

Minutes of The Cabinet

**Wednesday 24 February at 3.30pm
Virtual Online Meeting**

Present: Councillor Crompton (Chair);
Councillors Ali, Allcock, Millard, Padda, Shaeen, Singh,
Taylor and Underhill.

Also present: E M Giles, L Giles and Rollins.

Officers: David Stevens (Chief Executive), Alan Caddick (Director - Housing and Communities), Lesley Hagger (Executive Director – Children’s Services), Rebecca Maher (Acting Section 151 Officer), Sue Stanhope (Interim Director – Human Resources), Katharine Willmette (Interim Director of Adult Social Care), Surjit Tour (Director - Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager – Democracy), Maryrose Lappin (Domestic Abuse Team Manager) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager).

28/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Preece and Moore.

29/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared at the meeting.



30/21 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 10 February 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

31/21 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

32/21 **Council Finances 2021/22 to 2023/24**

Approval was sought for the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which set out how the Council would manage current and future finances. It detailed the assumptions and calculations for the estimated budget position for 2021/22 onwards.

As a result of the calculations within the MTFS, directorate and central items budgets had been calculated and estimates proposed for the provisional budgets for 2022/23 to 2023/24.

Approval was also sought to the proposed Council Tax level required to meet the forecasted expenditure. The proposed increase was an equated increase of 3.56% per Band D property. The precepts for the West Midlands Fire Authority were provisional but not expected to change. Any significant variance on the confirmed precept would be reported to full Council in March.

Cabinet noted the estimated General Fund reserve balance as of 31 March 2021 as £74.656m. Consideration of the Council's strategic risks meant the forecast level of free balances at the end of 2020/21 was unlikely to be reduced from the level of £11.470m held at the end of 2019/20. Equivalent to 4.64% of the Council's net expenditure budget for 2021/22 and within the prudent parameters set by the Section 151 Officer.



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During the budget process, specific reserves and provisions had been reviewed and found to be sufficient to meet existing known liabilities. They would continue to be reviewed as part of the 2020/21 closedown of account process.

Approval was sought to the Treasury Management and Investment Strategies and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy.

The MTFP for Sandwell Children's Trust had been assessed by Council finance officers and contract negotiations concluded. The outcome was a revised contract sum of £68.028m for 2021/22 which was £0.550m higher than the existing MTFP sum for 2021/22. In addition to the contract sum requested for 2021/22 the Trust had requested access to £500k from a High Cost Placements reserve created by the Council. Access to this reserve it was noted was subject to the approval of the Executive Director of Children's Services.

The 10-year Housing Revenue Account investment programme was under review. A report was due to be presented to Cabinet during 2020, however, due to the impact of COVID and the revised rent increase, it was necessary to defer this by 12 months. This would enable the programme to include items that help to meet the Council's climate change priorities.

Full Council agreed that the increase in Fees and Charges be set on a 3-year period up to March 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the low level of inflation, it had been decided that Fees and Charges should be retained at the same level across all Council Services. Any service that required a different approach would need to seek approval from Cabinet.

Cabinet noted the findings of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board having considered the Council's Finances which included the reasons why the Council Tax was being increased to prevent cuts to services next year and it was still representative of value for money for residents.



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The Cabinet thanked the Scrutiny Board for their feedback and reiterated that regionally, Sandwell was the only Council to provide a 100% council tax reduction scheme and was the lowest council tax increase in the West Midlands.

Reason for Decision and Alternative Options Considered

The Cabinet was legally required to recommend to Council a balanced budget for approval before the statutory deadline of 11 March. There were no alternative options.

