

Open

Cabinet

Agenda

**To be held remotely
6pm
Tuesday, 10th November 2020**



Cabinet

The Cabinet Members and their responsibilities:-

Councillor G Ballinger	Leader of the Council & Strategy & Finance
Councillor F Oborski MBE	Deputy Leader & Economic Regeneration, Planning & Capital Investments
Councillor N Martin	Housing, Health, Well-being & Democratic Services
Councillor H Dyke	Culture, Leisure & Community Protection
Councillor J Thomas	Operational Services

Scrutiny of Decisions of the Cabinet

The Council has one Scrutiny Committee that has power to investigate policy issues and question members of the Cabinet who have special responsibility for a particular area of the Council's activities. The Cabinet also considers recommendations from this Committee.

In accordance with Section 10 of the Council's Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, and Standing Order 2.4 of Section 7, any item on this agenda may be scrutinised by the Scrutiny Committee if it is "called in" by the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and any other three non-Cabinet members.

The deadline for "calling in" Cabinet decisions is 5pm on Friday 20th November 2020.

Councillors wishing to "call in" a decision on this agenda should contact Louisa Bright, Principal Committee and Member Services Officer, Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster. Telephone: 01562 732763 or email louisa.bright@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Urgent Key Decisions

If the Cabinet needs to take an urgent key decision, the consent of the Scrutiny Committee Chairman must be obtained. If the Scrutiny Committee Chairman is unable to act the Chairman of the Council or in his/her absence the Vice-Chairman of the Council, must give consent. Such decisions will not be the subject to the call in procedure.

Declaration of Interests by Members – interests of members in contracts and other matters

Declarations of Interest are a standard item on every Council and Committee agenda and each Member must provide a full record of their interests in the Public Register.

In addition, alongside the Register of Interest, the Members Code of Conduct ("the Code") requires the Declaration of Interests at meetings. Members have to decide first whether or not they have a disclosable interest in the matter under discussion.

Please see the Members' Code of Conduct as set out in Section 14 of the Council's constitution for full details.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) / Other Disclosable Interest (ODI)

DPI's and ODI's are interests defined in the Code of Conduct that has been adopted by the District.

If you have a DPI (as defined in the Code) in a matter being considered at a meeting of the Council (as defined in the Code), the Council's Standing Orders require you to leave the room where the meeting is held, for the duration of any discussion or voting on that matter.

If you have an ODI (as defined in the Code) you will need to consider whether you need to leave the room during the consideration of the matter.

1. The Cabinet meeting is open to the public except for any exempt/confidential items. These items are normally discussed at the end of the meeting. Where a meeting is held remotely, “open” means available for live or subsequent viewing.
2. Members of the public will be able to hear and see the meetings by a live stream on the Council's website:

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For further information

If you have any queries about this Agenda or require any details of background papers, further documents or information you should contact Louisa Bright, Principal Committee and Member Services Officer, Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster, DY11 7WF. Telephone: 01562 732763 or email louisa.bright@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Documents referred to in this agenda may be viewed on the Council's website - www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/council/meetings/main.htm

Wyre Forest District Council

Cabinet

Tuesday, 10th November 2020

To be held remotely

Part 1

Open to the press and public

Agenda item	Subject	Page Number
1.	Apologies for Absence	
2.	Declarations of Interests by Members In accordance with the Code of Conduct, to invite Members to declare the existence and nature of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI's) and / or Other Disclosable Interests (ODI's) in the following agenda items and indicate the action that they will be taking when the item is considered. Please see the Members' Code of Conduct as set out in Section 14 of the Council's Constitution for full details.	
3.	Minutes To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on the 16th September 2020.	7
4.	CALL INS a verbal update will be given on any decisions which have been "called in" since the last meeting of the Cabinet.	
5.	Items Requiring Urgent Attention To consider any item which, in the opinion of the Chairman requires consideration at the meeting as a matter of urgency.	
6.	Public Participation In accordance with the Council's Scheme for Public Speaking at Meetings of Full Council/Cabinet, to allow members of the public to present petitions, ask questions, or make statements, details of which have been received by 12 noon on Monday 2 nd November 2020. (See front cover for contact details).	

7.		
	Councillor G Ballinger	
7.1	Financial and Strategic Policy Context for the Medium Term Financial Strategy To consider a report from the Chief Executive on the financial and policy context that will shape the medium term financial strategy for 2021-2024.	14
7.2	Capital Strategy: Review of the Functional Economic Geography To consider a report from the Corporate Director: Resources and the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place to agree temporary arrangements for the acquisition geography for the Capital Portfolio Fund during the uncertain times brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic. To also consider recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 5 th November 2020 (to follow).	27
7.3	Write-off of Amounts Outstanding Report To consider a report from the Corporate Director: Resources to enable the Cabinet to give consideration to writing off the sum of £107,071.23 in respect of debts that cannot be collected.	35

8.		
	Councillor N Martin	
8.1	Report following consultation on homeworking To consider a report from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place which seeks to agree responses to the recently completed homeworking consultation and to agree the recommendations to Council in December. To also consider recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 5 th November 2020 (to follow).	40
8.2	Green Homes Fund - Local Authority Delivery Scheme To consider a report from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place to recommend amending the Capital Programme to enable the distribution of the Green Homes Grant. To also consider recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 5 th November 2020 (to follow).	67

9.		
9.1	<p style="text-align: right;">Councillor H Dyke</p> <p>Establishment of Museum Trust</p> <p>To consider a report from the Chief Executive to agree the steps necessary to establish Bewdley Museum as a fully independent trust.</p> <p>To also consider recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 5th November 2020 (to follow).</p>	70

10.	To consider any other business, details of which have been communicated to the Solicitor to the Council before the commencement of the meeting, which the Chairman by reason of special circumstances considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting.	
11.	<p>Exclusion of the Press and Public</p> <p>To consider passing the following resolution:</p> <p>“That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of “exempt information” as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act”.</p>	

Part 2

Not open to the Press and Public

12.		
12.1	<p>Agenda Item No. 7.2 - Capital Strategy: Review of the Functional Economic Geography</p> <p>Appendix 1 – Capital Portfolio Fund acquisition criteria matrix</p>	
13.	To consider any other business, details of which have been communicated to the Solicitor to the Council before the commencement of the meeting, which the Chairman by reason of special circumstances considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting.	

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CABINET
HELD REMOTELY
16TH SEPTEMBER 2020 (6 PM)**

Present:

Councillors: G W Ballinger (Chairman), F M Oborski MBE (Vice-Chairman), H E Dyke, N Martin and J W R Thomas.

Observers:

Councillors: N J Desmond, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, M J Hart, C Rogers and L Whitehouse.

CAB.23 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

CAB.24 Declarations of Interests by Members

Councillor M Hart declared, in respect of agenda item 8.1 - Section 106 Planning Viability Priorities, that he is the Cabinet Member for Education on Worcestershire County Council. He is covered by a generic dispensation but made the declaration for openness and transparency.

CAB.25 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 7th July 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CAB.26 Call Ins

No decisions had been called in since the last Cabinet meeting.

Councillor L Whitehouse joined the meeting at 6.04pm.

CAB.27 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There were no items requiring urgent attention.

CAB.28 Public Participation

In accordance with the Council's scheme for public speaking at meetings of Cabinet, the following member of the public addressed the meeting at this point: Lisa Taylor

Public Space Protection Orders were implemented for Councils to deal with

Agenda Item No. 3

antisocial behaviour which have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life for those in the local community within defined areas.

Councillor Dyke advised the majority of dog owners are responsible. West Mercia Police and WFDC provided no factual evidence of multiple dog related incidents, as required by the Home Office PSPO Guidelines.

Research shows that only 5% of the nation own more than three dogs so this PSPO limit will target an extreme minority of dog owners. Owners of multiple dogs train to a higher standard and more regularly, and understand far more about dog behaviour.

I ensure my four dogs are fully cared for within and above the guidelines of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and comply with English law. The impact this PSPO will have on me personally is I will be in breach of it just getting my dogs safely in and out of the house to my street parked car. During the dark mornings and nights, I will no longer be able to pavement walk all my dogs together, thus risking my personal safety twice. Should Government implement a lockdown of one walk a day again, I will be unable to exercise all my dogs.

Dog walking businesses will be seriously impacted as it will not be financially viable to be limited to three dogs and I and other owners of multiple dogs will not be able to afford the extra costs to procure this service. This PSPO also directly conflicts with the WFDC Animal Activity Licence limit of 6 dogs.

This PSPO will severely impede owners of more than three dogs maintaining their dogs' welfare under the 2006 Act as it is disproportionate and geographically covers the whole 75 square miles of WFDC.

The WFDC consultation survey garnered 192 responses for a limit of three dogs. Our Petition has received over 2,800 responses to rescind this limit, 555 of which are from the WFDC area and 285 from those who visit from neighbouring areas.

Furthermore, a PSPO for dog control is not required as The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 covers the criminal offence of allowing a dog of any breed to be dangerously out of control.

The Kennel Club endorse a maximum of 6 dogs. Insurance Companies allow 6 dogs. Defra allow 6 dogs. Forestry England allows 6 dogs AND your own WFDC Animal Activity Licence allows 6 dogs.

Only if absolutely required by Councillors, an interim compromise during the WFDC six month review period for the PSPO could be to restrict off lead dogs to three per person within clearly defined areas.

In summary, rescinding or amending the limit of dogs for this PSPO will not be detrimental to any of the aims and objectives of WFDC to promote Greener Living Spaces and responsible dog ownership. It will, however, be extremely detrimental to the victimised minority and more importantly the dogs in their care. Thank you for hearing our voices.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Protection thanked

Lisa Taylor for the petition and the points that she had made. The Cabinet Member gave a brief reminder of the legislative framework and chronological process for the public spaces protection orders (PSPOs) which were agreed by the Cabinet in July; one of which related to the control of dogs.

She explained that in July Cabinet decided under section 59 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to make a PSPO that continued the previous Wyre Forest PSPO in respect of dogs and extended its effect by adding some new controls. She said the decision was taken by the Cabinet after appropriate local consultation and after considering a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which supported the making of the order. The Act does not prescribe the exact form of what constitutes an appropriate consultation, but it makes it clear that the following must be consulted; Police and Crime Commissioner; Chief Officer of Police for the local area; any Community representatives the Council feels appropriate; and owners or occupiers of land within the restricted area, such as local businesses.

She added that the Council consulted on the proposed Public Space Protection Order between 12 May 2020 and 15 June 2020 and over 860 responses to the consultation were received from a range of stakeholders including individuals, local organisations, town and parish councils and representative bodies. The Dogs Trust was directly contacted by the Council as part of the consultation.

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Protection further explained that the proposal about limiting the number of dogs that one person may have under their control was debated at length in both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet. She said the Cabinet accepted the Committee's recommendation that the PSPO should be made and that it should be reviewed 6 months after implementation, with the results of the review to be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee; as part of the review Cabinet committed to consider the comments from the Committee in regards to professional dog walkers.

She said it was clear the decision in July was made after thorough consultation and extensive debate by Councillors from all groups. She added that, despite the fact that many local residents had signed the petition presented at the meeting, it would not be appropriate to change the decision that Cabinet made in July. She said there was a consultation process that ran for a specified period and, if the Cabinet were to take a different decision now in light of the petition, it would rightly stand accused of accepting a late representation from only one side of the argument. That would result in an imbalanced process and, she believed, would expose the Council to greater risk of successful challenge.

Decision: Cabinet noted the petition and reaffirmed the decision of 7th July 2020, in respect of the Review of Public Space Protection Orders regarding dog controls.

Councillor L Whitehouse left the meeting at 6.22pm.

CAB.29 Budget Monitoring First Quarter 2020-21

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Resources which provided a briefing for members on the Council's financial performance for quarter 1 ending 30th June 2020 and presented the current projected outturn position for the 2020-21 financial year. The report provided forecasts on the capital programme 2020-21 and the final capital outturn for 2019-20 against programme.

The Leader introduced the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. He said that the report builds on the May and July Cabinet reports on Financial Stress Testing re Coronavirus Pandemic Impact.

He said, in addition to the usual information presented in the Quarterly Budget Monitoring reports, the report provided key information relating to estimates of the Council's financial position for the next three years, highlighting the scale of the revised funding gap that the authority would need to close to bring expenditure into line with income.

The Leader outlined the key points from the report. He explained that the Government had announced a raft of financial assistance initiatives to help the community, businesses and local authorities through the pandemic; this included £22.5m Business Rate Grants, £952k Hardship Fund for Council Tax payers, £15.7m of business rate reliefs and £1.153m discretionary grant funding. He said that the authority had been extremely efficient and speedy in distributing this help to businesses and council tax payers as the various press releases have shown.

He said, whilst all of this was very welcome, the Council like Councils up and down the country is still facing significant financial difficulties that are not likely to be covered by additional funding, which results in a large increase in the funding gap and negative reserves during 2022-23. He added that the prospect for the Government providing full funding to mitigate losses is low and cannot be relied upon. It must therefore be assumed that the Council's reserves will be used at a faster rate than predicted in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), the funding gap will increase and a more radical approach will be necessary to accelerate the savings.

In conclusion, he said the Council undoubtedly needs to become a smaller organisation with fewer staff if financial sustainability was to be achieved. As set out in section 11.3 of the report, decisive action is needed to agree a plan of action for what changes the Council now wishes to pursue. He said this will take time, resolve and resource but cannot be delayed. The MTFS report in December of this year will set out the proposed savings plans; change will be required on an ongoing basis as soon as it is possible to implement it.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments seconded the proposals.

In response to a member question regarding the extra costs as a result of the Bridge Street planning decision, the Leader confirmed that the decision had been reached after considerable debate in the Planning Committee, and the

Progressive Alliance would not be seeking to overturn the decision of the Planning Committee.

Decision: Cabinet DECIDED to:

- 1.1 NOTE the projected budget variations and comments outlined within the report and appendices 2 to 5.**
- 1.2 NOTE the exercise of delegated powers granted to the Corporate Director: Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategy and Finance to use General Reserves to replace reduced income and increased expenditure as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic that is not covered by government funding and APPROVE that this delegation is extended to the end of December 2020.**
- 1.3 AGREE that a decisive savings plan to address the significant deterioration in the Council's finances be formulated as a priority and included in the December Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) or that earlier reports are taken as appropriate.**

CAB.30 Section 106 Planning Viability Priorities

A report was considered from the Head of Strategic Growth to agree the prioritisation of allocating funding achieved through planning obligations across the various elements (such as education, highways and affordable housing) on sites where there is a shortfall in meeting the costs of all obligations following a viability assessment.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments presented the report. She explained that the amount of s106 contribution allocated to each prioritised element will differ from site to site and will be subject to detailed negotiations undertaken by the Planning Officer on behalf of the Council. She added that, where it was the case that not all policy requirements could be met, the proposal was that Officers would prioritise in the following order: namely on and/or off site infrastructure necessary to make the development acceptable; affordable housing; open space and recreation; education; and other stakeholder contribution requests such as infrastructure costs associated with health provision or the police. She added that sadly there had been quite a few occasions across Worcestershire where the NHS had actually tried to get s106 to cover its running costs which is not acceptable.

She further explained that the proposals are what the authority intends to use going forward, if and until the Government's August 2020 published white paper 'Planning for the Future' actually comes into effect. She said the white paper proposed a number of changes to the current system of planning obligations including a nationally set value-based flat rate charge, which would replace both Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL - which the authority has not yet implemented within the district) and planning s106 obligations.

She added that s106 was incredibly important as it was these obligations that actually get the authority most of its affordable housing within the district. She

formally moved the recommendations for approval.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services seconded the proposals. She said the s106 planning obligations were very much needed to address the affordable housing need in Wyre Forest.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor M Hart, said that, after considerable debate, the Committee endorsed the priority list set out in the report and fully supported the Cabinet proposals.

Decision: In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 8th September 2020:

Cabinet DECIDED that the priority list set out in paragraph 4.10 of the report is used to determine the allocation of s106 obligations where the viability of sites is deemed to be such that not all policy requirements can be met.

CAB.31 Response to Planning Consultations

A report was considered from the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place to agree responses to the two Government consultations on the planning system; 'Planning for the Future' and 'Changes to the current planning system'.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments presented the report and formally moved the recommendations for approval. She said that in August the Government announced two consultations on changes to the planning system; a 'root and branch' overhaul of the planning system in a white paper entitled 'Planning for the Future', the deadline for which responses have to be submitted is 29th October 2020; and a more detailed series of changes to the existing planning system entitled 'Changes to the current planning system' for which responses are required to be submitted by 1st October 2020.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments explained that Government's 'new vision for England's planning system' was structured around five proposals, and the consultation was then structured around three pillars; namely planning for development; planning for beautiful and sustainable places; and planning for infrastructure and connected places.

She commended the work of the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place and his team for the very thorough and well thought out draft consultation responses set out in the appendices to the report.

She explained that, if the Government's proposals were agreed, the new standardised methodology for deciding housing requirements would not affect Wyre Forest during its current Local Plan that has been submitted for examination: it would only come in once the new Local Plan, having been approved, was up for revision, and therefore would not affect the authority for the first three to four years.

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The Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Well-being and Democratic Services seconded the proposals.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the recommendations from the Committee. He thanked the Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place for the very comprehensive set of responses and for adding in the comments and encapsulating what was proposed by the Committee.

