencing financial hardship to the Cabinet Members for City Assets and Housing and Resources and Digital City in consultation with Director of Finance and Director of City Housing and Environment to be in place by 1 April 2023.
7. Approve the HRA Financial Management and Investment Strategy, at Appendix 6 to the Business plan.

That Cabinet notes:

1. From 1 April 2020 the Regulator of Social Housing has regulated social rents charged by Local Authorities as set out in the Rent Standard 2020. However, the government has capped the increase chargeable from 1 April 2023 at 7%.
2. The increase to Shared Ownership rents is based on agreement to the government's principle of a voluntary commitment of the 7% cap.
3. No increases are planned to service charges in 2023-2024.
4. That, in the opinion of the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) the current levels of reserves and provisions is appropriate and adequate for the forthcoming financial year.
5. The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper (2020) sets out the principles for a new, fairer deal for social housing residents, focusing on the provision of safe and decent homes, resolving complaints, empowering tenants, tackling stigma and building new homes.

- 5 **Council Tax Base and Business Rates (NDR) Net Rate Yield 2023-2024**
- Councillor Obaida Ahmed presented the report that set out the Council's forecast for Council Tax and Business Rates for 2023-2024. A council tax base at 65,944.12 Band D equivalent properties was proposed. In terms of business rates approval was requested to set the Net Rate Yield for business rates at £76.9 million. Cabinet was informed that business rates are based on the property's rateable value which is set by the Valuation Office Agency. The next revaluation would come into effect from the 1 April 2023. The last revaluation took place in 2017. Businesses that see an increase in their rateable value would receive transitional protection which mitigates the impact of any increase in the short term. The Council would receive a transitional grant to compensate it for the reduction awarded to businesses. The report also sought approval to extend the Council's local scheme for Business Rates Discretionary Relief with effect from 1 April 2023.

Resolved:

1. That the Collection Fund Council Tax Base for 2023-2024 be set at 65,994.12 Band D equivalents.
2. That the Collection Fund Business Rates, also referred to as Non-Domestic Rates (NDR), Net Rate Yield for 2023-2024 be set at £76.9 million.
3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City, in consultation with the Director of Finance, to approve amendments to:
 - a. The final Business Rates Net Rate Yield as required as a result of changes to the NNDR 1 form (National Non-Domestic Rates return) by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities or data revisions and changes in projections.
 - b. The Council Tax Base as a result of any data revisions and changes in projections.
4. That the following extensions to the local Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy be approved:
 - a. In respect of charitable and voluntary organisations for one year from 1 April 2023
 - b. In respect of Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Rates relief scheme for one year from 1 April 2023
 - c. In respect of transitional relief for one year from 1 April 2023
 - d. In respect of supporting small businesses for one year from 1 April 2023
 - e. In respect of local newspaper relief for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2025.
5. That authority be delegated to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Head of Revenues and Benefits to award relief in individual cases which satisfy the criteria for the categories of discretionary rate relief in accordance with Section 47 Local Government Finance Act 1988.

6 **Collection Fund Estimated Outturn 2022-2023**

Councillor Obaida Ahmed presented the report on the estimated outturn for Council Tax and Business Rates also referred to as Non Domestic Rates (NDR) transactions on the Collection Fund in 2022-2023. Cabinet was informed that the proposals would inform the budget setting process for 2023-2024 for the Council and precepting bodies, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority. Overall the forecast outturn position was better than originally projected. In terms of council tax an accumulated deficit of approximately £846,000 was forecast, which included the carry forward from 2020-2021 which the Government confirmed could be spread over 2021-2022 to 2023-2024. The Council's proportion of the deficit was £754,000, the balance was for the precepting authorities. The overall position on council tax was an improvement on current assumptions. This was in part as a result of lower council tax support claimants not being as high as originally anticipated. In terms of business rates, it was forecast that there would be a total accumulated surplus of £1.6 million. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy would be updated to reflect the forecast outturn on the Collection Fund and reported to Cabinet on 22 February 2023.

Resolved:

1. That it be approved that the estimated outturn for Council Tax in 2022-2023 is a cumulative deficit of approximately £846,000 which includes the carry forward of the in-year 2020-2021 deficit, which the Government confirmed could be spread over three years from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024.
2. That it be approved that the estimated outturn for Business Rates, also referred to as Non-Domestic Rates, in 2022-2023 is a cumulative surplus of approximately £1.6 million with an estimated surplus in 2022-2023 totalling approximately £1.3 million.
3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City, 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 2023.
4. That authority be delegated to the Director of Finance to confirm and arrange the final payments to the precepting authorities.

7 **Annual Health and Safety Update**

Councillor Paula Brookfield presented the report on proposed revisions to the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Policy and the Annual Health and Safety Management Report 2022. The Annual Report highlighted progress and changes made by the Council with regards to managing health and safety within the organisation since the last Annual Report in September 2021. Cabinet was informed that as part of a decision to increase the staffing complement within the Health and Safety team, two apprenticeship spaces had been created in keeping with the Council's Wolverhampton Pound agenda, growing the Council's staff and creating opportunities for Wolverhampton people. The Health and Safety service was also now a formal proactive service, offering training for teams within the Council and inspections in wider areas. The Health and Safety team also supported events teams in schools and school trips and much wider areas than it was able to support hitherto.

Resolved:

1. That the revisions to the Corporate Health and Safety Policy be approved.
2. That the progress with regards to managing health and safety in the organisation be noted.

8 **Land and Property Disposal Policy**

Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal presented for approval a new Land and Property Disposal policy. The new policy detailed how disposals of council surplus land and property would be managed with the aim of providing stakeholders with a clear framework within which the Council carries out land and property disposal transactions. The Council's Constitution already showed that the Council managed its land and property disposals in accordance with regulations. The new policy would help to operationalise those rules and give a clear understanding and transparency to all stakeholders on how the Council carries out land and property disposal transactions. It would also demonstrate compliance with legislative and best practise requirements in order to ensure the Council achieves the best possible outcomes for the city and its residents when disposing of its surplus stock. It was noted that the policy excluded the Right to Buy scheme which was governed under separate legislation.

[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

Resolved:

That the Land and Property Disposal Policy be approved.