Agreed to recommend to Council that in relation to Council Finances 2021/22 to 2023/24, approval be given to: -

- (1) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy set out in Appendix A;
- (2) the expenditure level for 2021/22 as set in Appendix B1 and B2 and the resultant Council Tax as set out in Appendix C;
- (3) the provisional budgets for 2021/22 to 2023/24 as shown in Appendix B3;
- (4) the revised financial position and the forecast reserves position for the end of 2020/21;
- (5) the supporting information on the robustness of the budget process and adequacy of the Council's reserves detailed in Appendix D;
- (6) the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Investment Strategy in Appendix E;
- (7) the Capital Programme 2021/22 to 2023/24 in Appendix F and the Capital Strategy in Appendix G;



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- (8) the contract sum for Sandwell Children’s Trust of £68.028m for 2021/22;
- (9) the freezing of Fees and Charges across the Council;

33/21

Corporate Plan 2020 - 2025 and Budget

Approval was sought to the the Corporate Plan – Big Plans for a Great Place which set out what the Council would do to deliver Vision 2030 and Sandwell’s 10 ambitions, over the period 2020 to 2025.

During 2020, Sandwell had responded to unprecedented challenges across all service areas. The Council had responded effectively to the emergency of the pandemic, establishing business continuity rapidly and calmly. Within its efforts to combat the pandemic, the Council had sought to demonstrate a one council, one team response where departments and colleagues worked together across service areas.

Building on the impact work undertaken in Phase 1 and 2 of Sandwell’s recovery process, work had started to understand how the findings of would affect the Corporate Plan.

Approval was also sought to the net revenue target budgets for service areas.

Cabinet noted the findings of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board having considered the Corporate Plan 2020 – 2025. The Scrutiny Board had thanked officers for all of their hard work to ensure that it met the challenges of the pandemic and continued to run services in an efficient way. Cabinet thanked the Scrutiny Board for their feedback and placed on record their thanks to all officers for their continued work to provide the best service for Sandwell residents.



Reason for Decision

The Corporate Plan contained details about future service provision and how each directorate would spend their target budget available to them. A refresh of the detailed actions that underpinned the delivery of the strategic objectives was required, in order to take into account of the impact of the pandemic upon Sandwell as a whole and on the organisation.

Alternative Options Considered

Following the impact of the pandemic on the council's budget position and the continued need to respond to the needs of communities, the Council had taken the position to fund any budget shortfall for 2021/22 from one-off use of reserves. This meant that service and financial planning for 2022/23 and beyond would need to take into account this shortfall.

Members and other stakeholders would be asked through planned engagement sessions on the refresh of the Corporate Plan about options around budget savings. Outcomes from these workshops would feed into the future Corporate Plan and budget proposals.

Agreed to recommend to Council that: -

- (1) the progress made towards the achievement of the strategic priorities set out in the Corporate Plan - Big Plans for a Great Place 2020-2025, as now submitted be noted.
- (2) the plan to refresh the Corporate Plan during 2021, as now submitted be approved;
- (3) the budget and associated documents outlining how Directorates will direct resources to meet the priorities of the Corporate Plan, as now submitted be approved.



34/21

Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring 2020/21

Approval was sought to the Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring 2020/21 to ensure the Council conducted its business efficiently, acted to provide for the security of the assets under its control and ensuring that the use of resources was legal, properly authorised, provided value for money and achieved best value.

Reason for Decision

The Section 151 Officer was required to report the financial position of the authority to Cabinet on a quarterly basis. The Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring 2020/21 report set out the projected year-end variances for each directorate and the reasons for those variances.

Alternative Options Considered

The alternative option Cabinet heard would be to fail to provide a report on the Council's financial status. This would be in contravention of statutory obligations and would place the Council at risk of challenge and poor practice.

Agreed: -

- (1) that the financial monitoring position of individual directorates and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as at 31 December 2020 (quarter 3 2020/21) be received and referred to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and comment;
- (2) that the following financial position for the Council be noted:



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	Appendix	Projected Variance (£000)	(Use of) Reserves/ Corporate Resources/ RCCO (£000)	COVID-19 Pressures (£000)	Projected Outturn Variance (after COVID-19 Funding Applied) (£000)
Corporate Management	1A	(32)	0	0	(32)
Resources	1B	3,520	(2,868)	1,159	(507)
Adult Social Care	1C	(11,143)	3,500	2,269	(9,912)
Regeneration & Growth	1D	3,897	167	2,940	1,124
Housing & Communities	1E	1,300	46	3,295	(1,949)
Children's Services	1F	7,178	(21)	4,305	2,852
TOTAL DIRECTORATES		4,720	824	13,968	(8,424)