Decision: In line with the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from its meeting on 8th September 2020:

Cabinet AGREED the draft consultation responses for formal submission.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.24pm.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
10TH NOVEMBER 2020

**FINANCIAL AND STRATEGIC POLICY CONTEXT FOR THE MEDIUM TERM
FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Graham Ballinger, Leader of the Council and
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Ian Miller, Chief Executive
APPENDICES:	Appendix 1: summary of residents' survey, September 2020

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the financial and policy context that will shape the medium term financial strategy for 2021-2024.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Cabinet is asked to **AGREE** the suggested approach to the medium term financial strategy set out in section 4 below, and that this should now be the subject of consultation prior to the Cabinet taking final decisions on its proposals for the strategy at its meeting in December.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The medium term financial strategy for 2021-24 will be prepared against the backdrop of the most challenging circumstances facing Wyre Forest and the nation since the Second World War. The backdrop includes:
- (a) a significant worsening of the Council's financial position as a result of the COVID pandemic. Table 1 below estimates the total adverse impact as £875k in the current financial year, potentially rising to £1.45m in 2021-22 if the Government does not announce further funding support for local government next year. The main impact felt by the Council is loss of income, including within the collection fund, although there have been some additional costs.

Table 1: financial impact of COVID on Wye Forest District Council

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	2020-21 £	2021-22 £	2022-23 £
COVID-19 - Additional Costs/Lost Income			
Additional Costs	1,239,960		
Loss of non Collection Fund Income	2,619,000	792,500	
Loss of HB Overpayments/bad debt provision	290,000	145,000	
Loss of WFDC share of Council Tax (including extra CTRS costs)	474,110	237,060	
Loss of WFDC share of Business Rates	1,305,000	326,250	
Expenditure in relation to EDRF Town Centre Funding	90,196		
Other reduced costs and extra income as a result of Covid (extra income from Garden Waste, printing and energy cost savings)	- 86,200	- 76,200	- 76,200
Total COVID Additional Costs/Lost Income	5,932,066	1,424,610	- 76,200
Government Funding not pass ported			
Total COVID Government Funding	- 3,277,606	-	-
Other COVID Related Variances			
Spread of 2020-21 Collection Fund Losses over 3 years	- 1,779,110	593,040	593,040
Ongoing Collection Fund Losses (accounted for in year after they occur)		- 563,310	563,310
Total Other COVID Related Variances	- 1,779,110	29,730	1,156,350
TOTAL ESTIMATE OF NET IMPACT - COVID-19	875,350	1,454,340	1,080,150

- (b) the wider impact of the COVID pandemic on local residents and businesses, which is being felt in the local economy. The human price is being paid not just by those who have been seriously ill, suffered mental ill health or have sadly died but also as measured in the adverse impact on jobs and wages and business closures. The number of claimants of job seekers allowance has increased from 1,470 in September 2019 to 3,685 in September 2020 (+151%); of those, younger claimants aged 18 to 24 have increased from 430 to 735 (+171%). The increases have occurred before the furlough scheme came to an end. The number of working age households claiming council tax reduction support has increased by over 10%, from 4369 in early February to 4839 at the end of September. The three tier system of restrictions was introduced on 14 October and is expected to apply for some months;
- (c) the nature of the UK's trade deal (if any) with the European Union following the transition period remains uncertain at the time of writing. If a trade deal cannot be reached for January 2021, most commentators predict further adverse impacts for the UK economy in the short- to medium-term. While Wyre Forest will not be directly impacted by disruption that might occur around ports, local residents and businesses may suffer interruptions in supply chains across the range of goods and products. Costs of products imported from the EU may rise and, conversely, firms exporting to the EU may find that demand for their products falls as a result of tariffs. An absence of a trade deal is highly likely to worsen the local economic impacts of COVID;
- (d) the autumn budget was cancelled. A comprehensive spending review "in the last weeks of November" will set one year budgets, and this apparently will include local government funding. It contrasts with the promise that "Multi-year NHS and schools' resource settlements will be fully funded" and that "areas crucial to our economic recovery have their budgets set for further years so they can plan and help us Build

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Back Better". Bizarrely, this includes the NHS which seems far from central in economic recovery compared to the role that councils play. In the medium- to longer-term, financial commentators are predicting that there will be a return to austerity to help pay for the costs of the extra borrowing if the Government respects its manifesto commitment not to increase the main taxes including VAT and income tax. The contribution that economic recovery will make to growth in Government tax yields is, at best, uncertain. What all this means for public services including local government will probably not emerge until the budget or a further comprehensive spending review in 2021 or later;

- (e) it is not known when the provisional local government settlement for 2021-22 will be published although it is expected to be in December. In many respects, it is expected to "roll over" the arrangements from 2020-21 (just as they were rolled over from the previous year) but there has been no information about key issues such as whether the total level of Government grant will increase; whether councils will be given greater flexibility about their decisions on council tax or whether new homes bonus will continue;
- (f) a wide-ranging programme of Government policy initiatives that affect the Council. They include significant potential adverse changes to the Council's role in respect of planning arising from the proposals in the planning white paper. The Environment Bill continues to progress through Parliament and will demand major changes to the waste collection service, with a requirement for separate food waste collections from 2023;
- (g) Ministerial enthusiasm for devolution accompanied by reorganisation into unitary authorities – which was to be articulated in a devolution and local economic recovery white paper in September - was high in July but had evaporated by early October. It has been made clear that the Government would not be adopting a top-down approach and that the devolution white paper had been delayed until 2021. In a note from the Secretary of State, councillors were told that – except for North Yorkshire, Cumbria and Somerset, where councils have been invited to submit proposals - "given the pressures councils face this winter with the pandemic, I believe it would not be right at this time for them to further progress or focus on ideas for reform. The pandemic has rightly necessitated resources across Whitehall being re-allocated to tackling Covid, and this must be Whitehall's and town halls' number one priority at present." If reorganisation was to happen in the three areas mentioned, it would be likely to be implemented in 2023. The process in any other areas would take even longer, and there has been no indication that Worcestershire councils are likely to pursue such a course. Thus the medium term financial strategy cannot assume that local government reorganisation will intervene in the period before 2024 and obviate the need for the Council to take major steps to address its financial position.

- 3.2 The financial situation facing the Council remains stark. Table 2 below sets out the present estimates of the Council's income and expenditure and the financial gap that needs to be closed. These are the figures reported to Cabinet in September and have been updated to take account of the funding announced by Government on 22 October. They will be further updated before the report to Cabinet in December. They demonstrate that, if the Council did nothing to address its financial situation beyond existing plans, it would run out of reserves before March 2023, the second year of the

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next medium term financial strategy. The table demonstrates why major change is now required to reduce expenditure.

Table 2 – medium term financial strategy: current summary of funding gap and reserves (October 2020)

	2020-21 £	2021-22 £	2022-23 £
Overall Adverse Variance Q1	1,001,000	1,510,390	1,015,320
Revised Funding Gap July 2020	1,710,320	3,018,150	2,750,750
Previous savings Gap April 2020	959,320	1,507,760	1,735,430
Increase in Funding Gap - increase in take from reserves*	751,000	1,510,390	1,015,320

Revised Projection of Reserves - Revised for 2019-20 Final Accounts Saving			
	2020-21 £'000	2021-22 £'000	2022-23 £'000
Reserves Statement			
Reserves as at 1st April	4,833	3,597	1,673
Increase to Working Balance			
Contribution (from)/to Reserves	(1,236)	(1,924)	(1,850)
Reserves as at 31st March	3,597	1,673	(178)

- 3.3 A residents' survey was undertaken in September and the summary results are presented in Appendix 1. Across the questions that can be compared with the 2019 survey, perceptions of the Council have moved in a positive direction. This is welcome and perhaps derived from a better understanding of the Council's role and services during the lockdown period. Residents' responses confirm the widely expected impact on the retail sector: while people will make more use of online shopping, they also expect to undertake more shopping locally which might perhaps soften some of the long-term impact of the COVID pandemic on the district's town centres.
- 3.4 Despite the lack of clarity being provided by central Government at present, a detailed medium term financial strategy for 2021-2024 will be produced for the Cabinet's consideration at its December meeting. This will benefit from input from, and scrutiny by, all political groups through the Strategic Review Panel. The strategy will be shaped by the public consultation on the issues raised below including a review of the corporate plan priorities.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Council has done exceptionally well in generating additional income and implementing efficiency savings that have put back the date at which it has to bring its expenditure into line with income. However, in the absence of additional Government funding and if the Council takes no further actions beyond those already agreed, the impact of COVID-19 is that the Council will exhaust its general balances within the lifetime of the MTFS, by the end of March 2023.
- 4.2 The Council's financial position requires more radical and rapid action than in the past. In summary, the Council is going to have to become a much smaller organisation, that seeks to deliver fewer services itself or even at all. This will allow it to close the financial gap by bolder and more ambitious steps than incremental changes in:
- growing income;
 - efficiency; and
 - alternative service delivery models.

While the Cabinet is asked to authorise consultation on various issues below, it is councillors who ultimately have to take decisions which will be informed by the public response but also by other factors such as their political priorities and the necessity to act to address the financial gap. It is not possible to commit in advance therefore simply to adopt whatever response the public provides.

Priorities in the corporate plan

- 4.3 Before turning to those bolder and more ambitious steps, it is first appropriate to consider the priorities set in the Corporate Plan that was adopted in September 2019 and the level of council tax. The plan has three priorities:
- A safe, clean and green living environment
 - Supporting a successful local economy
 - Good quality and affordable homes for all
- 4.4 In line with the direction of becoming a smaller council, it would be appropriate to reduce the number of priorities as this will signal that the Council is not going to carry on trying to do everything that it does now. The consultation with the public will therefore ask them to choose which two of the three priorities should be retained: the results will be reported to the Cabinet meeting in December, so that it can consider recommending changes to the corporate plan that take account of the public's views as far as possible.

Council tax

- 4.5 The corporate plan's value of "be honest" requires the Council to be candid and direct in explaining its position and the choices it faces. A good example is council tax, which is an important element of the funding for the Council's work. The Council is going to become a smaller organisation but council tax will increase, faster than inflation. In recent years, the Council's share of council tax has grown much less in absolute and percentage terms than other bodies and the District Council is not responsible for their decisions although local residents see "Wyre Forest District Council" at the top of their council tax bills. Because the District Council collects

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council tax for the county council, police, fire and parish councils, the public is often misled into thinking that the total average bill at Band D of £1880 in 2020 is the responsibility of Wyre Forest District Council, when its element is only £219 or 12% of the total bill, the equivalent of £4.22 a week.

- 4.6 Total council tax bills have increased ahead of the rate of inflation in recent years. One of the main reasons has been the introduction of the adult social care precept to help fund social services provided by Worcestershire County Council. It was first payable in 2017 at £21.60 for a Band D property and has since grown to £116.04 in 2020. The county council's element of council tax, including the adult social care precept, increased by £50.30 in 2020. There was a further substantial increase in the precept issued by the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia in 2020, which added £8.54 at Band D: the police element of council tax exceeded the District Council element for the first time in 2019. It will be seen that the county council and police increases in 2020 were both significantly higher in cash terms than the District Council's increase of £5 – the maximum increase allowed by the Government's criteria.
- 4.7 For five of the ten years between 2011 and 2020, the District Council's element of council tax was frozen. At Band D, the District Council's element of council tax increased from £197.62 in 2010-11 to £219.34 in 2020-21, an increase of £21.72 or 11%, significantly lower than inflation across that period. As can be seen, **the District Council's increase over 10 years is significantly lower than the cash increase decided by the county council for 2020-21 alone.**
- 4.8 It is hoped that the Government will realise that councils' response to the impact of COVID on their finances, and its apparent commitment to devolution, should be reflected in a relaxation of limits on the council tax increases that councils decide, despite what was said in the manifesto for the December 2019 general election. At present, the MTFS assumes that the Council will continue to increase council tax by £5 a year. The Cabinet is minded to propose increasing the district element of council tax at the highest rate permissible without triggering a referendum on an "excessive" council tax increase. For example, if the Council was able to increase council tax by, say, £8 or £10 at Band D, this would represent an increase of about 4% or 5% and represent only 40p-50p a week for households that pay their full council tax bill – most households in the district would pay less than that as the average property is at Band B. The public's views on this approach will be sought in the consultation.
- 4.9 While the Cabinet's proposal is that all residents should be asked to pay a little more than now for the District Council's services, it does not consider it appropriate to add further to the burden of the poorest working age residents. They have to pay a minimum contribution of 20% of council tax. Following the review of this issue last year, the Cabinet does not intend to propose changing the minimum contribution although there will need to be a formal decision not to undertake a review of the scheme for 2021, in accordance with the legislation.

A smaller council, protecting front line services

- 4.10 The thrust of the Cabinet's proposals for the medium term financial strategy will centre on making the Council a smaller organisation while protecting essential front line services. The proposals outlined below is bold and ambitious and would take

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time to implement in full. However it is expected to be achievable to implement most or all the changes outlined before the next elections in 2023. The Council will not be able to grow its way out of a financial gap of this scale by increasing commercial income in that timeframe: while opportunities remain in some areas such as trade waste, many other areas of income have been severely impacted by COVID and are not expected to recover, let alone allow scope for growth. In simplistic terms, the financial gap could be closed by reducing the Council's net expenditure by about 15%-20% and, because staff costs are the largest single controllable cost within the Council's budget, this would translate into reducing the workforce by about 20% or 70 posts. Such a reduction could not fall evenly – it is not possible to reduce the number of waste collectors, for example (indeed, over time, in the absence of robotic solutions, they will increase because of Government plans to require separate food waste collections and because of growth in housing across the district). But a major reduction of staffing across most areas of the Council would not be realistic. In many areas, workload would not fall by 20% and it is not considered realistic to expect that such gains in efficiency, given past reductions in staffing, are likely to be achievable. The Council cannot assume that there will be a 20% reduction in planning applications, requests for help with homelessness or applications for welfare support, for example, and that it can therefore dispense with an equivalent proportion of staff working on such functions.

- 4.11 Thus the approaches outlined below would be aimed at seeking a similar financial impact. These would require detailed business cases and negotiations with other organisations and are not going to emerge overnight. The Council will operate its usual approaches when implementing change: consultation with affected staff and unions when there are clear proposals, applying the Council's policy on redeployment in order to avoid redundancies if possible, and compliance with the TUPE regulations where relevant in terms of transferring staff on their existing terms and conditions to other organisations. While every effort will be made to avoid compulsory redundancies, it is unrealistic to expect that there will be no job losses across the period of the MTFS. However the detailed impact in terms of what it will mean for staff and other aspects of service delivery cannot be predicted as this will emerge only when detailed proposals for implementation are brought for decision. Given the potential for significant job losses over the period of the medium term financial strategy, this will require use of reserves to fund exit costs which could extend to about £2 million across the period. Other incremental and modest changes to services and structures will continue to be brought forward and implemented as they are in every year: where it becomes apparent that cost reductions can be sought by reshaping existing teams or management structures, that will be done. Likewise the Council will continue to roll out ever wider use of digital or other technological solutions to reduce costs.
- 4.12 Building on the localism work with town councils and a self-standing museum trust (see separate report on tonight's agenda), and the Council's existing successful shared services such as Worcestershire Regulatory Services, the Cabinet will seek to shift a wider range of services to alternative delivery models. In effect, this might have a result akin to the commissioning model adopted by other councils and at its furthest extreme could see only a very small core of staff directly employed by the Council. To enable early progress and implementation of any proposals that involve other councils, the Cabinet will not be actively seeking to host services if that issue would be a barrier and will therefore be ready to pass day-to-day management and

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control to other councils (apart from policy, contractually specified service levels and any areas where councillors are involved in decision-making, such as the planning committee). While the Council would not insist on hosting any new shared service, it would require fair competition processes to fill relevant posts in such a service so that talented WFDC staff would have the opportunity to further their careers in a new setting.

- 4.13 The Cabinet plans to examine the scope for the vast majority of services currently provided solely for the district by WFDC staff to be the subject of shared services with another council or councils in Worcestershire or other organisations. This will include the possibility of joint venture vehicles with the private sector and the option of a joint waste collection and disposal authority. Outsourcing to the private sector will also be available as an option in some cases such as revenues & benefits or waste collection. Options for the nature reserves and rangers include transfer to another council or relevant voluntary sector body. This process could involve the transfer of relevant assets to other organisations or their placing in joint venture vehicles. Table 3 summarises the range of options that is believed to be relevant to the main service areas.

Table 3: potential alternative delivery options to be examined

(Existing shared services are not listed as they are already in alternative delivery models.)

	Shared service with other council(s) or other organisation	Joint venture	Outsourcing to private sector	Transfer to voluntary sector
Waste collection, street scene, toilets, garage	X	X	X	
Civil enforcement, community safety	X	X	?	
Grounds maintenance, tree work	X	X	X	
Nature reserves & ranger service	X	?		X
Housing & homelessness	X	?		
Forward planning	X	?		
Development management	X	?		
Revenues, benefits, customer services	X	?	X	

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Support services (finance, audit, ICT, HR, legal etc.)	X	X	X	
Elections & committee support	X	?		