(3) that the following budget virements above £0.250m be approved;

Virements above £0.250m for approval by Cabinet	(£)	(£)
<u>HOUSING & COMMUNITIES</u>		
Expenditure to reflect increase in income received for Homeslessness Grants	391,000	0
Reflection of additional income for Homelessness Grants	0	391,000
<u>Adult Social Care</u>		
Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Grant	0	472,000
COVID Winter Grant Scheme	0	1,404,600
Infection Control Fund Round 1	0	2,875,900
Infection Control Fund Round 2	0	3,144,400
Management Team	7,896,900	0
<u>Public Health</u>		
Public Health Grant - In year increase in Public Health Grant	0	581,000
Reduction in Public Health savings requirement	581,000	0
TOTAL	8,868,900	8,868,900



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- (4) that a sum of £0.632m be allocated to Sandwell Children's Trust to fund COVID-19 pressures (already reflected within the Children's Services budget monitoring) which is in addition to the £0.391 allocation approved at quarter 1 and £0.433m allocation approved at quarter 2;
- (5) that a carry forward of £2.000m be approved for Adult Social Care to 2021/22, with the remaining underspend of £7.072m to be released back to Council balances and ringfenced to cover future year budget pressures (the total underspend on Directorates is £8.424m plus £0.648m on central items);
- (6) that the creation of an earmarked reserve for Elections Services of £0.150m be approved to enable COVID-19 safe elections to be facilitated;
- (7) that a revenue contribution be approved to capital outlay of £0.600m from the Sandwell Children's Trust earmarked reserve for the purchase of ICT equipment required by Sandwell Children's Trust;
- (8) that the committed spend against the Land Regeneration Fund as follows be noted:



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Land Regeneration Fund Schemes	Spent/Committed £000
Sandwell Regeneration and Inclusive Growth Deal Delivery Plan	150
Brandhall Golf Course Options	50
Lyng Regeneration Phase Two	90
Housing Options Business Case	50
Sandwell Valley Review	55
Lion Farm Playing Fields Feasibility Study	25
West Bromwich Masterplan	200
Housing Delivery Vehicle	230
Brandhall Golf Course Masterplan	250
Land Reaeration Fund - Approved Allocations	1,100
Land Regeneration Fund - Unallocated Budget	222
Land Regeneration Fund Total Budget	1,322

35/21

Adoption of revised Black Country Tenancy Strategy

In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, in 2013, the four Black Country local authorities developed and implemented the current Black Country Tenancy Strategy that had enabled a uniform approach across the sub-region for the administration of both Fixed Term Tenancies and Affordable Rents.

With regard to administration of Fixed Term Tenancies the review had concluded that the following key amendments should be made:

- reviews will take place at least nine months prior to the fixed term tenancy ending (instead of the current six);
- tenants will be notified of the review outcome and the decision at least six months instead of three months before the fixed term tenancy ends.

With regard to administration of Affordable Rents, it was reported that the review had concluded that the following key amendments should be made:

- a proportion of new build development to be social housing rent where the said homes are not funded through the Affordable Housing Grant programme;



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- where affordability was an issue, the landlord would provide support to the tenant to enable them where possible to access and sustain the tenancy rather than exclude the said household in the first instance;
- that converting from social rent to affordable rent is not supported unless there is a direct link to the funding of additional affordable or social homes within the region.

Reason for Decision

In conjunction with the neighbouring Black Country local authorities, the Council had concluded a review of the current strategy that itself took effect on 15 January 2013.

The Localism Act 2011 stated that a local authority must publish a Tenancy Strategy. The Black Country Strategy enabled a uniform approach across the Black Country Region on the part of registered housing providers for the administration of both Fixed Term Tenancies and Affordable Rents.

Alternative Options Considered

There were no alternative options as it was statutory requirement for a local authority to publish a Tenancy Strategy. Adoption of the Strategy would ensure that the Council was not open to any form of legal challenge and maintained its statutory obligations in this context.

Agreed: -

- (1) that approval be given for the Council to adopt the revised Black Country Tenancy Strategy as now submitted;
- (2) that the Director of Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Homes, be authorised to review and approve subsequent Tenancy Strategy reviews and amendments except where the changes are major or involve amended legislation.



36/21

Flooring and Associated Works

Approval was sought to appoint one contractor to undertake the flooring and associated works contract for the period of 4 years, from 1 March 2021 to 28 February 2025.

The anticipated value of the contract was in the region of £1.1 million (£275,000 per annum) over a period of four years.

The supplier was based in Halesowen, on the border with Blackheath town centre. Due to their proximity they employ local people and committed to offering apprenticeships to local students. Being local they were also committed to using wherever possible local material suppliers.

Reason for Decision

To renew an existing contract to renew and replace flooring to Sandwell MBC properties along with any associated work required.

Alternative Options Considered

Sandwell MBC's Asset Management and Maintenance Service do not have trained/qualified employees that can install the specialist floor coverings and external providers are therefore required.

Agreed: -

- (1) that approval be given to renew the Flooring and Associated Works contract for the period of 4 years, from 1 March 2021 to 28 February 2025;
- (2) that the Director – Housing and Communities be authorised to award the contract referred to undertake flooring and associated works for the period of 4 years, from 1 March 2021 to 28 February 2025.



37/21

Stabilisation of 2 no. disused mineshafts and shallow mine workings at land off King Street, Wednesbury, Sandwell

It was reported that tenders had been invited for the stabilisation of 2 no. disused mineshafts and shallow mine workings at land of King Street, Wednesbury. The length of the contract was for approximately 10 weeks commencing early 2021.

However, it had not been possible to obtain three tenders. The most likely reason was due to the specialist nature of the works to be executed under the contract and the relatively limited number of contractors within the UK that can undertake the work. This was further reduced when seeking to appoint contractors based in the West Midlands region.

The development programme for the project was such that re-tendering again was not desirable as it would have cause a knock-on delay for the proposed completion and opening date of the facility. After two attempts at tendering the contract already, it was highly unlikely any further interest would be generated. Approval was therefore sought to make an exemption to the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules to enable the contract to be awarded.

Reason for Decision

The treatment of 2 no. mineshafts and stabilisation of shallow mine workings form the first part of enabling works for the construction of new housing and the Wednesbury Health centre on the site. The works are required in order to:

- ensure the long term structural integrity of the proposed development (Health centre and residential dwellings)
- ensure that no risk is posed to human health users of the site (tenants and visitors)

Alternative Options Considered

The works were originally tendered in October 2020 but only 1 completed tender was returned.



If exemption was not permitted for this contract award there would be knock on delay for the proposed completion and opening date of the housing and medical facilities in Wednesbury.

Agreed:-

- (1) that an exemption be made to the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules in order to obtain a minimum of three tenders for the appointment of a contractor to undertake stabilisation of 2 no. mineshafts and shallow mine workings at land off King Street, Wednesbury;
- (2) that the Interim Director – Regeneration and Growth award a contract to Forkers Limited for a works period of 10 weeks at a value of £249,187.00 to deliver stabilisation of 2 no. disused mineshafts and shallow mine workings at land of King Street, Wednesbury, Sandwell, West Midlands.

38/21

Extension of grant for the provision of community-based support to victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence

Approval was sought to extend the grant for the provision of community-based support to victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence to Black Country Women's Aid for a period of three years from 1 April 2021 at a value of £287,268.

The Domestic Abuse Team Manager delivered a presentation to Cabinet highlighting the work of the team, how the grant would support the community and what the challenges were within Sandwell in relation to domestic abuse.

Cabinet heard that a Domestic Abuse Problem Profile was undertaken in 2020 which identified that domestic abuse was a significant issue for Sandwell with reports of domestic abuse to police consistently increasing over the proceeding 3 years.



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Reports of rape and sexual violence to police had consistently increased in Sandwell by 30% between 2017 and 2019.

However, whilst the increase in reported incidents was of concern, it indicated that more victims were being identified at an earlier point and coming forward for support. Evidencing the need of the Council's continued investment in the support provided via this grant.