- 4.14 Other tools to reduce the size of the Council will be pursued. The Cabinet believes that Wyre Forest should seek to avoid the additional cost of preparing its own local plan every five years. The work on a new plan has to start soon after each plan is adopted and costs a six figure sum in consultancy reports alone. Thus, to cover future plan periods after the current proposed plan has been adopted, the Cabinet is minded to recommend to Council that it should seek partners for a joint local plan, whether for North Worcestershire or even the whole of Worcestershire, in order to reduce staffing and consultancy costs.
- 4.15 The localism agenda is expected over time to reduce the role for a number of District Council teams, including support services, grounds maintenance and toilet maintenance, as town councils and the museum trust make their own arrangements. The reduction in scale of these teams may require other action, for example if it is no longer feasible to carry on undertaking highways verges work on behalf of the county council – maintaining the verges is the latter council's statutory responsibility and the District Council presently has to subsidise it, so returning the work to the county council would allow the subsidy to end.
- 4.16 The Cabinet is minded to end a range of discretionary activities where possible. Therefore it will not be proposing continuation of the community leadership fund (which would add £33k to the Council's costs in 2021-22) and will propose no further additions to the community grants fund (as they would also add to the council's costs). Worthwhile community groups and charities now need to seek support from the Wyre Forest community lottery, which has launched this autumn and the Council will continue to promote the lottery. The programme of events and activities previously organised by the District Council will now come to an end, without exception – this includes but is not limited to the Older People's Event, Mike Oborski No Barriers Awards etc. Other organisations may come forward to run them.
- 4.17 The changes outlined above will reduce the need for support services such as finance, HR, ICT, audit etc. There will be fewer WFDC staff to recruit, pay or support, there will be many fewer financial transactions to process and so on. While teams in these areas can therefore expect to shrink over time, options to reduce costs and improve resilience will also be sought through shared services with other councils or other delivery models.
- 4.18 Wyre Forest House has been too big for the Council's needs ever since it was first occupied in October 2012. The previous administration recognised this and adopted a strategy of letting out increasing amounts of the building to a range of private and public sector tenants. However there are now large areas that are vacant and the market position is uncertain as a result of COVID: many organisations are reviewing and reducing how much office space they use, but conversely others may be looking

for more dispersed, local provision rather than maintaining large city-centre offices. In the Cabinet's view, the point has been reached where significant decisions will need to be taken about how much office accommodation the Council should own. Its own need for offices will fall as a consequence of being a smaller organisation and the steps outlined above. The Cabinet therefore intends to commission a full business case to explore either disposing of Wyre Forest House entirely or dividing the building so that the Council would retain and occupy only part of it and dispose of the remainder. If it was decided to proceed with a sale, this would generate a one off capital receipt that could be used to reduce the Council's debt and therefore provide a benefit to the revenue account.

- 4.19 It will be apparent that the changes above, if implemented, would be likely to reduce significantly the need for the current management structure. When there is greater clarity about the changes being implemented and the timetable, a holistic management review will be undertaken in light of those changes, which would be expected to reduce the cost and number of managers (over and above any changes that arise directly as a result of new service delivery models). However in the meantime it is unrealistic to expect the Council to reduce management costs significantly as the proposals above involve a radical programme of change, preparation of business cases, negotiation of shared service agreements or contracts etc. The pressures on managers have increased because of COVID and the significant changes implemented in April 2020 and it would not be reasonable to expect that workloads should be further increased by reducing middle and senior management posts at this time. As a consequence of the programme of moving services to alternative delivery models and reductions in management, it might also become necessary to consider the future hosting arrangements for existing shared services based in WFDC and to transfer the lead authority role to another council.
- 4.20 Finally, the changes outlined above mean that there should also be a reduction in the number and cost of councillors: a smaller organisation needs fewer councillors, particularly if the Cabinet model of governance is maintained. However any review by the Boundary Commission to reduce the number of councillors, even if the Council successfully applied for inclusion in its forward work programme, would not be implemented until the 2027 elections. A review would also allow redrawing of ward boundaries to take account of future population growth as a result of the local plan.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report. Even though it outlines the administration's thinking on certain issues such as future increases in council tax or major changes to how services are organised and delivered, no decisions are sought at this point – they will follow in the medium term financial strategy in December and recommendations to Council in February about the budget and council tax for 2021-22. The financial implications will be set out in full in the report about the MTFS, and will include updated forecasts of the overall position informed by further information that continues to emerge, particularly in relation to COVID. The report will include appropriate provision for severance costs to be funded over the programme of change from reserves.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council's budget setting process is governed by the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and other local government finance legislation. While this does not oblige the Council to share the shape of emerging issues for the medium term financial strategy at this stage, it is recognised as good practice to do so. Decisions will be taken in due course as necessary in accordance with legislative requirements and will identify any changes that might be required to the Council's policy framework. This will include any changes to the corporate plan, which would be subject to formal approval by full Council.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required at this point as no decisions are sought that would have an impact on the protected characteristic groups. As proposals move forward to decision, such impact assessments may be required for particular proposals and these will be addressed in subsequent reports as appropriate.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 The most significant risk facing the Council remains its funding gap. The suggestions outlined for the medium term financial strategy, which will be the subject of consultation, would help to address this gap. There are risks associated with implementing alternative delivery models as outlined in this report, and these will be addressed in detail in specific proposals as they are brought forward for decision. For example, an inherent risk of outsourcing is that, while costs might initially be lower, the Council would be exposed to additional costs if it became necessary to change the service outcomes or standards during the course of the contract (for example with the addition of new work streams such as the Council has had to undertake in distributing Government grants during the COVID pandemic).

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Cabinet is invited to agree the suggested approach outlined in respect of the medium term financial strategy. This will now be the subject of consultation and a final decision by the Cabinet on proposals in the MTFS which will be presented in December.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 CLT
10.2 Cabinet

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Reports to the Strategic Review Panel, October 2020

Appendix 1

Summary of residents' survey, September 2020

Survey was launched online on 14 September and closed at midday on Monday 12 October. There was a total of 739 responses.

The comparisons below have been made against the response we had to the same questions, which were asked as part of our Corporate Plan survey in summer 2019. There were 1,618 responses to that consultation.

Summary

Satisfaction with local area as a place to live increases

People in Wyre Forest say they are satisfied with the local area as a place to live. 32% said they were very satisfied and a further 47% said they were satisfied (79% total). When asked the same questions in 2019 a total of 58% said they were satisfied or very satisfied.

Greater percentage of respondents feel we are working to improve the area

Almost half the respondents (49%) agreed or strongly agreed that we are working to improve the local area, this compared with 39% when we asked the same question in 2019.

Opinion on quality of our services and whether we are doing a good job.

44% of respondents felt that we offer quality services, this compares with 36% in 2019.

Meanwhile 44% also felt we were doing a good job, that's up 15 percentage points (from 29%) in 2019.

Efficient and well run

One quarter of respondents (25%) did not feel the council was efficient and well run, this is down from 37% of respondents who felt this way last year.

Offering value for money

A quarter of respondents felt we were offering value for money, this is up five percentage points on last year when 20% agreed or strongly agreed we did offer value.

Spending trust grown

A greater percentage of respondents felt they can trust us to spend their money wisely. In 2020 19% agreed we could be trusted, up from 12% in 2019.

A more caring authority

More respondents felt that we care about our residents (36%), up 12 percentage points from 24% in 2019. In both 2019 and 2020 most respondents didn't have a view on whether we are changing lives for the better, but the number who feel we are not has dropped from 39% to 28%.

COVID-19 specific questions

Respondents' biggest concerns for themselves and for their families were risk of infection, physical health and mental health. For the community the focus of concern shifted to housing circumstances, education and loneliness.

The top three lifestyle changes respondents have made due to the restriction and would like to keep were spending less money, more time outdoors and more time with families.

55% of respondents said they're more likely to use measures to control infection after the pandemic has been contained. 38% said they are more likely to support local businesses and more than one third (35.49%) would be more likely to shop online. Almost one quarter (23.75%) said they are more likely to exercise daily and almost one fifth (19.28%) said they are more likely to continue working from home. Those activities which respondents said they were less likely to do were attending large sporting/entertainment events (43%), eat out (32%) and use public transport (31%).

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The sorts of things respondents said they'd like to see continued once the pandemic is contained include supporting the volunteer and community groups, free parking, helping the homeless and also social distancing.

Some of the things that respondents felt would help Worcestershire recover from the pandemic were sticking to the rules, enforcing the rules and getting back to normal as soon as possible. People also suggested more support for businesses.

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**CABINET**
10th November 2020**Capital Portfolio Fund Temporary Arrangements for Acquisition Geography**

OPEN WITH EXEMPT APPENDIX	
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor G Ballinger, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategy and Finance Councillor Fran Oborski, Deputy leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration, Planning and Capital Investments
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Corporate Director: Resources
CONTACT OFFICERS:	Tracey Southall Ext. 2100 Tracey.southall@wyreforestdc.gov.uk Mike Parker Ext 2500 Mike.parker@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
EXEMPT APPENDICES:	Appendix 1 – Capital Portfolio Fund acquisition criteria matrix

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to agree temporary arrangements for the acquisition geography for the Capital Portfolio Fund during the uncertain times brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is asked to **RECOMMEND** to Council:-

- 2.1 That until further notice, only within district purchase proposals are considered for the balance of the Capital Portfolio Fund.
- 2.2 That the Capital Strategy is temporarily amended to reflect 2.1 above.
- 2.3 That for the duration of the period in 2.1 above, for acquisitions made through the Capital Portfolio Fund a threshold of a score of 200 will be used when assessing proposals against the scoring criterial matrix.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This Council has successfully used PWLB borrowing to fund Capital Portfolio property purchases within our agreed combined Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) geography comprising the Worcestershire and Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP areas. This reflects the Council's multiple objectives including economic development and regeneration as set out below in an extract from the latest Capital strategy approved by February Council as part of the suite of Budget papers:

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- 3.2 The Council's current Capital Portfolio Fund policy is that it will always be the Council's preference to invest within the district area to support regeneration and local economic development whilst also allowing the Council to consider opportunities within the wider geographical area of the two LEPs which the district is a member of.
- 3.3 In the light of the uncertainty around some sectors and the consequent impact that will have on property holding, together with the impact on property values which the current Coronavirus is having, it is considered necessary to introduce some interim amendments to the Council's current policy.
- 3.4 Members are aware that our external Auditors Grant Thornton required significant evidence for the two out of area purchases (Stratford Court and Buntsford Gate) made so far to support our asset classification as Operational Assets rather than Investment Properties. The evidence was accepted and the asset classification was not challenged. GT were not minded to challenge the evidence presented for this classification. All of the Council's acquisitions have been supported by thorough due diligence and robust businesses cases and it is satisfying to know that GT accepted the Council's justification for all of its acquisitions made to date. Currently the portfolio comprises five acquisitions, two of which are outside the district and they account for 37% of total capital expenditure on the Portfolio so far, or 31% of the total £26.5m approved budget (as at 31st March 2020).
- 3.5 For some Council's also making acquisitions, out of area purchases funded by PWLB borrowing have been controversial, highlighted by the disproportionately high levels of debt some Councils have chosen to undertake to fund such schemes. However, current legislation and code guidance do not prevent such action and there is a view that the government has forced some councils down this more extreme route as one of the few choices, given the large reductions in government funding and need for innovative ways to protect future sustainability.
- 3.6 The impact of COVID-19 on the property market is significant and has created an uncertain future for some sectors, retail and office in particular. The enforced migration to home working and the move to even more online shopping has been significant in these areas of the market. Whilst the chancellor is making determined efforts to get people back to offices and to using the high street, it is clear that the pandemic will result in some permanent changed behaviours, but the full effect is as yet unknown. The future for the property market remains uncertain at this time. There will be a 'new normal' though and hopefully the market will recover quickly and alternative uses found for vacant retail or office units through conversion/adaptation e.g. to meet housing need. This will take time and property owners (such as pension funds) may choose to play a waiting game with some empty properties whilst a demand equilibrium is found.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Officers and the external auditors are content that all purchases made so far both within and outside the district are compliant with all legislative and code requirements.
- 4.2 The reasoning behind the combined LEP geography allowed the Council to fulfil its economic aspirations to the fullest extent on the basis that the success of both LEPs would add growth potential to the local economy; it also enabled the Council

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the opportunity to spread risk over the greater geographic area and also to develop a balanced portfolio of sector, location and quality. For purchases made so far the Council has followed its robust strategies and has been confident of the ability to justify its acquisitions, including those made outside the district.

- 4.3 The report from the recent Public Accounts Committee and also the consultation on Future Lending Terms from the PWLB all signal change. The clear message is that 'debt for yield' schemes will not be able to be financed through the PWLB moving forward. Indications are that the legislation and Code Guidance will be tightened up probably with effect from April 2021, at best to make justification of out of district purchases funded by PWLB borrowing far more difficult to justify. It is somewhat perverse that it would seem that CIPFA and the Government are not saying councils will not be able to continue to make out of district purchases in the future but rather, if they do, moving forward, they will not be able to get funding from HMT and therefore LAs will take the risk, not Government.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmpubacc/312/31202.htm>

- 4.4 There are funding sources that councils could continue to use to fund out of area purchases: capital receipts (insufficient available in WFDC's case, unless the Council made some major disposals, whether within or outside the Capital Portfolio Fund) or borrowing from other sources, including the UK Municipal Bonds Agency which has successfully issued its first couple of loans.
- 4.5 The initial 1% PWLB rate increase in October 2019 was intended to choke off more commercial, debt for yield schemes due to concerns about the national debt cap and the PAC review. However, the effect of this has since been eliminated by interest rate reductions following the COVID pandemic. There does not seem to be a suggestion that debt for yield is or will be made illegal but it is clear that HMT will not provide borrowing to support it in the future. A further threat is that, if a Council chooses to include debt for yield schemes within their capital programme, all PWLB borrowing for that financial year will be withdrawn.
- 4.6 Rob Whiteman, Chief Executive of CIPFA, recently reminded all Members that adherence to Code guidance is mandatory for CIPFA Members: others only "must have regard to the code".
- 4.7 In the light of the developing advice on the use of PWLB funding together with the impact of the pandemic, it is proposed that the Council limits any further acquisitions made through the Capital Portfolio Fund to in-district purchases only. This is proposed as a temporary measure until greater clarity is available in respect of the uncertainties identified. A further report would follow once matters were clearer if a return to a wider geography was proposed. With this in mind it will be necessary to agree an amendment to the threshold the Council uses to determine whether acquisitions should be pursued (see policy below). It is also over two years since the Council originally agreed its Capital portfolio Fund strategy (March 2018) and it is proposed that in the forthcoming annual update of the Capital Strategy, that a refreshed Capital Portfolio Fund strategy is also brought forward for consideration.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Capital Portfolio Fund supports both regeneration and economic growth allied to the Council's income generation/commercialism objectives. The Development

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Loan Fund will help deliver the Council's regeneration and economic development objectives in terms of both housing and commercial regeneration in accordance with the corporate plan priority "to support you to contribute to a successful local economy", whilst also potentially generating future income streams.

- 5.2 This Council confirms that it has fully complied with the MHCLG requirements and has done so ahead of the formal timeline due to the significant Capital Portfolio Fund activity in 2018-19. In accordance with approved policies and strategies, these property acquisitions are not investments; property purchases completed so far are classified as operational assets, however the full suite of prudential indicators is included in this report for full transparency.
- 5.3 Allocations that have been approved so far from the Capital Portfolio Fund are shown in the table below; Where schemes are allocated but not spent this is subject to approval of full business cases.

Capital Portfolio Capital Fund	Expenditure		Committed
	Purchase Price/ Development Cost	SDLT, Fees and Capitalised Costs	
	£000	£000	£000
Acquisitions at 1st April 2019			
Worcester Street/High Street Retail Units, Kidderminster	1,034	51	
Stratford Court Offices, Solihull	6,110	424	11
Buntsford Gate Offices, Bromsgrove	1,487	87	
Forest House Start-up Units, Kidderminster	730	37	
Acquisitions 2019-20			
Riverside Food and Beverage Units, Kidderminster	2,420	135	43
Goldthorn Road Industrial Unit	4,100	240	28
Committed Schemes			
Industrial Units, Kidderminster		395	33
	15,881	1,370	114
Total Capital Expenditure		17,251	17,365
Total Capital Approval			26,500
Balance of Funds remaining (Max)			9,135

- 5.4 The table below summaries the current projection of the revenue impact of the Capital Portfolio Fund acquisitions in 2020-21:

Property	2020-21 Original £	2020-21 Est. Outturn £
EXPENSES		
Property Expenses	235,620	235,620
General Expenses	52,260	52,260
Recharges	44,980	44,980
Increased bad debt provision		100,000
COST OF CAPITAL		
Capital Financing (MRP & Interest)	1,445,920	1,445,920
GROSS INCOME	(2,183,620)	(1,973,620)
NET INCOME BEFORE TRANSFER TO RESERVES	(404,840)	(94,840)
Variance		310,000
NET POSITION AFTER TRANSFER TO RESERVES		
Transfer to sinking fund/risk reserve (20%)	18,150	18,150
Net Revenue Impact 2020-21	(386,690)	(76,690)
Variance to Approved budget (OE to Outturn)		310,000

- 5.5 The temporary limitation of the geographical area for the acquisition of further capital portfolios properties may reduce the scope for the achievement of financial yield, which whilst secondary to the regeneration and economic objectives is still an important benchmark for consideration as part of business case proposals. Proposals would still have to at the very least fund the borrowing costs but given the reduced potential to source properties and the less attractive infrastructure of the district net returns may be lower than would otherwise be available within the wider combined LEP geography. It may also prove more challenging and potentially take longer to source acquisition opportunities that meet our criteria within district.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Capital schemes must comply with legislation such as the Equality Act, and also Council policies, Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations.