During the past three years, the service had provided support for 4426 victims of domestic abuse and 478 victims of rape and sexual violence within Sandwell. Last year, 79% of victims reported that their situation had improved following support from BCWA.

Reason for Decision

Given the specialisms of the support, the outcome of the competitive process was that only one application was received, this was from Black Country Women's Aid (BCWA) who had been providing this support in Sandwell for many years.

Alternative Options Considered

If the grant was not extended and subsequently not commissioned, the Council would be left in a position of non-compliance with legislation and leave vulnerable victims without the specialist and bespoke support they need.

There would no other options available to ensure the continuity of provision of bespoke specialist support to victims from 1 April 2021 onwards.

Agreed: -

- (1) that approval be given to the extension of the grant for the provision of community-based support to victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence to Black Country Women's Aid for a period of three years from 1 April 2021 for a value of £287,268 per annum.



- (2) that the Director of Prevention and Protection be authorised to extend the grant referred to in Resolution 1 above, subject to satisfactory monitoring and performance criteria at the end of the current extension.

39/21

Delivering New Homes - Demolition of Obsolete Properties and Acceptance of Tender for the Construction of New Build Council Homes at Albion Road and Bull Lane, West Bromwich

Approval was sought to award a contract for the construction of new build council homes at Albion Road and Bull Lane, West Bromwich to five new council-owned affordable homes that meet Building Regulations and current housing requirements.

Subject to approval and completing contractual arrangements, it was envisaged that works would commence May/June 2021 and be completed Spring 2022.

Reason for Decision

Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules 2018-2019 clause 16.2 provided authority to the Cabinet to award contracts above the value of £250,000. The tender of J. Harper & Sons Ltd., in the sum of £944,163.00, had been checked and found to be technically and arithmetically correct. The successful contractor would work with officers from Building Services/Urban Design in the management of the construction works.

Alternative Options Considered

There was an option to re-tender the scheme and hope for a lower tender return but because the current tenders included in the report, have been sought on a most economic advantageous tender basis through open competition, and three tenders had been returned, it was unlikely that this would have been the case.



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Not awarding the contract would lead to delays for the proposed completion of urgently needed housing and adapted accommodation and have implications for the Council in meeting its commitment to deliver housing outputs and draw down Homes England affordable housing grant.

Agreed: -

- (1) that approval be given to increase the overall project budget to demolish 3 defective dwellings and construct 2 x 2 bedroom bungalows (Albion Road, West Bromwich) and 1 x 2 bedroom M4(3) wheelchair compliant adapted bungalow and 2 x 4 bedroom houses (on land off Bull Lane, West Bromwich) for affordable rent from the estimated budget £904,983.00 approved at Cabinet meeting 7th August 2019 to £1092,463 consisting current tender amount plus fees;
- (2) that the Director Regeneration and Growth be authorised to accept the tender and award a contract to J. Harper & Sons Ltd, in the sum of £944,163.00 for the construction of new build council homes at Albion Road and Bull Lane, West Bromwich;
- (3) that the Interim Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into or execute under seal any documentation in relation to award of the contract and/or other agreements as may be deemed necessary.



40/21

New Contract Award for the Provision of Merchant Acquiring Services

Approval was sought to award a contract to Global Payments for the provision of Merchant Acquiring Services for the period 1 March 2021 to 28 February 2025.

A price comparison of three major suppliers was undertaken by the procurement partner who was satisfied that the most competitively priced provider was Global Payments.

Reason for Decision

The Council had a requirement to establish a new contract for the provision of Merchant Acquiring Services.

The Framework had three service providers. A comparison was undertaken of their pricing structures and the most competitively priced provider was found to be Global Payments.

Alternative Options Considered

The alternative was not to renew the current contract and move into a yearly 'rolling status', which would not comply with the Council's procurement policy. The other alternative was to not accept card payments for goods and services provided by the Council, which would not comply with Council priorities.

Agreed:-

- (1) that approval be given to award a contract to Global Payments for the provision of Merchant Acquiring Services for the period 1 March 2021 to 28 February 2025, at a cost that is partially variable and linked to the number of card transactions processed, based on current usage of 356,308 transactions processed the annual cost is £214,033, but if the number of transactions processed increased by 5% the cost would be £223,232 and if the number of transactions processed increased by 10% the cost would be £233,862.



- (2) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into an appropriate contract with Global Payments.

41/21

Implementation of 2 Boroughwide Public Space Protection Orders in relation to Alcohol and Dog Fouling

Approval was sought to the implementation of two Boroughwide Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) covering alcohol and dog fouling.

Reason for Decision

In October 2017, the Council had introduced four Boroughwide PSPOs; 1 in relation to consumption of alcohol in a public place and 3 in relation to dogs. These were previously in place as a Designated Public Place Order and 3 Dog Control Orders which under the transitional arrangements of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 automatically became Public Space Protections Orders.

PSPOs would last for up to three years and then need to be reviewed. Having undertaken this review and public consultation, it was recommended that two of these PSPOs, those related to alcohol consumption and dog fouling, were renewed.

Alternative Options Considered

Sandwell had controls in place in relation to alcohol and dog fouling for many years. The issues remained public concerns and enforcement figures indicate that they were both still needed and serve a purpose in dealing with these issues and providing reassurance for residents. The PSPOs were supported by partners and would ensure direct action was taken using the most suitable tools and powers as required by the individual situation. It was possible to not renew these powers and deal with any issues individually, but this would will require significant resources and not enable the engagement opportunities that we will have through the use of a PSPO. This was not recommended.



Agreed: -

- (1) that approval be given to the implementation of two Borough-wide Public Space Protection Orders covering the following:

Alcohol: *‘enables authorised officers / constables, where satisfied that nuisance or disorder associated with alcohol is occurring, to require people not to consume alcohol in the area and to surrender any alcohol in their possession. It is an offence to fail to comply with these requirements without reasonable excuse’.*

Dog Fouling: *‘making it an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to pick up the dog’s faeces forthwith should it defecate whilst in their control. Registered disability assistance dogs and their users are exempt from the requirements of this order’*

42/21

West Midlands Collaborative Framework Contract for Works to Highways Structures

Approval was sought to participate in a new West Midlands Collaborative Framework Agreement for the procurement of Works to Highways Structures

Reason for Decision

The benefits from participation in this regional Framework Agreement would include the delivery of the work necessary to maintain Sandwell’s highway structures to a high quality at lower costs through utilising shared resources, adoption of regional best practice, project management principles, and procurement.



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Participants in the Framework Agreement would be able to achieve costs savings and additional benefits through reduction in tendering costs, reduced contract administration, regional innovation, creativity and collaboration; improved customer service, delivery of social value benefits and to improved measurement, recording and promotion in the successful delivery of the outcomes.

Alternative Options Considered

Without a current Highways Structures supplier, the Council would have had to utilise elements of a civil engineering framework contract for urgent service provision, it is not recommended for this specialist area of work or considered to provide best value.

Agreed: -

- (1) that approval be given to participate in a new West Midlands Collaborative Framework Agreement for the procurement of Works to Highways Structures;
- (2) that the Director of Law and Governance be authorised to execute any documents necessary to give effect to the Resolution 1 above.

43/21

West Midlands Vision for Bus – Approval to enter into an Enhanced Partnership

It was reported that the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) approved a strategic Vision for Bus in the West Midlands. The Vision set out bold objectives for improving bus travel across the region. Transport for West Midlands committed to developing these further as part of a delivery plan to ensure the objectives could and would be achieved.



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The programme of bus rapid transit routes, known as Sprint, was central to the objectives. The introduction of the Sprint phase one corridors by the end of 2021 provided a major opportunity for investment by the public and private sector to achieve a step change in public transport that would set the foundations for benefits and improvements across the integrated transport system throughout the region.

The two Sprint routes (A34 and A45) had been identified as a priority for helping to facilitate the transport element of the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Delivering these routes in time for the Commonwealth Games was a commitment that had been made to the Commonwealth Games Federation. Of these two routes, the A34 links Walsall with Birmingham city centre via Scott Arms in Sandwell.