- 6.2 The Council has adopted policies for the Capital Portfolio Fund and Development Loans Fund including legal considerations were set out in depth in appendices 3/1 and 3/2 to the medium term financial strategy report, which was considered by Cabinet on 20 December 2016. These remain current so will not be repeated but can be found at:

<http://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/media/2639628/20161220FinancialStrategy2017-2020IncludingCover.pdf> (pages 34 to 54).

- 6.3 Part of the Council's agreed Capital Portfolio Fund strategy contains a criteria matrix (see Appendix 1) which the Council uses to make an initial assessment of potential acquisitions and a threshold of a score of 250 has been agreed (proposals scoring lower may still be considered if there are exceptional reasons for doing so). Given the limitations brought about by the temporary in-district only geography, there will need to be a reduction in this threshold figure (for example the district has no 'major prime' or 'micro prime' locations making this score unattainable). It is proposed that this threshold figure is reduced to 200 to reflect the types of opportunity which might be available within the district.

- 6.4 The latest MHCLG Guidance on investments that should be read in conjunction with

the new Prudential Code introduces the requirement for additional disclosures with increased emphasis on transparency, accountability, proportionality and the risk management framework. The Solicitor to the Council is satisfied that the underlying legal powers for these policies remain unchanged and can still be relied upon and that the current Capital Strategy has appropriate regard to the new Investment Guidance.

- 6.5 In accordance with approved policies and strategies, these property acquisitions are not investments; property purchases completed so far are classified as operational assets, however the full suite of prudential indicators is included in this report for full transparency.
- 6.6 Given the current market uncertainty together with the clear signal of imminent changes to the operating arrangements for the PWLB and Code Guidance, albeit that they will not be effective until some point in the future, it is appropriate to temporarily revise this Council's policy to limit future property acquisitions to within area. Further consideration to this matter and appropriate revisions to the Capital Portfolio Fund strategy will be brought forward as part of the forthcoming Capital Strategy.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This is a financial report and there is no requirement to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 The ongoing pandemic has increased uncertainty, reduced predictability and led to market changes and vulnerabilities that have increased the risk of acquiring property. This together with the heightened risk of external auditor challenge if the Council makes such purchases funded by PWLB borrowing, on what could be viewed as the cusp of changes in Government lending policy and guidance means the proposed temporary revision to the geography for Capital Portfolio Fund purchases is appropriate.
- 8.2 To manage risk effectively, the risks associated with each acquisition under consideration will continue to be systematically identified, analysed, influenced and monitored.
- 8.3 It is important to identify the risk appetite for each scheme and for the capital programme as a whole, especially when considering the purchase of property assets to be acquired for multiple objectives including a financial return. The Capital Portfolio Fund assets acquired so far are not defined as non-treasury investments under the CIPFA Prudential Code but rather are held as operational assets as they contribute to the Council's corporate priorities, the key principle of control of risk and considering returns consistent with the level of risk still applies. The full suite of Prudential Indicators is reported in this Capital Strategy for full transparency as they are funded from prudential borrowing. Currently these are reported for the full £26.5m although this may be refined in future reports as the portfolio management continues to develop.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Council's current geography for property acquisitions has served the Council well and allowed flexibility and breadth to spread portfolio risk and hold a more diverse range of properties than would otherwise have been possible. The proportion of property holdings situated outside the district represents a reasonable proportion of the overall Portfolio value.
- 9.2 Given the current market uncertainty together with the clear signal of imminent changes to the operating arrangements for the PWLB and Code Guidance, albeit that they will not be effective until some point in the future, it is timely to revise this Council's policy and this will follow as part of the Council's Capital Strategy. In the meantime it is appropriate to temporarily limit future property acquisitions to within the district until there is greater clarity and circumstances change. This is due to the two-fold risk – firstly the financial viability of such proposals is considered over the long term of 30 plus years (the ongoing pandemic has revealed stark market changes and vulnerabilities that have increased risk); and secondly the heightened risk of external auditor challenge if we make such purchases funded by PWLB borrowing, on what could be viewed as the cusp of changes in Government lending policy and guidance.

10. CONSULTEES

Corporate Leadership Team
Cabinet
Link Asset Services

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- The annual Medium Term Financial Strategy including the revenue implications of this Capital Strategy Capital approved by Full Council on 26th February 2020
- The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) 2020-21 approved by Council on 26th February 2020 that covers financial investments
- The Asset Management Strategy Report – Cabinet 16th July 2019 and Council 24th July 2019
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-21 including the Capital Programme Report Appendix 6 considered by Cabinet on 19th December 2017 and 7th February 2018 and approved by Full Council on 21st February 2018
- Approval of Cabinet Proposals for a £25m Capital Portfolio Fund and £10m Loans to Third Parties (now renamed Development Loans Fund) by Council as part of the MTFS 2016-19 on 22nd February 2017 and further approval of £1.5m for the Capital Strategy as part of the MTFS approved by Full Council on 26th February 2020
- The Strategies for the Capital Portfolio Fund and Loans to Third parties approved by Cabinet on 14th June 2017
- Approval Process for Capital Portfolio and Loans to Third Parties approved by Cabinet 20th September 2017 and process for Scrutiny of business cases in respect of the capital portfolio fund and development loan fund approved by

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 5th October 2017

- The Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) approved by Council 2016
- The Enabling Enterprise and Business Growth In Wyre Forest strategy adopted in 2016
- Corporate Plan 2019-2023 – Council 25th September 2019
- Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-2026
- MHCLG Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments (3rd edition) 2nd February 2018
- Asset Management Strategy – Cabinet 16th July 2019 - http://www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/docs/doc54727_20190716_cabinet_agenda.pdf (agenda item 8.1)
- CIPFA Guidance on Prudential Property Investment – November 2019

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
10th November 2020

WRITE OFF OF AMOUNTS OUTSTANDING

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr. Graham Ballinger
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Corporate Director: Resources
CONTACT OFFICER:	Fiona Johnson Ext. 2661 E-mail Fiona.johnson@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDIX 1	Proposed Write-Off

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To enable the Cabinet to give consideration to writing off the sum of £107,071.23 in respect of debts that cannot be collected.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to DECIDE that:

- 2.1 The total of £107,071.23 as detailed in the Appendix to this report, be written off, for National Non-Domestic Rates.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Part 4 of the Council's Constitution, Delegation to Officers, paragraph 1.13, authorises the Corporate Director: Resources as Chief Financial Officer to write off individual debts up to the value, in each case of £5,000. For values, between £5,000 and £9,999.99 write-offs can be made with the approval of the delegated Cabinet Member. The Cabinet is authorised to write off debts of £10,000 and over.
- 3.2 It is therefore necessary for Cabinet to give consideration to the cases scheduled on the appendix to this report. On this occasion, the debts relate to non-domestic rates.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 National Non-Domestic Rates are demanded in accordance with the provisions laid down by The Local Government Finance Act 1988; the total annual sum collectable by this Council is circa £30 million, our overall collection rate for 2018/19 was 98.82%. Recovery action is taken in the event of non-payment under the various regulations made by this Act.

- 4.2 Every effort has been made to pursue the debts set out in the Appendix. This rigorous recovery work has been a prolonged exercise due to the necessary stages that must be followed for debt recovery.

Write off is only recommended when all recovery avenues have been fully explored, and this is the reason for the debts now presented for write off.

- 4.3 The latest forward projection of business rates income for 2020-21 included in the Cabinet report on Budget Monitoring First Quarter 2020-21 on 16th September 2020, showed a significant reduction in collection of Business Rates compared to assumptions included within the Medium term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as a result of the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This will be reviewed and confirmed as the year progresses, as part of the December Cabinet report on the MTFS. Dependent on the performance of other Worcestershire Districts, membership of the Worcestershire Business Rates Pool should help mitigate the impact of such losses; increased levels of provision for bad debts/write-offs will be included as part of the MTFS report. MHCLG have confirmed that collection fund losses due to COVID can be spread over 3 years to help mitigate the impact, although technical detail is awaited on how this will be accounted for.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Under the current Business Rates Retention regime, the cost of non-collection of National Non-Domestic Rates is met both by the Government and the Worcestershire Business Rate Pool. Approval of the proposed write-off detailed in the Appendix of £107,071.23 will be accounted for as part of the Worcestershire Business Rates Pool and result in a loss of income shared between the Pool members and the Government.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This is a financial report and there is no requirement to undertake an Equality Impact Needs Assessment.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 The principal risk to the Council is loss of National Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates) income which is a key funding source. However, the budgeting process includes an estimate each year for a small percentage of potential write-offs/provision for bad debts that are unfortunately inevitable given the total annual sum collectable of circa £30m. The Business Rates accounting regime and membership of the Worcestershire Pool mitigates the

risk of impact on this Council as the loss of income is shared between Pool members and the Government.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The amount set out in the Appendix cannot be collected and should be written off.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 Corporate Leadership Team
Cabinet Member for Strategy and Finance

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Overview and Scrutiny Report 5th October 2017 – Processes for Business Rates Debt Recovery

Appendix Open Companies				
Debt Type	Payer	Address	Reason for Write-Off	Amount £
NNDR	Mr M Mansuri T/A Lovely Eyebrows 00380229	Shop and premises, Unit 9 Josiah Mason Mall, Kidderminster. DY10 1EJ	Business rate debt related to occupied rates for the period 20/07/2016 to 31/03/2017 and 01/04/2017 to 19/06/2017. Mr Mansuri operated an eyebrow/beauty shop. Liability Orders were made by Kidderminster Magistrates Court on 10th March 2017, 17th November 2017 and 12th September 2018. Mr Mansuri made an arrangement to pay the outstanding balances and some payments were received, however not in full. Instructions were then passed to Enforcement Agents but they were unable to collect any payments and instructions were returned no trace. Following further investigations we are still unable to trace.	10,523.24
NNDR	Amadeus (Kidderminster) Ltd 00355089	Shop and premises, Unit 5 Josiah Mason Mall, Kidderminster. DY10 1EJ	Business rate debt related to void rates for the period 22/09/2011 to 31/03/2012, 01/04/2012 to 31/03/2013 and 01/04/2013 to 31/10/2013. This company was the Landlord of the premises and were based in the British Virgin Islands. Liability Orders were made by Kidderminster Magistrates Court on 5th October 2012 and 28th June 2013. LPA receivers were appointed January 2012 for this company. The LPA receivers believed the company had gone into administration, however we have never been able to confirm this. We have liaised with an Insolvency company to see if they could provide any further information but they were unable to. Amadeus (Kidderminster) Ltd are not registered at Companies House, however we had received correspondence from them in the past. As we are unable to find any trace of the company now and they never traded we have tried every avenue available to us to recover the debt.	21,038.18
NNDR	Amadeus (Kidderminster) Ltd 00317403	Shop and premises, Unit 8 Josiah Mason Mall, Kidderminster. DY10 1EJ	Business rate debt related to void rates for the period 01/04/2011 to 31/03/2012, 01/04/2012 to 31/03/2013 and 01/04/2013 to 31/10/2013. This company was the Landlord of the premises and were based in the British Virgin Islands. Liability Orders were made by Kidderminster Magistrates Court on 17th February 2012, 15th June 2012 and 28th June 2013. LPA receivers were appointed January 2012 for this company. The LPA receivers believed the company had gone into administration, however we have never been able to confirm this. We have liaised with an Insolvency company to see if they could provide any further information but they were unable to. Amadeus (Kidderminster) Ltd are not registered at Companies House, however we had received correspondence from them in the past. As we are unable to find any trace of the company now and they never traded we have tried every avenue available to us to recover the debt.	25,575.28

PROPOSED WRITE-OFFSAPPENDIX 1

Debt Type	Payer	Address	Reason for Write-Off	Amount £
NDR	Amadeus (Kidderminster) Ltd 00323853	Shop and premises, Unit 10 Josiah Mason Mall, Kidderminster. DY10 1EJ	Business rate debt related to void rates for the period 24/07/2012 to 31/03/2013 and 01/04/2013 to 31/10/2013. This company was the Landlord of the premises and were based in the British Virgin Islands. Liability Orders were made by Kidderminster Magistrates Court on 28th June 2013 and 26th July 2013. LPA receivers were appointed January 2012 for this company. The LPA receivers believed the company had gone into administration, however we have never been able to confirm this. We have liaised with an Insolvency company to see if they could provide any further information but they were unable to. Amadeus (Kidderminster) Ltd are not registered at Companies House, however we had received correspondence from them in the past. As we are unable to find any trace of the company now and they never traded we have tried every avenue available to us to recover the debt.	16,828.61
NDR	Mr Habich T/A Killians Cafe 00346233	Restaurant and premises, 6-7 Blackwell Street, Kidderminster	Business rate debt related to occupied rates for the period 01/04/2011 to 31/07/2011 and then void rates for the period 01/11/2011 to 31/03/2012, 01/04/12 to 31/03/2013, 01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014, 01/04/2014 to 31/03/2015 and 01/04/2015 to 15/11/2015. Mr Habich operated a restaurant but when it closed he had signed a lease for several years so was liable for the void rates. Liability Orders were made by Kidderminster Magistrates Court on 08th July 2011, 17th February 2012, 10th August 2012, 28th June 2013 and 1st August 2014. Mr Habich made an arrangement to pay the outstanding balances and some payments were received, however not in full. Instructions were then passed to Enforcement Agents but they were unable to collect any payments and instructions were returned insufficient assets. Mr Habich has now left the last known address and following further investigations we have not been able to find a forwarding address.	33,105.92
				107,071.23

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

10th November 2020

Response to Homeworking Consultation

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Nicky Martin – Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic Services
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Mike Parker - Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place
CONTACT OFFICER:	Mike Parker ext 2500 Mike.parker@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES:	Appendix 1 – matters raised in response to consultation and Corporate Leadership response

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To agree responses to the recently completed homeworking consultation and to agree the recommendations to Council in December.

2. RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is recommended to DECIDE that Council be recommended to:

- 2.1 **Note the responses which were submitted in response to the consultation process;**
- 2.2 **Agree to proceed with a review of teams and the services they deliver with a view to enabling more individuals to operate on a hybrid model working at home and in the office where it is feasible for employees to do so; and to introduce such working from 1st April 2021 or when the Government advice is such that a return to working from the office is safe, in the event that this is later than 1st April 2021;**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In July Council agreed to undertake a consultation of staff and unions with regard to the future arrangements for homeworking and to report back to Council in December. The resolution was to: *“authorise the Head of Paid Service to initiate formal consultation with staff and unions with a view to maximising home working at the optimal level, in order to minimise the building space that the Council occupies ... with a further report to Council no later than December 2020 to seek Council’s approval of any changes to terms and conditions.”*

- 3.2 The consultation was undertaken between 4th September 2020 and 5th October 2020. A total of 28 responses were received, a summary of which is set out in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 A recent Atlas Cloud (specialist IT services provider) nationwide survey of workers who had worked at home during lockdown found that 87% of UK office workers stated their desire to be able to work from home at least some of the time and Just shy of 70% of UK office workers stated their desire to be able to work both from home and the office – the ‘hybrid’ solution as it has been termed. The survey found that *“Office workers who are working from home are regaining a significant amount of time in their day by not having to commute. Not only will this be a tremendous boost for their work-life balance but the survey results show that, on average, employees are willing to give back a substantial proportion of their time saved as additional work hours. The average home worker regained 84 minutes in their day by not having to commute. 46 minutes (55%) of this regained time was spent doing personal activities and 38 minutes (45%) was spent working.”* The findings from the survey went on to say that *“Employees could regain more than 25 working days of personal time over the year (based on a 7 hour working day).... With the top 3 uses for the extra personal time being: 1) Sleeping (49.3%), 2) Spending time with family (46.2%), and 3) Exercising (43%), employers could benefit from well-rested, happier, and healthier employees, making them likely to be far more productive in the time that they do spend working.”* This was not a survey of Wyre Forest employees and clearly some of the issues are not directly comparable such as the length of most commuting, but it is of interest in the context of the Council’s proposal.

4 KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The summary of issues raised in the consultation and set out in Appendix 1 indicates that of the few who responded to the consultation there are mixed views as expected; some find homeworking beneficial, others have reservations. Some of the matters raised are of a practical nature which as can be seen from the response by the Corporate Leadership Team can be readily dealt with in the roll out of more homeworking; some matters continued to be raised about allowances even though the consultation stated that these would be considered through the pay and grading review, which remains the case.
- 4.2 All of the consultation responses have been carefully considered and where there are practical actions which can be adopted as the Council moves forward, they will be. However the harsh reality the Council faces is that at least for the foreseeable future the pandemic situation is not likely to change and the Council will need to continue to ensure the safety of its employees by continuing to enable homeworking where services can be delivered effectively that way. The Council has to plan positively for the future and it has to plan for homeworking as a solution to that short term challenge presented by the pandemic, but it should sensibly plan for the longer term future where the hybrid working from a combination of home and office is likely to become the ‘norm’ for many office based workers, not just those within the Council. For those reasons it is recommended that the Council proceeds with its intended review of services with team managers between January and March with a view to being ready to introduce new hybrid ways of working from 1st April 2021 which maximise the ability to deliver services from a homeworking environment for those services and for those employees where this can be carried out effectively. If the Government advice effective at that time allows such safe working then the Council

would begin introducing the new homeworking model from 1st April, however if the advice regarding the pandemic at that time is still to work at home where it can be done so effectively then the Council would continue to support such measures and would only introduce the office working environment part of the hybrid solution when it was safe to do so.