Reason for Decision

The Enhanced Partnership (EP) was recommended by Transport West Midlands as the preferable mechanism to deliver Sprint for the following reasons:

- the ability to implement an EP before the 2022 Commonwealth Games;
- the ability to manage access to infrastructure by Sprint and other bus services;
- the powers to set maximum frequencies or restrict access to only Sprint vehicles on individual route sections (which cannot be achieved with an AQPS);
- the flexibility to trigger a review of the EP at certain points of the EP lifetime (whereas an AQPS has a minimum 5-year lifespan);
- the ability to develop additional EP Schemes at a later date in the region if they are deemed an appropriate mechanism without having to create a new EP Plan;
- supports the timescales for the operating model where commercial operators are required to procure the vehicles for use on the service;
- provides clear accountability for all partners including bus operators



Alternative Options Considered

There were three alternative options; doing nothing, franchising, or entering an advanced quality partnership. An enhanced partnership was considered the best option.

Agreed: -

- (1) that the expected benefits of using an Enhanced Partnership for improving bus travel and in particular the role it plays in the delivery of proposed A34 and A45 Sprint projects be noted;
- (2) that the Enhanced Partnership, in partnership with Transport for West Midlands, other local authorities and local bus operators, be approved;
- (3) that Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Growth, be authorised to formally 'make' the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme respectively, subject to complying with the statutory preparation, notice and consultation requirements of the Bus Services Act 2017.

44/21

A34 Sprint Bus Rapid Transit

With reference to Minute No. 43/21, it was reported that the Sprint would feature;

- dedicated highway infrastructure to give bus priority such as bus lanes, traffic signal modifications. This would reduce journey times and improve reliability;
- high quality stop infrastructure and off-board ticketing for easier/speedier access;
- dedicated branded zero emission Sprint vehicles delivered, paid for and owned by the operator to give improved journey experience and increased public transport profile.



Reason for Decision

The introduction of the Sprint Phase 1 corridors by 2022 provided a major opportunity for investment by the public and private sector to achieve a step change in public transport that would set the foundations for benefits and improvements across the integrated transport system throughout the region.

Two Sprint routes (A34 and A45) had been identified as a priority for helping to facilitate the transport element of the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Delivering these routes in time for the Commonwealth Games was a commitment that had been made to the Commonwealth Games Federation. Of these two routes, the A34 links Walsall with Birmingham city centre via Scott Arms in Sandwell.

Following consultation period, 569 responses were received on the A34 scheme, with 73% fully supporting or partially supporting the scheme and 24% not in support of the proposal. The consultation showed that 81% of responders agreed with the need to provide reliable bus journey times on the route.

Agreed: -

- (1) that the elements of the A34 Sprint Bus Rapid Scheme, Phase 1 within Sandwell as shown on the Drawing Nos scheduled in the appended Agreement with the West Midlands Combined Authority under Section 8 and Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 including the following drawings detailing the main changes in Sandwell as follows be approved;

60599248-ACM-0700-0000-DR-PE-000009	PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 9 PHASE 1)
60599248-ACM-0700-0000-DR-PE-000010	PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 10 PHASE 1)
60599248-ACM-0700-0000-DR-PE-000011	PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 11 PHASE 1)
60599248-ACM-0700-0000-DR-PE-000012	PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (SHEET 12 PHASE 1)
60599248-ACM-0700-0000-DR-PE-000013	PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (PHASE 1)
60599248-ACM-0700-0000-DR-PE-000014	PAVEMENT TREATMENT PLAN (PHASE 1)
SANDWELL DRAWING SHOWING	A34 SPRINT BUS STOP LOCATIONS



- (2) that the Director- of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Growth, be authorised to enter into the appended Agreement with the West Midlands Combined Authority under Section 8 and Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980 for the purposes of delivering the A34 Sprint Bus Rapid Transit scheme.

45/21 Covid Winter Grant Scheme

It was reported that councils were given new funding to ensure that vulnerable households did not go hungry or without essential items over the winter period. The funding allocation to Sandwell was £1,404,606.44.

The scheme had been successfully launched in Sandwell in December 2020 and the demand for the scheme had significantly outstripped the amount of funding available. It was recommended that the underspend on the Covid Council Tax Hardship Fund Grant be used, within the legislative discretions allowed, to enable the Winter Support Grant to be offered to residents until 31 March 2021.

Reason for Decision

The Covid Winter Grant Scheme had enabled local authorities to provide support to families with children and other vulnerable households and individuals from early December 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Alternative Options Considered

A number of alternatives had been considered and presented to Cabinet:

- a 'pause' to applications to the Scheme whilst clearing applications in the system;
- to review and reduce the amounts allocated per claim; and
- to 'close' the Scheme at the end of February 2021.



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The alternative options were not considered suitable, particularly when recognising the high numbers of positive Covid cases in the Borough and numbers of people shielding or clinically extremely vulnerable that needed continued support during lockdown.

Agreed:-

- (1) that the progress of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme be noted;
- (2) that due to the demand for the Covid Winter Grant Scheme, the Executive Director – Children’s Services be authorised to continue the Scheme to 31 March 2021.
- (3) That the Executive Director – Children’s Services be authorised to use the Covid Council Tax Hardship Fund Grant to cover the costs of successful applications to the Covid Winter Grant Scheme until 31 March 2021.

46/21 Cabinet Petitions Committee

The minutes of the Cabinet Petitions Committee held on 20 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and noted.

47/21 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person, including the authority holding that information.



Private Item

48/21

West Bromwich Town Centre Regeneration

Approval was sought to proceed with the application for grant funding to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to enable the future redevelopment of the Bull Street, West Bromwich development site to come forward for housing led regeneration.

Reason for Decision

The additional funding would enable a comprehensive Bull Street development site to come forward for housing led regeneration and provide an opportunity for West Bromwich to improve its offer, by developing a compelling mixed-use investment opportunity for the site.

The £1.3m of WMCA funding already secured was allocated for the delivery of the redevelopment of the Multi Storey Car Park (MSCP) site which was considered as Phase 1. A Phase 2 funding grant application agreement would be for a further grant from the WMCA to cover the additional land assembly costs which would expand the scope of the scheme, assist with viability and enable a more comprehensive scheme with improved outcomes to come forward.

Alternative Options Considered

Consideration was given to acquiesce any commercial or developer interest and let the private sector attempt to acquire the interests. This may have resulted in the shopping centre being retained as an investment or remain locked (due to complex ownership structures) for the foreseeable future as without public sector grant the financial appraisals suggest any residential led redevelopment would not viable.



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Agreed:-

- (1) that the Interim Director – Regeneration and Growth be authorised to proceed with the application for grant funding to the West Midlands Combined Authority to enable the future redevelopment of the site illustrated on Site Plan 1 utilising the funds released to acquire ownership and control of the Queen Square Shopping Centre, West Bromwich together with the adjacent cleared site and work up a combined business case for the sites comprehensive redevelopment (inclusive of the former Bull Street Multi Storey Car Park site) aligned to the Council's masterplan for the area;
- (2) that the Director – Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised in consultation with the Head of Finance and subject to a Financial Appraisal by the Strategic Investment Unit, enter into or execute under seal, if necessary, the new funding agreement and to complete the acquisition of the Shopping Centre and cleared site on terms and conditions to be negotiated by the Interim Director – Regeneration and Growth;
- (3) that the Interim Director – Regeneration and Growth is authorised, in consultation with the Head of Finance, to consult the public, town centre stakeholders and industry experts to further develop a comprehensive and detailed business case for the redevelopment of the Bull Street, West Bromwich area to determine its feasibility and bring a preferred option proposal back to Cabinet for a final investment decision in advance of the business case and Masterplan for redevelopment being presented to the West Midlands Combined Authority;



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- (4) that the Interim Director – Regeneration and Growth and the Head of Finance be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economic Growth, to enter into further negotiations with the West Midlands Combined Authority and any applicable third parties as may be appropriate in order to secure funding and agree the terms of any acquisitions and property transactions necessary to facilitate the comprehensive regeneration proposed.

Meeting ended at 4.35pm

To watch this meeting go to [YouTube](#)

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