- 4.3 Since the consultation was undertaken, the Government advice has changed and currently is that employees should continue to work from home if they can and where it effective to do so; this advice is in the light of the autumnal continued rise in Covid-19 cases and the prospect of a possible 'second spike'.
- 4.4 In order to accompany the new way of working the Council will need to refresh its current guidance on homeworking which dates back to 2009 with a refresh in 2011 just in advance of the Council's occupation of Wyre Forest House. The draft new policy formed part of the consultation and it is proposed that this new policy be agreed through the Joint Negotiating and Consultation Committee with the unions and adopted as part of the implementation of the hybrid solution.
- 4.5 Once the review of the homeworking opportunities has been completed the Council will have a clearer perspective on the amount of operational floorspace that it requires and this will enable appropriate amendments to the Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) and the Facilities Asset Management Plan (FAMP) to be undertaken.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 As indicated above the financial implications regarding the allowances for working from home is being dealt with separately through the pay and grading review and will continue to be part of that discussion. There may be financial implications arising from ensuring that those employees working from home have the right equipment and furniture to enable a satisfactory workstation. Procurement of furniture for homeworking has been agreed and any consequential costs which cannot be met from within existing budgets will be met from Covid-19 grants received.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report. Part of the report sets out the proposed new Homeworking Policy that it is proposed is adopted.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Initial screening assessment indicates no detriment to protected characteristics.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 The Council has a duty to its employees to ensure that they are able to work safely and that currently means working from home where possible due to the pandemic, it cannot risk not doing that. When the pandemic eases and a return to an office working environment is possible the Council is at risk of not achieving the benefits of working at home that could be delivered both for its employees and for the Council in not embracing the new ways of working.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Council has undertaken a consultation of all of its employees and union representatives into the introduction of increased working from home. A total of 28 responses were received, these are summarised at Appendix 1. Recommendations are to be made to Council at its meeting in December on how to make homeworking a more permanent feature going forward.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 Cabinet/CLT

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 11.1 Consultation undertaken between 4th September 2020 and 5th October 2020.
11.2 Atlas Cloud Survey

Homeworking Consultation – Summary of Consultation Responses

Thank you to everyone who submitted feedback /comments

The responses received have been grouped under thematic matters which occurred throughout the submissions received to avoid duplication and any personal information relating to any individual has been redacted for the purpose of this summary.

Feedback/Comments	Response
<p>1. Practicalities of Homeworking</p> <p>Facilities for employees working at home differ and consideration will need to be given to undertaking home assessments of the environment in which employees will be working.</p> <p>Clear guidance is required for printing documents at home.</p> <p>How do Managers ensure their staff are working efficiently and effectively to ensure that our residents get value for money, as well as ensuring that staff are working when they should be? How do we maintain and promote motivation and innovation? A good work/life balance rarely refers to more time at work!</p> <p>How can costs like stationery and printing for example be controlled - it is very easy to put a ream of WFDC paper in your printer and then print everything else on it too unintentionally.</p> <p>Thinking about those staff who cannot/do not want to work from home and are therefore one of the only people in the office, how do we control them getting all the internal queries and phone calls, which of course would not be fair?</p> <p>Having managed a significant number of staff in my previous role, it can be difficult to monitor employee work levels especially when working from home. I recognise that work plans can be</p>	<p>Staff working from home have completed a comprehensive self assessment, any areas highlighted as a concern will be addressed via discussions with the individual member of staff and their line manager. They will continue to be a feature of the Homeworking Policy.</p> <p>Documents should not be printed at home for IT security reasons. Printing can still be undertaken in the office and collected as necessary.</p> <p>The Council's current ways of working rely on the trust of all of our employees to undertake their duties professionally and managers are trusted to see that services are delivered efficiently and effectively. This does not change with the introduction of working at home; many officers have been working at home for some or all of their time for over ten years now and it has not had any detriment on service delivery. Offering greater flexibility for employees who are able to work at home improves their work life balance and offers the opportunity for time spent travelling between home and work to be used more efficiently as the employee sees fit.</p> <p>See above on printing</p> <p>All staff working from home are available via the phone and have their phone extensions redirected to themselves. The Mitel software which the phone system uses enables laptops to be used as 'softphones'.</p> <p>Comments noted.</p>

<p>developed with employees and regular 121s introduced. Daily contact between the manager and employee at the beginning of the pandemic made employees think about what they intended to achieve that day, but moving forward perhaps it could be a requirement for all employees to update their electronic diaries with the activities / actions they intend to complete each day. This can be done at the beginning of the week and can be monitored by the supervisor by having access to the employees diary. However, it is not an exact science as telephone calls and urgent emails can disrupt the day's work plan.</p> <p>I've worked in a number of local authorities both large inner city and small rural councils and have to say that the IT section here at Wyre Forest are head and shoulders above anything I have worked with before. The team are extremely helpful and provide a very effective and efficient service – I never thought I would say that about an IT section !! but they have been excellent.</p> <p>My general observation would be that the Guidance appears heavily skewed towards voluntary homeworking and not re-written to reflect the current Council-led initiative which is distinctly not voluntary. I can see where section 7 comes from with respect to travelling expenses, but I feel staff could be seriously affected. In the normal course of events, one would normally undertake one daily commute. Therefore if a situation arises that more than one separate visit is required on a particular day, I would be penalised for having to make the additional journey as opposed to the Council incurring the costs. That is surely unacceptable.</p> <p>With regard to homeworking generally, my particular post mostly requires access to a computer which is solely office based and therefore I have very limited capability to working from home. This was quickly exhausted at the start of lockdown. Also, I frequently refer to record drawings which are held in the offices and they have yet to be digitised. Also, having recently moved home, I have no safe space for homeworking as we have down-sized and the accommodation is suited to being a small residence with no safe facility for homeworking due to lack of space and power/internet capabilities.</p> <p>If we are to work at WFH (or other) and at home the same applies as above but we also need to have a desk set up at work the same as home otherwise it will be very disruptive working</p> <p>I have done a self-assessment of my makeshift work station at home as requested, which</p>	<p>Thank you, noted.</p> <p>The current situation is not “Council-led” other than to ensure that as a responsible employer it ensures that the Government guidance is followed to work at home where it can be done effectively and that employees are able to work in a safe environment. It would be unusual in normal circumstances for more than one commute to and from the office from home at the beginning and end of the day. In terms of those undertaking site visit any costs incurred will be reimbursed.</p> <p>The intention is that in discussing with managers the services which can be delivered effectively from home, consideration will also be given to the working arrangements for the individual(s) delivering the service.</p> <p>Comment noted.</p> <p>These are matters for discussion with your Line Manager as part of the workstation assessment</p>
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<p>declared some drawbacks. I don't necessarily understand or agree with all elements of the assessment, nor have I got an understanding to what extent I should take action to address failure points. Do I have to install blinds? Do I have to move a plug socket? Do I have to have a proper office chair? I understand from the frequently asked questions that managers (or other suitably qualified staff I guess) are not due to undertake formal assessments any time soon, but I find it difficult to fully formulate my view on homeworking until I know the potential impacts upon my home. I have a small home and no dedicated office space, and don't have a full understanding on what is required or expected regarding the creation of one. This includes the physical space as well as the internet provision. My internet is somewhat basic but has always been more than adequate for my personal needs. Working from home I seem to (more than others) struggle with video conferencing. I can switch my video off and that's fine by me. However, could I be expected to upgrade my internet (if even technically possible)? I think that in the past 6 months people (including the public) have generally been understanding regarding the limitations of working from home (incl internet dropping out) but I fear that this understanding will evaporate if this is no longer an emergency situation (doing the best we can given the situation) and instead becomes a situation the council has decided to continue beyond the emergency (to save costs).</p> <p>I.T. can be an issue and could definitely do with better mob phones etc. e.g. smartphones for ease of access to emails while out at appointments etc.</p> <p>Need to consider a rota of office visits for keeping team connected as it can become isolating for employees and managers Easy to get frustrated if something goes wrong – no one to bounce it off.</p> <p>I need to go into the office to access files and print off documents.</p> <p>I feel really inefficient working from home. Everything takes longer to do and then it is harder to send out. I am sending out documents that have only been proof read on screen and potentially contain errors. I have to send them out (because time is critical) with a caveat that I need to check them once I have printed them out. This means revisiting work that I have "moved on" from and everything just</p>	<p>This will be part of a hybrid working solution.</p> <p>We acknowledge not all tasks can be done from home and there will be some that require attendance in the office.</p> <p>Comments noted, we recognise that there are some tasks that can't be done or done as efficiently from home.</p>
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<p>takes longer.</p> <p>My job is paper based. I often have to cross refer many documents and need to have the documents and plans on the desk. Without access to a printer I find this very difficult. To read a complicated case report or guidance notes on the screen whilst cross referring to the original query etc. is frustrating to say the least and time consuming (a simple highlighter or strike out – is replaced by copious notes). To compare plans whilst flicking between screens is impossible. I have also found that my eyesight has deteriorated over the last 6 months and I now need glasses to read – I appreciate this might have happened anyway – but I am sure that 6 months of 6-7 hours of nonstop computer use has not helped.</p> <p>You have already acknowledged that some matters simply can't be done from home. Documents that need to be sealed have to be done in hard copy and signed by an authorised signatory (please note that the temporary removal of the Chairman for sealing has been most welcomed, thank you) and many land registry applications have to be sent by post and signed by a conveyancer (so we cannot ask someone in the office to do it for us, for example the Form NAP that I sent to the land registry yesterday). By not being in the office daily (or not having someone in the office daily to do it for you and interrupt their working day) then this means that you add delays to matters that could be simply processed.</p> <p>Unfortunately, I do not live in a big house with the luxury of an "office". I work at my kitchen table (on a fold up chair, there is no room for an office chair) the "desk space" is barely big enough for me and in the evenings just move the computer and my current work to the side ready for the next morning. I feel like work has taken over my life. You mention work life balance in your consultation – there is no work life balance anymore – work has taken over my home and this makes me really sad. I am also far more sedentary at home than at work – working from my kitchen does nothing for my step count and general well being. If I had a big house with an "office" that I could put all my work in and lock the door then maybe I would find it easier – but I don't (unless I win the lottery).</p> <p>Work life balance of family / home situation, home working space; some people do not have suitable home working space and must be assessed by a manager/ trained assessor. Recognise working from home for some people</p>	<p>As above.</p> <p>As above.</p> <p>All of these concerns will be addressed in the proposed discussion with your Line Manager about the ability for your role to be delivered effectively through homeworking.</p> <p>The appropriateness of individuals being able to work from home will be part of the conversation with Line Managers when they consider their service areas.</p>
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<p>not achievable due to personal/ space circumstances, cannot put it as a job requirement to work from home if not safe for them.</p> <p>Need to recognise that there are many roles whereby the officers need an office base to support their working in the area, mobile staff, whilst not necessarily needing a workstation dedicated all day need to use facilities, get printing, write up notes etc. So, some free space needs to be built into calculations of available space.</p> <p>A lot of my work is currently online based due to the pandemic, however, when things go back to normal, even if there will be an overall increase in online engagement as a result of the pandemic, the paper based output will inevitably significantly increase due to the nature of the job. Dealing with that from home is nigh on impossible. Even with dedicated secretarial support, which we do not currently have, creating court bundles will still need office presence. And even with secretarial support a lot of the correspondence that goes out contains enclosures that need to be compiled and checked by the lawyer at the location rather than by a secretary remotely. Whilst we managed remotely during the full lockdown, it was something that took significantly longer than it would have taken in person and it was very much a case of making do in a difficult situation. Not something that could be undertaken as a norm. In addition documents sent out often require certification, etc. In the current circumstances part of the correspondence is often located in different places, etc, making collation and posting difficult.</p> <p>As things return more to normal it will be necessary for me to have an office base for when I have court hearings and trials with access to a printer. Often there is a need for a last-minute support from the office and my colleagues that will not be possible to provide remotely. In addition, whilst there might be more remote hearings in court, undertaking these from a domestic environment is not ideal on a long-term basis.</p> <p>The lack of a printer that would allow me to quickly print documents and make notes, rather than reading everything online, which leads to eye strain, makes things more difficult. It is manageable in what is basically an emergency situation but a more permanent homeworking would present a need for a printer for everyday printing. This need would of course be</p>	<p>There will always be some flexible shared desks available in any offices.</p> <p>See comments above about accepting need for some activities to be office based.</p> <p>See above re printing at home.</p>
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<p>somewhat minimised with regular presence in the office that would allow for printing in advance.</p> <p>On a permanent basis, I think that the Legal team could work very efficiently in a more remote manner provided that there remain desks dedicated to the Legal team in the office that would guarantee the ability of the team to work regularly face to face in full for a part of the working week.</p> <p>I just want to respond with details of my need for office presence or where it would be beneficial. I am able to effectively carry out my role remotely most of the time but do not feel that a permanent move to full time home working would be in the best interest of the Council for this role due to the following:</p> <p>Need for access to safe where existing contracts are not scanned Need for office access for printing/preparing hard copy engrossments, sealing and receipt/postage of the same Some need for printing when schedules are lengthy or dealing with multiple documents at a time Need for team support Benefit of having face to face contact with client officers – often easier to identify key issues Benefits of having admin support in person to enable checking and easier explanations Wish to continue storage of hard copy contracts (even where signed electronically) in case of cyber attack Use of library resources</p> <p>I have always been classed as a fixed office worker but due to Covid-19 have moved to a mix of home working and coming into the office for two days a week.</p> <p>It was agreed by Management and HR that I could come into the office to work if needed due to my injury. I am very grateful for this and would ask that it can continue. At home, I have to work from the dining room table, dining room chair so the position is not ideal anyway. I do not have the luxury of space to dedicate to setting up a home office or to accommodate any office equipment, so the dining room table is the only alternative.</p> <p>I do find it very beneficial to be able to sit at a proper desk and on a proper chair for my 2 full days (7 hours) at work. My Manager has kindly let me alter my working pattern so that my home working days are only 5 hours per day (Tues-Thurs).</p>	<p>The hybrid home/office solution would ensure desks in the office would be available.</p> <p>See all comments above. This proposal is not to force people to work from home permanently, a hybrid office and home solution is the most likely appropriate arrangement for most employees.</p> <p>The self assessment of the workstation at home should have picked these matters up.</p>
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<p>Whilst under the current circumstances, with the guidance being clear that we should work from home where possible, we are managing the work, it is not on the basis of 100% working from home. Some areas of work are easier to manage from home eg contracts and litigation where the online court systems allow it (& there are a number of proceedings that it has not been possible to issue, due to problems with the court system that, once resolved will have to be issued using paper documents requiring office presence), but in other areas, some attendance is required to be able to work effectively, even in the current circumstances. It has to be said, that due to the number of admin tasks that now have to be performed, the work is not being progressed as quickly as usual, which has resulted in significant stress for some team members.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the way that legislation is drafted for a number of functions that the council is responsible for requires that documents are issued in paper form, eg regulatory notices (planning enforcement, breach of condition etc), court papers, property papers eg declarations, leases, transfers, planning agreements, TPOs, burial grants. It therefore isn't just attending to seal a document that requires a presence in the office, there are tasks that need to be done associated with that which need office presence. Letters need to accompany documents being issued. Documents need to be copied and/or scanned. At the moment much of this is being done by solicitors as they need to be completed and sent out the same day that they are sealed or signed. Whilst colleagues have been very helpful, their roles require them to do other work which means that they can't simply drop everything when a document needs to be sent out.</p> <p>We need to be able to access paper records in the safe and in files. There is no facility for all deeds to become electronic as they need to be produced in paper form. A safe needs to be retained for these documents and to keep other documents eg at election time, secure. The Council's seal is also kept in the safe. Access is needed to the safe by officers who will need somewhere to work while they are using the papers that they have accessed.</p> <p>Not all legal research tools are electronic as they are not available electronically and some are much more effectively used in paper form eg where you need more than one resource open at a time. There is a continued need for a library that everyone can access (some resources are</p>	<p>The proposal is not for everyone to work at home 100%, see comment above on hybrid solution.</p> <p>See above, it is acknowledged that some functions will still need to be carried out in the office.</p>
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<p>used by multiple team members and other teams).</p> <p>There has also been a significant impact as a result of having no admin support in the office able to complete secretarial roles. Legal documents are often lengthy and, whilst we have all created our own precedent banks to use as much as possible, the role requires diverse documents that frequently require significant adaptation and documents received often require significant amendment. Documents marked up have no one to type them up. This can be very time consuming. Long term, the effectiveness of the legal team would be reduced if they had to continue to perform the admin tasks permanently. This would require the presence of someone in the office who could pick up the work left as digital dictation does not enable all admin issues to be dealt with due to the nature of the work and the need to send things by post. The uncertainty around homeworking has delayed the recruitment of a legal secretary to undertake the a role that includes the secretarial function as it is not clear exactly what they would be able to do. It would only be an effective use of an officer if they and solicitors could be in the office, even if it is not all solicitors all of the time.</p>	
<p>2. Interaction with Colleagues</p> <p>Interaction with colleagues face to face remains important and the opportunity to come into the office for a day a week would be welcomed. Having noted the comment around “water cooler conversations” that aid creativity there is a need to develop and maintain that creative approach, which is most successfully using face to face meetings as ideas and thoughts can be “bounced off each other”. Therefore, an opportunity for such meetings to take place would be welcomed.</p> <p>In my xx odd years of working for WFDC I was classed as a ‘fixed worker’ as I did not have the equipment to work from home. Since March I have been working from my dining room table and chair which is far from ideal as I do not have the luxury of a spare room or even the extra room to accommodate a work station or office chair so have had to make it work. From the start of July, I have been working from home 3 days a week and book my desk out at Wyre Forest House for the other 2 days as there are certain aspects of the job that could not or were difficult to continue to carry out from home on a long term basis. It also provides me with face to face contact with other members of staff, it is good for my mental health.</p>	<p>Noted and agreed, the intention is to retain the ability for face to face meetings to take place in the new office environment.</p> <p>Comments noted.</p>

<p>However, I do find it very isolating at times and no longer feel part of or connected to my team but am resigned to the fact that this is most probably going to have to be my new way of working going forward and am willing to</p> <p>With home working, is that there is no social interaction, this isn't good for mental health. Quite often we need to ask questions & discuss problems with the whole team. It's good to be able to bounce ideas off one another & find solutions to problems.</p> <p>Hard to work at maximum productivity every day with minimal contact with others. The easiest way I can put this is, if you have been to the gym or an exercise class, you push yourself a lot harder when you go with someone else rather than on your own. The same principle applies with office and homeworking; you have others around you to motivate you.</p> <p>I find that it is harder to interrupt someone when you are not aware of what they are doing at that point in time. An office environment gives you the opportunity, when you see that they are momentarily free, to show someone a clause or section of report and ask for a second opinion. It allows you to overhear what people are working on and to interject if you are duplicating that work or have done it before. It also allows you to prepare for something that might be landing on your desk in the coming days or weeks. It also provides a training environment – learning by osmosis of sitting by your desk. Especially in a small team – where we are asked to comment on a wide range of subjects. Sharing ideas, knowledge, concerns and frustrations occurs naturally in a group; it does not in isolation. This has all been lost sitting at my kitchen table.</p> <p>I understand, post Covid-19, that in the current economic climate savings have to be made and I know that I have to adjust and do what I am told. However, you have asked for our feedback and I really don't feel as efficient and productive as I could be in carrying out my duties at home and I miss the support that my colleagues give to me when I have a query on a new point of law or a clause that is ambiguous. I feel that working in a team environment is beneficial to my work and "healthy" for my mind.</p> <p>Management/ team cohesion challenges, can't</p>	<p>Managers will be having regular well-being check-in conversations with their staff, for staff struggling with the isolation and their mental health please speak to your line manager, HR and/or mental health first aider. All employees have access to Employee Assistance Programme and there is additional information on Your Life pages on COLIN.</p> <p>Comments noted.</p>
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<p>access all staff / manager situation that needs recognition/support. Office meetings, booking in desks and meeting rooms by all managers option needed.</p> <p>Teams; need to have one day a week that whole team in for each team so set up each day has certain teams in that use the space. Important interaction between certain teams that support each other. Suggest that face to face meetings needed for teams/ managers each month at least.</p> <p>I welcome the proposal for more homeworking due to the distance I have to commute and would be happy to work from home on a more permanent basis for a few days a week. I have already worked from home one day a week before the pandemic and found it worked really well. However, now I am working from home all the time, whilst I have found myself to be highly productive and effective in general in matters where I have plenty of experience, I have found it problematic that I do not have an easy access to the pool of knowledge of my colleagues when dealing with novel or highly complex issues. In the xx team the ability to brainstorm with the rest of the team in person on ideas, approaches and solutions is absolutely invaluable as each member brings a different experience, knowledge and legal angle to the problem at hand. Whilst zoom sessions, e-mail and phone calls can be helpful it is never as valuable as a personal interaction. Solutions can take much longer to reach than they would have otherwise.</p> <p>Collective time in the office also helps with team building and ensures closeness of the team that just cannot be maintained with long term remote working, the dynamics of the team just aren't the same. There is a definite detachment from the rest of the team working on my own all the time as we just don't know things about each other we would have known otherwise, just from normal, everyday interaction in the office, despite being in regular contact. This feeling of isolation would not be helped by being able to hot desk in the office on different days because that would not provide the necessary team engagement. In that particular respect I would prefer to work from home permanently, from an established work space, than having to book a random desk in the office, which would not guarantee team engagement.</p> <p>A lot can be dealt with via zoom, e-mails and phone calls but often a personal interaction is the most efficient way in which to progress a matter.</p>	<p>The ability to book desks for those needing to is already in place.</p> <p>See above re Line Managers and review of their service areas.</p> <p>Comments noted.</p>
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I miss seeing colleagues from both my team and other teams too; of course I would rather stay home at the present time where it feels safer but in the longer term when it is safe to return to the office I would like to do so; although our team often worked apart for most of the week, having one set day a week where we worked in the office together was really beneficial for us and I hope that will be retained. I feel that working apart from colleagues in both my team and other teams across the Councils can result in some opportunities being missed – for instance sharing ideas isn't so easy or natural when working apart, and work can easily be duplicated which can be easily avoided when working in the same office. While home working part of the time would be nice I think it is vital to retain office space going forward.

I do miss the daily contact with my colleagues and do feel cut off from my team. Even if I didn't have my injury I don't think I would manage well working from home all week, as I need some interaction with people.

Team meetings when we discuss issues that may not all impact on everyone, take time for everyone, but it is hard to dip in and out of the meetings and 1 to 1s are not always timed at a moment when someone wants to be able to progress an issue and needs support. Managers who carry their own case load have less time to undertake that work due to the longer amount of time needed for the management role. What would be a quick conversation in the office with a document or plan in front of you can take so much longer remotely. The work is not process orientated and unique solution are needed that benefit from discussion. Relying on teams and zoom does not bring the same results as in an office setting. Hot desking with eg only one desk for the team would not resolve this issue nor would desks apart from each other.

3. Mental Health Considerations

What analysis is available to show what effect permanent working from home has on people's mental/social wellbeing and how can a good team working spirit be enhanced when the team would rarely be together? If people sign up to working from home now because it suits them,

It is acknowledged that homeworking may impact on an individual's mental well-being. Throughout the pandemic and continue to do so information/support is provided to assist people with their mental well-being i.e. signposting, EAP scheme, Mental Health First Aiders.

<p>their office desk space gets reallocated, but what if it doesn't work for their successor?</p> <p>One thing that I hadn't realised before was how important it was to differentiate the start of the work day from homelife. To leave the house and "start" work in a different environment is an important trigger to clearing my brain. Perhaps other people are better at doing this than me but I have noticed this on the days that I do go into the office: I feel more prepared for "work".</p> <p>I am lonely at home. Really lonely. If I work from home all week, I could easily not see another adult. As I said above, my job is mainly paper based and therefore there is very little in the way of conversation or contact with the "outside world". I often don't know colleagues on the other side of jobs and so therefore, even if I contact them, it is often "cold" as a lot of the time you are arguing a point so there is more conflict than compassion. I note in your FAQs that you have provided support for mental wellbeing and we have had weekly team zoom meetings but that does not replace seeing people, even just to say hello to. For me a happy state of mind is really important – and makes me more productive.</p> <p>I have noticed a difference in the wellbeing and stress levels of colleagues. The lack of certainty in the current climate obviously plays a part, but the lack of team members to easily discuss matters with and share ideas and develop solutions, plays a significant part. Much of what we have to do involves finding new solutions to complex issues and having an opportunity for shared views can be invaluable, even of this is done informally across the office or by calling a quick meeting with colleagues to go through a document. Zoom and teams meetings have not proved to be as successful. Social interaction can be important in building professional relationships. Welfare checks and case discussion take much longer. When working together, it is easier to spot when someone is struggling and needs extra support when you see them regularly.</p> <p>4. Implementation Timetable for Homeworking</p> <p>Looking ahead especially with the Government's approach to getting employees back into the office and the potential introduction of a vaccine, which would make the 2 metre social distancing</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>See comments above regarding workstation assessments, discussion with Line Manager about appropriateness of being able to work from home and about mental health.</p> <p>Please see earlier response on well-being</p> <p>We set out originally a three stage approach to working in the current pandemic, including stage 3 which envisaged the situation described. The Council believes that there have been some</p>
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<p>redundant, will there be a need to review the approach at a time in the future or are we saying this will be the new norm?</p> <p>I'm somewhat confused by the various timings of events, 3.9 of the consultation states that between January and March 2021 managers will be tasked to review services that can work from home in order to maximise home working. The home working guidance (4.2, 4.2.1) uses the term request for home working.</p> <p>As responses to this consultation have to be submitted by 5th October 2020, the above suggests that a.) employees don't know for sure if they are/ are to be considered a home worker and b.) whether or not the homeworking is 'mandated' by management or to take the form of a request. You will appreciate that any response to the consultation may differ significantly on whether the employee is to request home working or the employer is to mandate it – which is it please?</p>	<p>very positive attributes associated with working from home and it is envisaged that the hybrid of increased working at home mixed with some days in the office will become the 'new norm'.</p> <p>Noted, the documents will be reviewed and the Homeworking policy amended for consistency.</p> <p>The consultation is clear that between January and March managers will be asked to review their services and discuss with their teams which services and which team members can effectively work more from home.</p>
<p>5. Homeworking Allowances</p> <p>For some reason you do not wish to entertain discussions of homeworking allowances within this response.</p> <p>Q "Why can we not consult and negotiate allowances for home working as part of this policy? It seems more appropriate in this forum than as part of the pay and grading review?" A "As this element is a change to terms and conditions it has been included with the pay and grading review where we can negotiate with trade unions with the aim of achieving a collective agreement"</p> <p>Again this seems to re-iterate that the homeworking consultation is NOT anything to do with a change to terms and conditions?</p> <p>I would like to comment on the costs associated with homeworking; heating, lighting, loss of a suitable room as a permanent office/ workstation even though you do not wish to hear these, but without knowing clearly what I am being consulted on it is difficult for me to formulate a response.</p> <p>I cannot believe that you have now indicated that you are reviewing these [original homeworking] allowances and may not consider paying them in the future.</p>	<p>The consultation made this clear.</p> <p>Noted.</p> <p>As mentioned in the Q and A's - As this element is a change to terms and conditions it has been included with the pay and grading review where we can negotiate with trade</p>

<p>I cannot believe that you have stated you are not looking for comments on this matter in this consultation – yet it clearly relates to homeworking! And should be included in this consultation.</p> <p>I want my comments to be included in this consultation, as this does relate to homeworking and is an important factor.</p> <p>I feel by not including this matter in the consultation, is just a way of sweeping under the carpet all the long term homeworkers rights and loyalty, and benefits to now new homeworkers, who are moving with the times, supporting the Council, releasing even more office space for the Council to rent out.</p> <p>As stated in your last Corporate Brief, available to view on the intranet (Zoom briefing), it was stated that "You would Continue to invest in your staff".</p> <p>Taking away any allowance we receive is not investing in your staff.</p> <p>I have worked now for nearly xx years with Wyre Forest District Council, staying loyal, getting paid less than the National Pay Scales.</p> <p>I did receive the long service award - which was taken away too - by this Council, and was not acceptable!</p> <p>As a Council worker, how much more penalisation can be directed at the workers who help make the Council what it is?</p> <p>I feel you risk the loss of valuable staff, if you continue to pursue to take away more and more.</p> <p>I have read the home working consultation and note the comment that you do not expect any comments relating to home working allowances as this forms part of the Pay and Grading review upon which consultations are taking place with trade unions. I feel that this is denying a voice to all staff who may be affected by any changes relating to their home working arrangements.</p> <p>Therefore, I am making a comment upon this element of the change to home working practices whether they are expected / invited or not and expect them to be considered either as part of this consultation or the pay and grading review.</p> <p>If we are to work at home permanently then we should be reimbursed for the purchase of a desk and other equipment needed (I have already bought my desk as found it very difficult to work at the dining room table, I have also purchased a laptop riser as my laptop was stacked on books, I currently have my monitor, keyboard,</p>	<p>unions with the aim of achieving a collective agreement.</p> <p>Leasing space in Wyre Forest House to external tenants represents an important source of revenue for the Council which enables it to protect jobs and continue to deliver services.</p> <p>As a Council we can review terms and conditions periodically and align with other authorities. Decisions to review terms and conditions are not taking lightly and due to the significant funding gap we have to look at everything. Whenever we review terms and conditions we gather regional and national information to see what other authorities are doing.</p> <p>As mentioned in the Q and A's - As this element is a change to terms and conditions it has been included with the pay and grading review where we can negotiate with trade unions with the aim of achieving a collective agreement.</p> <p>The Council has agreed the provision of furniture at home where the workstation assessment indicates a need and the furniture is provided through the Council's provider.</p>
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<p>chair and mouse from the office.</p> <p>I appreciate that the financial allowances will be reviewed as part of the pay and grading review but for some members of staff that may be unfortunate enough to be downgraded, how will they be compensated?</p> <p>I understand that the proposal is to not pay an allowance towards the cost of homeworking. I find this odd as the fact that home workers were paid something in the past surely evidences a recognised need and fairness? The consultation document hails the reduced commuting cost, which obviously depends on one's commute. I live local and throughout a year I will certainly don't spend as much on bicycle maintenance as I do on heating my house all day throughout chilly days and electricity for lighting and laptop. I've always used the same old bike to commute into the office for 4 to 5 days each week for the last 10 years and I've only recently had to change my tyres for the first time and install a new cassette (£80 total cost). I would certainly have paid a multitude of this in gas and electric over the years. I appreciate that there might be the option to claim home working tax relief, but this option was there for home workers previously, and did not stop anyone from getting an allowance.</p> <p>Need to consider costs of additional heating & lighting on worker</p> <p>I have worked for the council for xx years and 10 years as a homeworker. I was the one of three people who trialled the homeworking (full time) and never returned back to the office. 10 years ago our department manager encouraged us to go homeworking due to the Council needing to make savings so we jumped on board with it. In our terms and conditions of homeworking, we were told what the homeworking allowance would be and accepted it based on that. When other people started to go homeworking about 9 years ago they queried the home working allowance and provided evidence from the HMRC website stating that our allowance was well below their recommendations and that it should also increase yearly to make allowance for the cost of inflation but we were then told that this allowance was fixed and would never be changed which at the time we all thought was also unfair because our heating/lighting/broadband all change on a regular basis and as we all know, our bills always seem to increase and not decrease.</p> <p>I am also struggling to pay for my bills and this</p>	<p>The pay and grading review is a separate consultation with Unions and there will be provisions i.e. 12 month protection for staff adversely affected.</p> <p>See previous responses regarding homeworking allowance.</p> <p>Allowances are dealt with as part of the pay and grading review.</p> <p>The current allowance is below the HMRC rate and this will be considered during negotiations with Unions as part of the pay and grading review.</p> <p>For the last three years and the four years before that the Council has had a local pay arrangement which provided modest percentage increases.</p> <p>As of April 2021 we will be returning to the</p>
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<p>allowance, even though a small token, helps me in a big way and to take it away would just be yet another blow. Until last year's small cost of inflation pay rise, I have (along with everyone else) not had a pay increase for a long time (7 years I believe). This I have also felt in my household but now you are also bringing in that new pay grading system which you state will not technically affect my pay, but it does because the cost of inflation rise I would have been given next year will get eaten up in the new pay grading system to keep me where I am.</p> <p>I have worked for the Council for xx years. In this time I have witnessed many changes, years ago the Council used to care about their staff but I am sorry to say this is no longer the case. I have been loyal to the Council and have always done my best to support the organisation. However, over the years we seem to be penalised in every way possible. We have not had a pay increases over the years to help with the budget you have taken our long service pay awards away and now once again you are looking at a wage review which will inevitably show in our wage packet even though you say it won't. We seem to lose out in every way. We have thanks you emails regarding how hard we have worked during this pandemic and have given Wyre Forest District Council a fantastic reputation however, after all the work we have done you once again want to penalise us by not paying home workers allowances for heating & internet etc. when at the end of the day we are saving the Council money and have increased our workload. You say you value your staff but constantly are taking money away from us or simply not paying the allowances this doesn't seem to show that you value us in any way shape or form. We all have bills to pay which are constantly increasing. Over the years we have been paid less than national pay scales. We are also feeling the pinch. We have been kicked out of the building Wyre Forest House the building which was built for us only to be moved into Green Street offices which once again have been built for us and now once again have not been able to work in the offices and have worked from home which is now going to be long term which will inevitably result in renting Green Street Offices or more staff moved from Wyre Forest House so we will no longer have the office which was built for us. We will be working from home which will once again help with the budget but you do not want to pay any allowances for working from home. I feel you do not realise how loyal your staff are and have been over the years and you should certainly think again about the home working allowances for all staff who work from home.</p>	<p>National pay negotiations and applying the agreed percentage.</p> <p>See comments above that this is part of the Pay and Grading Review considerations</p> <p>Please see previous response regarding pay increases.</p>
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<p>Payment consideration for home working review must be fair and have some recognition, flexibility; costs will be variable for people. e.g. if living close to office, no petrol saving, only costs.</p> <p>If home is work base, payment for mileage to office/ area working?</p> <p>Additional broadband costs for some people to improve broadband, that if not working would not be needed, e.g. me paying £26 a month where otherwise would only be £15 a month.</p> <p>Home equipment costs, chair and tables and other items, need a standard allowance against which people can buy what suits the location as well if needs be.</p> <p>Only trades union members being consulted on pay and grading review and expect to drop all the current allowances, not fair and fact that most union members are not representing the office based staff so this issue for home workers will not be adequately represented / considered. what will council do to ensure office based staff across all grade are represented and considered in the review and not rely on just the trade union representatives?</p> <p>I have always been an office worker, due to Covid -19 I started to work from home as requested. I found this difficult and struggled to adapt to begin with. I was not alone and speaking with my colleagues who were also struggling like myself and those who have long been home workers supported me in the transition.</p> <p>To find that I was not going to be paid to work from home as it was a short-term measure and I would be saving money on my commute was a real kick in the teeth. The amount staff have been paid to work from home isn't great, that said it's the principle. By paying staff to work from home is shows you value them, you support them and you understand them.</p> <p>I have been home working for over 6 months now, I am not saving money I am spending it! I live close to the office so I am not saving on travel expenses, however I am paying out on electricity, gas , water etc. We listen to customers day in day out with their difficult financial situations and we do our best to support them at the same time trying to get them to pay their council tax bill, we see their income and listen to their situation, however no one listens to us or looks at our income.. incidentally our income is often far less that the customers we try to support. Our daily expenses are going up yet our wages do not reflect the cost of living or the hard work we do.</p>	<p>This has additional tax implications as it is deemed a 'benefit', but the application of mileage allowance includes provision for the start and finish point being home rather than office</p> <p>Please see previous responses regarding equipment</p> <p>This is the appropriate and standard procedure for negotiating the pay and grading review.</p> <p>No employee is "paid to work at home", but no employee has been furloughed and all employees continue to receive 100% of their salaried remuneration.</p>
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<p>Staff who have worked from home for many years are in the same situation as staff who have just started to work from home so why is it ok to pay them to work from home but not the new staff... what's the difference? Please do not insult me by saying I have no travel expenses, as they also save on this.</p> <p>I am enjoying working from home for the time being – I like the benefits of the work/life balance, and I can personally see the benefits of not driving into the office 4 days a week as I would normally do (working from home 1 day a week), although I am still undertaking site visits once or twice per week.</p> <p>I do however think it is unfair to completely remove the financial contribution to home workers (although I appreciate there is the government tax rebate system). Not everyone will have saved commuting costs (or like me will still be traveling for site visits and therefore still incurring commuting costs) which I think should be considered. I have noticed that my electricity costs have risen significantly since March and I am now paying more each month – no doubt this will increase over winter as the heating will be on more too. On the whole my broadband works well but can be temperamental, I would not expect to have to cover the costs for upgrading this to meet WFDC standards. In addition while have most of my printing done by a colleague in the office (or where I have had to visit the office to print & sign legal notices etc), there are some occasions where I have had to use my own printer, paper & ink – while only a small cost to me it will add up over time along with using my own stationary in the absence of being able to use the office stationary. In addition I have purchased my own desk chair to make my current work space more comfortable; on this note I'm not sure that having done a brief i-learn module that I am qualified to assess my workspace sufficiently, however I also do not wish to modify my home to turn it into an office – the setup I have at present works for me and my home.</p> <p>I know the pay review is currently ongoing. I do save petrol money for two return journeys a week for work whether that balances out heating/lighting during the winter months for home working I don't know. However, if grades change following the review, I feel some compensation for heating/electricity needs to be addressed for those who find themselves in a worse position.</p> <p>You are looking at taking away our home allowance for homeworkers. Before I worked</p>	<p>As above this is being dealt with through the pay and grading review.</p>
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<p>from home, I did not have broadband and was told that the council wants employees to work from home. I had to set up broadband for Council purposes only. I was told that the council will subsidise the expenditure – It has caused me extra financial commitment and currently subsidized by a small nominal amount. If this is taken away then I am subsidizing the Council, which to me is not looking after its long term, loyal employee. No consideration just penny pinching.</p> <p>6. Miscellaneous</p> <p>The Frequently asked questions seem confusing;</p> <p>Q “Can you clarify if the council intends moving to permanent home working for roles which can be carried out at home or is it an expectation/request from the individual?” A “It is unlikely that there will be many permanent home working roles..”</p> <p>Question - as stated above, why can't these roles be identified prior to the consultation so that employees directly affected have the opportunity to feedback appropriately?</p> <p>Q “Will contracts of employment be changed to state permanent home working?” A “No. A number of staff currently have home/office capability (pre COVID) so this will be the same.”</p> <p>Am I fundamentally missing something here, the above reply states there will be no changes to contracts of employment but the timetable associated with this clearly sets out the path and includes “01/01/2021 – 31/03/2021 – notice period if necessary to dismiss and re-engage”. Is this therefore a consultation for a change to terms and conditions or not?</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the homeworking consultation. I fully support the proposals and the draft homeworking guidance. I have faith in CLT to continue to keep us safe during the current pandemic and acknowledge that changes will have to be made to address the Council's financial situation.</p> <p>I am grateful that we have not been furloughed and have been given all the equipment and support to work from home. I would not have</p>	<p>There is no inconsistency, it is expected that more roles will be able to work in a hybrid fashion with more working at home than present and less office presence than they may have been used to; it is not envisaged that there will be many posts which lend themselves to permanently working from home for their full time.</p> <p>It was felt that it would be more responsible to allow managers and their teams to agree their best ways of making more of homeworking, rather than taking a ‘top down’ dictatorial approach.</p> <p>The consultation was on a change in working practices not a change to terms and conditions</p> <p>Comments noted.</p>
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<p>been able to work as effectively as I have been able to do without the help of our IT team.</p> <p>I would be happy to continue with my current working arrangements (working from home for the majority of the time and going into the office on days when I have agendas to print and post out etc). Whilst I am still working the same amount of hours, I feel that my work-life balance has improved as there is more flexibility with home working.</p> <p>I am able to split my day up at home, which is beneficial for when I have to work late to support evening meetings.</p> <p>There is a failure to acknowledge the service done for the Council by the many of us who have become home workers over the past few years. As Council offices closed and space became limited we have supported the Council in its aims to cut costs and increase revenues. Some have done so voluntarily and others more reluctantly as available space become less and less. I myself saw my workspace at WFH reduced and reduced until a permanent desk was not made available for me and I was advised that I could move from desk to desk to fit in around the non working days of my colleagues. My only option of a stable work space was to begin home working. Others were affected by the noise of the reduced workspace meaning more people working closer together and felt that home working would enable them to achieve a better working environment that they could control and not constantly face disruption.</p> <p>You comment that letting office space to raise income must be exploited as fully as possible but it feels that this is being done at the expenses of your loyal staff and taking advantage of their goodwill.</p> <p>The consultation suggests the savings made by reduced commuting outweighs the additional costs of running a home office without any analysis of whether this is actually the case for the majority of staff.</p> <p>I would like to declare that I absolutely enjoyed the last 6 months working from home. I never worked from home previously and didn't think I would actually like it as much as I have. However I, and I expect others, interpreted the staff survey undertaken in June as a way of measuring how we were coping with the temporary and necessitated situation, not as an indication of the appetite for working from home on a more permanent basis. So, citing the 'encouraging' responses of this staff survey in</p>	<p>A number of organisations/authorities are moving towards agile working this isn't specific to this Council. Agile working creates flexibility and benefits to both the employer and employee.</p> <p>See comment above on importance of external income.</p> <p>Comment noted.</p> <p>We recognise the results of the survey were a snapshot at time and that is why we have planned a three staged approach to the return to the office and what that will look like.</p>
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<p>the current consultation is I believe somewhat inappropriate and could be misleading. This is not to say that I don't recognise the benefits of homeworking, because I do, especially on a personal and individual level. I do however have reservations regarding the practicalities and also regarding the long term impacts for the organisation as a whole.</p> <p>It works for me as I benefit from the flexibility & lower travel costs etc. I'm pretty self- sufficient type!</p> <p>As a recent trainee, it is so much harder to learn new skills while working from home. Something to bear in mind if any form of succession planning is on the radar.</p> <p>I appreciate the council is trying constantly to make savings but I have been a loyal worker and homeworker for the council all this time and by doing this I do not feel valued. I have saved the council a lot of money in my increased productivity, positivity, heating, lighting and toiletries as I'm not using the council's supplies. Not to mention that I have never been in the office to increase the risk of this infection or any other infection. You have put in your corporate brief that you would "Continue to invest in your staff". How is this investing in us when things keep being taken away?</p> <p>Having little or no access to secretarial support means that I am finding myself typing up documents, all of which are significantly slower than a trained secretary – plus it puts me under pressure as I feel like I should be doing my "work" whilst doing administrative tasks – so often work over to try and catch up or do the administration tasks etc. in the evening</p> <p>IT have been brilliant and have provided me with a laptop that works (and doesn't keep crashing/being slow like my last one), I now have a set of headphones for the phone which means my neck is much better and I'm not worried that my home phone battery is going to run out mid call. I would like to thank them for the continued support that they have provided.</p> <p>Homeworking has been made possible and has worked well due to the fact that Wyre Forest has a fantastic well managed IT section who ensure that the hardware, software and security issues facing the Council are all under control. During the pandemic, I have been able to work from home pretty much as effectively as working in the office with the exception of the inability to</p>	<p>Comments noted.</p> <p>Comments noted.</p> <p>Comments noted.</p> <p>Secretarial support is still available.</p> <p>Noted, thank you.</p> <p>Noted.</p>
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<p>print but it has made us think about alternatives to printing and different ways of working around issues to save on printing.</p> <p>The introduction of Teams has been great to manage meetings, share screens and to see and chat issues through with some of our work colleagues, granted it's not quite the same as meeting people face to face but it's the next best thing and a lot safer in the current climate.</p> <p>The main issue with homeworking is the sometimes inconsistent internet connection but these issues are few and far between but nonetheless annoying when they happen.</p> <p>During pandemic , challenge for parents of kids / caring roles, needs a temporary policy to support those workers can't afford to lose those workers, must have an agreement to have them work less hours for the same money.</p> <p>Approach should make clear review to make sure 'optimal level' covers safety, effective working not necessarily the most efficient work life balance, business resilience/ continuity Service reviews approach to home working over few months good.</p> <p>Should be identifying persons in roles where the role suits and the person is able effectively to work from home most of the time. Cannot be just role based as we may have change of personnel where the incoming person does not have home working capability.</p> <p>Homeworking workstations must be assessed by competent person as part of council H&S duty, not just self-assessed. assessment of home working needs to take account of surrounding / personal factors.</p> <p>WFDC staff do their best across all departments to make the council look good, they do their jobs to the best of their ability and continue to look at ways to improve our services and bring in more revenue, yet we are repaid for our loyalty and hard work by removing long service payments, no longer paying staff to work from home and our wages are low. What respect and support do the staff get? Its difficult times at the moment and everyone is feeling it, once we are on the other side of covid-19 how may loyal staff will you have left, staff that have years of knowledge, when jobs pick up do you think the staff you have so caringly looked after, will be hanging round, I fear they may not. Will you be able to attract hard working and loyal staff to work for you if you are not paying a competitive wage? Being a council worker isn't as attractive as it once was.</p>	<p>During the lockdown there was flexibility for staff who had children at home</p> <p>This is implicit in the consultation.</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Following the self assessment, areas of concern should be discussed with your line manager. If considered appropriate a competent person could be sent out to undertake an assessment if it is determined this post continues to work from home.</p> <p>There is a parallel pay and grading review exercise currently being undertaken.</p>
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Agenda Item 8.1
Appendix 1

<p>A thank you for our hard work does not pay our bills, a decent wage for a decent job does.</p> <p>I have worked for the Council for xx years and have gone through many changes. When I first worked for the Council back in the 19xx's, we were looked after then. I now feel that the Council is not looking after or taking any consideration towards their employees welfare. I have been a loyal employee and feel that there has been very little recognition on the Councils behalf. There has been no pay rises for several years. On top of this my long-term service award has been taken away. yes – long term, loyalty, which is something you don't get very often these days.</p>	<p>This proposal will benefit a number of employees who appreciate the benefits that more homeworking would enable.</p>
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WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**CABINET**
10th November 2020**Green Homes Grant – Local Authority Delivery Scheme**

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Nicky Martin, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health, Wellbeing and Democratic services
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity & Place.
CONTACT OFFICER:	Kate Bailey, Head of Strategic Growth 01562 732560
APPENDICES:	N/A

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to recommend amending the Capital Programme to enable the distribution of the Green Homes Grant.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that:

- 2.1 There is an amendment to the Capital Programme to include expenditure of £300,000 to provide Green Homes Grants fully matched by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) funding.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Government Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, BEIS, opened for bids to the Green Home Grants Local Authority Delivery Scheme in August 2020. Wyre Forest District Council supported a Wychavon led consortium bid by Worcestershire Councils and has been awarded £200k for measures to properties in the district.
- 3.2 The eligibility criteria have a relatively narrow focus to improve energy efficiency in owner-occupied properties that have a poor energy efficiency rating of E, F or G, where off mains gas and the household income is less than £30k. Eligible works include modernising heating and insulation with up to £10k per property.
- 3.3 The Private Sector Housing team can deliver the grants through a process of identifying likely eligible properties and directly marketing the opportunity to them. If there is insufficient take up through this route the grants will be promoted through social media etc. As a joint bid there is some flexibility that if any council is underspent, the funding can go across to areas where higher demand is identified.

- 3.4 The scheme only runs until the end of March 2021. It is anticipated that following this first tranche, BEIS will look to provide further funding in following years.
- 3.5 Wychavon are managing the formal returns to BEIS and utilising Act on Energy (AoE) to support the monitoring and management of the project.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Green Home Grants are capital and therefore need to be included in the Council's Capital Programme.
- 4.2 The exact number of applications that will be received and the amount of grant eligible in each case is difficult to predict. Although the budget is £200k there is scope to increase should there be high demand not mirrored elsewhere in the county. It is anticipated that approximately 30 grants will be delivered.
- 4.3 The scheme will aim to complete all grants by end of March 2021.
- 4.4 A Service Level Agreement will be set up between Wychavon and district partners to facilitate the transfer of funds, monitoring of data and adherence to the grant requirements.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The grant available for Wyre Forest is £200k although further funding may be available if any other parts of Worcestershire under perform. Although the Council's allocation is £200k, in case any further monies are redistributed from underspending Worcestershire authorities it is proposed that the Capital Programme is amended to include up to £300k to cover the cost of this grant scheme. Only those monies received through the grant will be spent, there will be no further financial contribution forthcoming from the Council. The Council will claim 100% of the costs of these grants back from BEIS via Wychavon DC in line with the signed service level agreement so this scheme will be fully funded.
- 5.2 There is a small revenue contribution towards costs included as part of the Green Homes Grant programme from BEIS of £9k. Other costs to the Council in relation to officer time to process the grants will be met from existing budgets.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The eligibility for the grants has been determined by the bid to BEIS. A Memorandum of Understanding between BEIS and Wychavon District Council and then a service level agreement (between WDC and WFDC) will be signed to enable the Council to claim the grant.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Screening Assessment has been undertaken and this indicates there are no adverse effects of this decision on any groups with protected characteristics, so a full EIA is not required.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 The Council will sign a SLA with WDC to enable us to recover any capital grants out. Colleagues in the Private Sector Housing (PSH) and Finance teams will work together to oversee the process of paying out the grants.
- 8.2 The PSH team will ensure eligibility for the scheme in each claim to ensure grant recovery.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 BEIS has made available funding for Green Homes Grants to assist residents with improving the thermal comfort of their homes, The Council will sign an SLA with Wychavon District Council to enable the Council to access this funding to be able to offer grants where the energy rating of the property is E,F or G.
- 9.2 The Council will need to amend the Capital Programme and it is proposed to include an additional provision up to £300k into the programme to meet the costs of the grants and this funding will then be recovered from BEIS.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 CLT

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Not applicable

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**CABINET**
10th NOVEMBER 2020**ESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENT MUSEUM TRUST**

OPEN	
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Helen Dyke - Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Protection
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER	Ian Miller, Chief Executive x 2700
APPENDICES:	Appendix 1: project plan

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to agree the steps necessary to establish Bewdley Museum as a fully independent trust, no longer part of Wyre Forest District Council – once fully in place the only relationship would be that the Council would expect to be the principal funding partner.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS**The Cabinet is asked to:**

- 2.1 **endorse** the project plan to establish Bewdley Museum as a self-standing trust with a board of trustees with the Council transferring its role as trustee of the Bewdley Museum Trust (No 527511) to the new trustees or to a new charitable incorporated organisation that would subsume that Trust (“the museum trust”);
- 2.2 **note** that all property and collection items vested in the Bewdley Museum Trust will remain vested in the museum trust;
- 2.3 subject to confirmation that sufficient trustees can be appointed, **agree** that
- the properties known as The Guildhall, 12 Load Street; Bewdley Museum, 12 Load Street; 11 Load Street and Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Gardens, High Street, all in Bewdley, should be transferred to the museum trust at nil consideration, in accordance with the Council’s power under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to dispose of land at less than best value;
 - the Council’s leasehold interest in Unit 4 Building 329, Rushock Trading Estate should be assigned to the museum trust;
 - any collection items owned by or deposited with the Council should be transferred to the museum trust, at nil consideration in respect of items owned by the Council;
 - the stock of the shop as it exists immediately prior to the new trustees assuming responsibility for the museum should be transferred to the museum trust but the value of the stock should be appropriately recognised in the agreement about

financial arrangements that will be reached between the Council and the Museum trust;

- 2.4 **note** that, subject to completion of the steps outlined above, relevant staff of the Council will be transferred to the museum trust in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (“TUPE”);
- 2.5 **note** that estimated costs of up to £100k will be incurred in establishing the museum trust and that these will be funded from the innovation fund;
- 2.6 **note** that the medium term financial strategy will need to address the future funding levels from the Council, as set out in paragraph 5.5;
- 2.7 **delegate** to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Corporate Director: Resources and the Solicitor to the Council all steps necessary to implement the successful establishment of the museum trust. This includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Arrangements to recruit trustees, the arrangements to be made in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Community Protection;
 - b. Advertising the disposal of public open space and, in consultation with the said Cabinet Member, considering and deciding on any objections received;
 - c. Dealing with all matters related to transfer of staff from the Council to the museum trust in accordance with TUPE;
 - d. obtaining landlord’s consent for the assignment of the leasehold interest in the store and consent to share occupation with the Council to enable the Council’s archive to remain;
 - e. Agreement of the financial arrangements with the museum trust, including the level of grant to reflect the adopted medium term financial strategy.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Reports to Cabinet and Council in September 2019 identified that areas of discretionary activity where the income (if any) is less than the gross costs funded by the Council will have to make the largest contribution to closing the financial gap. “Examples include parks, play areas, toilets, economic development and regeneration, the museum and events and activities. However, this has to be considered within the context of the priorities in the corporate plan. The Cabinet intends to adopt a positive approach, seeking to maintain these activities where they align with the Council’s priorities and looking for alternative ways to ensure their sustainability wherever possible. However the option of reducing or ending services has to be kept open to ensure that the financial gap is closed.” The reports went on to say “Work is under way to explore conversion of Bewdley Museum into a self-standing charitable trust which would be overseen by a board of independent trustees and which would employ the staff. This change is considered essential in order to move the Museum to a sustainable position where its operating costs can fall because of the tools that would be available to it as a charity. The financial and support calls on the District Council would be reduced or removed, and the District Council’s role would be limited to being a funding partner.” The Corporate Plan approved by

Council in September 2019 identifies the strategic action of “Establish Bewdley Museum as a self-standing charity”.

- 3.2 Since then, officers have identified the steps that would need to be taken into order to progress the vision set out last autumn. This work has been informed by consultancy support, including an options appraisal undertaken by cfp, and discussions with the Bewdley Museum Management Committee. A project team is in place, chaired by the Chief Executive, and involving staff from relevant teams. The process of change is complex, as will be apparent from the detail within the project plan in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 The remainder of the report describes the proposals that would enable this positive move for the future of the museum and other important assets in Bewdley. It intended to inject new energy from the trustees who will be appointed and to secure a sustainable future for the museum, Guildhall and QEII Gardens. It will bring these assets under the control and direction of a board of trustees with relevant skills to develop the offer further. It is not about the District Council walking away – while the Council would expect to reduce how much it spends, it envisages entering a grant agreement that would be worth several hundred £ thousand a year.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Council’s financial position has worsened as a result of COVID-19 and the financial gap is now greater than in September 2019. It is imperative that progress is made to place the museum on a sustainable financial footing but outside the Council, in order that the level of grant support from the Council can be reduced. The museum is recognised as an important draw for visitors to Wyre Forest and Bewdley, with over 200k visits recorded in 2019. While its collections relate to the Wyre Forest area as a whole, the association is strongest with Bewdley and reflected in its name. However it is unrealistic to expect Bewdley Town Council to bear the cost of running the museum, as the total net cost runs to over £450k (which does not include the cost of QEII Jubilee Gardens) - that is approximately two and a half times the Town Council’s precept for 2020-21. The Town Council could choose to make a financial contribution, in recognition of the importance of the museum to the town’s tourism offer, although at present it does not do so. For the foreseeable future, the District Council is likely to have to perform the role of principal funder if the museum is to continue on a sustainable footing: without the District Council’s financial contribution, the only realistic alternative is closure.
- 4.2 The work undertaken since September 2019 now permits the Cabinet to take the steps that will secure implementation of the new governance model. In endorsing the project plan, the Cabinet is in particular asked to agree that Bewdley Museum should be established as a self-standing trust with a board of trustees. The Council has performed this role for many years as trustee of the Bewdley Museum Trust (No 527511). The intention at present is to continue with the Trust but to vest it in new trustees with effect from 1 January 2022. This process will require the approval of the Charity Commission and if, in light of its advice or other factors, it is identified that it would be preferable to constitute the museum trust as a charitable incorporated organisation, that route would be implemented instead. (For example, a charitable incorporated organisation limits the personal liability of trustees and might mean that it would not be necessary to establish a separate trading arm.) Either governance model would have the same outcome in terms of the Council’s role: it would cease to be involved in the trust as trustee. All actions taken by the Council will have to comply

with relevant legislation on charities and will be taken with full awareness of the responsibilities of the Council as the current trustee.

- 4.3 Whichever governance model is adopted, all property and collection items vested in the Bewdley Museum Trust will remain vested in the museum trust: they are held by a charity and will continue to be held by a charity. The collection held by the Council extends beyond property and items vested in the trust. The recommendations therefore include seeking the Cabinet's agreement to transfer any collection items owned by or deposited with the Council to the museum trust, at nil consideration in respect of items owned by the Council. This would not disturb the basis on which any particular item is held: in particular, any item that has been deposited with the Council (as opposed to acquired by it, whether by purchase, gift or other means) would continue to be held on deposit and would be returned if the owner wished to have it back. As part of the process, efforts will be made to contact depositors, where known, to inform them and to give them the opportunity to withdraw items if they wish.
- 4.4 However the process of transferring the collection and certain other key steps, such as transfer of land and buildings and staff, will happen only if sufficient trustees can be appointed to the museum trust. It will be important that the trustees are in place as a shadow board some months in advance of the formal transfer of responsibility. It would mean that those who will be responsible for the charity would be able to work alongside the Council in the transitional period, and be able to take appropriate preparatory steps such as deciding arrangements for support services and other matters that change on or soon after the date of transfer. It will be the case that, if no or too few trustees come forward, the council will have to address the future ability of the charity to carry out its purposes in light of the need for the Council to reduce the levels of funding it is able to provide to support the museum. This would be the subject of a separate report and decision-making process.
- 4.5 The recommendations include the transfer of significant land and buildings from the Council to the museum trust: The Guildhall, 12 Load Street; Bewdley Museum, also at 12 Load Street; the former town house at 11 Load Street; and Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Gardens, High Street, all in Bewdley. The proposal is that they should be transferred to the museum trust at nil consideration, in accordance with the Council's power under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to dispose of land at less than best value. The Council has commissioned an independent valuation of the properties in question and this shows that their value is £780,000. (As is always the case, a valuation for disposal is conducted on a different basis from the balance sheet valuation in the Council's accounts which is calculated solely for accounting purposes. Unsurprisingly, the different basis of valuation produces different results.) Therefore the Council can rely upon the general disposal consent from the Secretary of State. This allows a council to dispose of land and buildings where the estimated value is less than £2m without reference to him, if the council is proposing to obtain less than best value and it considers that the disposal will help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area.
- 4.6 It is also proposed to assign the Council's leasehold interest in the museum store at Rushock. However this would be subject to obtaining agreement from the landlord as noted in one limb of the delegation to the Chief Executive. The current lease expires in 2022-23 and the options appraisal notes the possibility of working with Worcestershire Museums on joint storage arrangements: this will be a matter for the

museum trust to pursue. The store contains not only museum collection items but also space occupied by the District Council's archived files (for which the District Council will need to pay rent if the museum trust becomes the leaseholder).

- 4.7 The site is used for more than a museum. It incorporates a tourist information centre (staff roles in respect of the museum and TIC are seamless) and provides not only Bewdley's art gallery but also an important venue for promotion of crafts and performing arts in the town. Finally the land incorporates Bewdley's premier open public space which has recently received a further award of a Green Flag from Keep Britain Tidy, as it has done for many years.
- 4.8 The transfer of the land, buildings and operation of the museum and Queen Elizabeth II gardens from the Council to the museum trust would therefore be of wider significance than simply the museum. It would trigger the transfer of relevant staff to the museum trust in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 ("TUPE"). The transfer would be on their existing terms and conditions. It is intended to negotiate admission of the museum trust to the Worcestershire Pension Fund so that they could continue to benefit from membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme. Information would be provided to staff and recognised trade unions in accordance with TUPE. It would be open to the museum trust to recruit any new staff on whatever terms and conditions it wished to offer – this is one of the ways in which the cost of operating the museum could fall over time – and it would assume full responsibility for making any changes in respect of transferred staff, subject to compliance with employment law.
- 4.9 The financial implications are dealt with in section 5 below, and will need to be reflected in the medium term financial strategy in terms of levels of future grant funding from the Council.
- 4.10 Finally the report seeks agreement to a significant range of delegations to the Chief Executive in order take steps necessary to implement the successful establishment of the museum trust. These have been designed to avoid a multiplicity of reports to Cabinet on detail which will not affect the parameters set out for agreement in this report or which will be approved by Councillors by other means (such as the level of grant funding set out in the medium term financial strategy).

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The net revenue cost of the museum, museum store and Guildhall is £454k in 2020-21 rising to £472k in 2022-23, provided as Council support, as set out in the budget book. This includes depreciation. In addition, the Council maintains the QEII Gardens which are estimated to cost c£120k a year.
- 5.2 The transfer of these assets to the museum trust is expected to unlock the opportunity for it to make significant cost reductions that are not open to the Council. Principally these relate to the cost of Council support services, central recharges and grounds maintenance. No museum trust would choose to spend as much on these services as the Council spends. The transition to making its own arrangements will need to be an early focus for the museum trustees once identified. The Council will be prepared to provide its services if necessary for a period beyond December 2021 but it should expect not to undertake this work in the longer term. A reduction in the Council's activities is likely to lead to a reduction in staffing levels in

support services and grounds maintenance, which is also likely to arise from the ongoing work with town councils on transfer of assets under the localism agenda. It is difficult to predict the impact with any accuracy at this stage but it is expected that, taken together, there will be one off exit costs associated with downsizing the Council as a result of the wider localism agenda. The funding of these costs together with any other exit costs proposed to close the funding gap will be addressed as part of the MTFS.

- 5.3 The Council faces significant one off costs in ensuring that the museum trust is successfully established. These have been estimated at up to £100k and the Corporate Leadership Team has allocated funding from the innovation fund. The report recommends proceeding on the swiftest timetable to implement the museum trust. The Council would therefore bear the costs of transition, with the expectation that they would be recouped within a maximum of two years. The cfp consultancy report identifies options for annual savings and increased income totaling over £100k although not all of these would materialise in the first 12 months. However it is considered realistic to assume that the Council could reduce its net contribution by at least £50k/year from the outset.
- 5.4 An alternative, slower time line is articulated in the consultancy reports if the Council sought funding for the transition costs from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. However this route is uncertain, firstly because it is not known if or when the Heritage Fund will reopen its Heritage Grants programme; and secondly because there is no guarantee of a successful outcome for any application. There could be a delay of 9-12 months even if a grant was successfully secured. In simple cost-benefit terms, it would be preferable for the Council to obtain funding towards the transition costs. However this would not demonstrate the Council's commitment to implementing changes swiftly in order to address its financial situation. The report therefore adopts the swifter route to implementation.
- 5.5 The stock in the museum shop at the point of transfer to the museum trust will have a value – the Council pays for the stock. It is not proposed to transfer this stock at nil value but instead to reflect the value in an appropriate way in the detail of the agreement about financial arrangements with the museum trust.
- 5.6 The medium term financial strategy will need to be aligned with the outcome achieved in respect of the financial agreement with the museum trust, including the future level of grant funding. This is expected to show an annual reduction of at least £50k from January 2022, rising in subsequent years to at least £100k.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000, as amended, make no provision in respect of the Council's role as trustee of the existing trust. In the absence of specific statutory provision vesting decision-making on this matter in the Council, it therefore falls to the Cabinet to take decisions in accordance with the legislation and the Council's executive arrangements.
- 6.2 In its capacity as sole trustee of a charity, when taking decisions on behalf of the charity, the Council has a duty to act in the charity's best interests and to avoid any conflict between its duty to the charity and the interests it has in its capacity as the Council.

- 6.3 The Charity Commission has a set of objectives, two of which are most relevant to this report. The first is to promote compliance by charity trustees with their legal obligations in exercising control and management of the administration of their charities. The second is to promote the effective use of charitable resources.
- 6.4 The steps proposed in this report are to ensure that the charity is able to continue to be sustainable without the current level of reliance on financial support from the council, which cannot be guaranteed in the long term, by reducing costs and becoming more self-sufficient.
- 6.5 The report identifies other relevant legislation such as the TUPE Regulations and charity legislation with which this process will have to comply.
- 6.6 The Council will enter into appropriate discussions with leaseholders, license holders and other bodies that have rights in respect of the land and buildings proposed for transfer. In simple terms, it is not proposed that the nature of current arrangements would alter at the point of transfer although arrangements beyond that point (for example on the expiry of a lease or licence) would be a matter for the museum trust.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An EIA screening has been undertaken and no adverse equality impacts have been identified. A full assessment is not required.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 This is a complex process and there is a variety of risks that will need to be managed. A full risk register will be produced and monitored by the project board. The principal risk relates to the ability to attract sufficient trustees with relevant skills who are prepared to serve in a volunteer capacity. Without people stepping forward, it will not be possible to implement the changes outlined in this report, and the preparatory expenditure on the costs of transition might turn out to be wasted. In such circumstances, it would be necessary to bring forward a separate report on the future ability of the charity to carry out its purposes in light of the need for the Council to reduce the levels of funding it is able to provide to support the museum.
- 8.2 The balance of “risk and reward” in terms of a delayed implementation timetable and the possibility of obtaining external funding to meet some of the transition costs is set out in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 above. The recommended approach avoids the risk that implementation and savings are needlessly delayed, given that there is no certainty that external grant funding would be obtained.
- 8.3 Paragraph 4.2 refers to the duty on the Council to act in the best interests of the charity. Risks here will be mitigated by liaison with the Charity Commission about the process of change and compliance with charity legislation.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Cabinet is invited to consider the recommendations in this report that would secure the establishment of a self-standing trust to own and operate Bewdley Museum.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 Cabinet
- 10.2 Corporate Leadership team
- 10.3 Bewdley Museum Management Committee

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Reports about corporate plan and financial context, Cabinet 18 September 2019; Council 25 September 2019
- 11.2 Bewdley Museum Options Appraisal report from cfp, July 2020
- 11.3 Report from Caroline Taylor Consulting, October 2020
- 11.4 Avison Young valuation report on Bewdley Museum and Town Hall, Load Street, Bewdley, October 2020
- 11.5 Circular 06/03 Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent 2003

Bewdley Museum Independent Trust Working Group – Project Plan

Version 6 - October 2020

Task	Key Actions	Timescale	Lead Officer
Project Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify people requirement ➤ Appoint trust recruitment & project consultants 	Jan 2021	AB/SB
Collection & Store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Collection ownership ➤ Collection condition survey 	Jan – Sep 2021	LC/JA
Trustees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Numbers of trustees and skill mix ➤ Trustees proposal and shadow board ➤ Potential for merging with any other Trusts ➤ Advertise for trustees ➤ Shadow trustee board to be in place by June 2021 ➤ Trustee appointments 	Jan 2021 – Apr 2021	AB/SB Consultants
Business Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Service level agreements – WFDC ➤ Future income & expenditure predictions 	Jan – Mar 2021	TS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Revised business plan ➤ Vision – Mission – Values ➤ Revised service operating plans 	Apr – Sep 2021	AB/SB Consultants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Memberships ➤ Donations ➤ Gift Aid ➤ Legacy programme ➤ Fund raising 	Apr – Sep 2021	AB/Trust Consultants
Legal & Governance Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review current trust status ➤ Revise legal constitution / change purpose ➤ Review volunteer groups ➤ Review friends group ➤ Review management committee role ➤ Draft and agree new constitution 	Jan – Mar 2021	JA
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Confirm charity vehicle ➤ Confirm constitution with charity commission ➤ Confirm extent of all assets to be transferred 	Apr – Sep 2021	JA

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Task	Key Actions	Timescale	Lead Officer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Close old agreement - Charity Commission consent 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Licences - craft workers – terminate and grant new license ➤ Lease - cafe transfer lease ➤ Lease - Bewdley Town Council office – transfer lease ➤ Covenants 	Apr – Sep 2021	CB
Marketing & Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Community consultation and stakeholder engagement ➤ Marketing & communications to secure positive press (November 2020 onwards) 	Jan – Dec 2021	SJH
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Accounts - Review 5 year trading plan produced with options appraisal ➤ VAT – Review position status ➤ Forecast impact on WFDC budget over the MTFS ➤ Future accounting issues between WFDC and the Trust – Recharging position 	Jan – Sep 2021	TS
Property Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Land ownership ➤ Condition survey of buildings & grounds (Inc QE11 gardens) ➤ Building maintenance – Draft 10yr forward plan ➤ Inventory of equipment ➤ Landlord consent for transfer of lease on the store ➤ Valuation of site for S.123 purposes (October 2020) ➤ Advertise disposal of public open space (2 consecutive weeks) 	Jan – Sep 2021	VB/JL
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Transfer of staff (TUPE) ➤ Staffing levels for independent trust ➤ Pension issues – secure admitted body status; clarity of costs post transfer, particularly in relation to any subsequent restructures by trust 	Apr – Dec 2021	RS
Risk Register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Draft project register 	Nov 2020	SB

Project Plan Working Group:

JA	Jane Alexander	Principal Solicitor
AB	Alison Bakr	Project Lead - Museum Manager
VB	Victoria Bendall	Estates Surveyor
CB	Charlotte Beswick	Property Solicitor

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SB	Steve Brant	Head of Community & Environment
LC	Liz Cowley	Collections & Interpretation Officer
SJH	Suzanne Johnston-Hubbold	Communications and Engagement Officer
JL	James Leach	Asset Maintenance & Compliance Officer
RS	Rachael Simpson	Principal HR Advisor
TS	Tracey Southall	Corporate Director - Resources