

## **Cabinet – 20 July 2022**

### **Walsall Council Strategic Asset Plan 2022-27 – Accommodation Policy**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration

**Related portfolios:** N/A

**Service:** Corporate Landlord

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** Yes

**Forward plan:** Yes

#### **1. Aim**

The Strategic Asset Plan is the key document which sets out the Council's vision and approach for the management of its property portfolio under the new Corporate Landlord model. The Accommodation Policy is the final appendix to the Strategic Asset Plan.

#### **2. Summary**

- 2.1 The Council's property function has undergone a transformation to create a comprehensive, joined up service operating under a Corporate Landlord Methodology
- 2.2 Coupled with the integration of the Corporate Landlord service is the preparation of a Strategic Asset Plan (SAP) which sets out the principles and objectives for the operational and strategic management of the Council's property assets.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021, Cabinet received a report seeking the approval of the SAP and the appendices that had been prepared at that time.
- 2.4 On 20<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Cabinet approved the Major Projects Handbook and a number of minor amendments to the SAP and the suite of appendices previously presented to Cabinet.
- 2.5 This report seeks Cabinet approval of the Accommodation Policy which is the final appendix to the SAP.
- 2.6 The approval of the Accommodation Policy is a key decision because it is significant in terms of its direct effects on communities in an area comprising two or more wards in the Borough.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 That Cabinet approves the Accommodation Policy as attached in Appendix A.

### **4. Report detail - know**

#### ***Context***

- 4.1 Walsall Council has adopted a Corporate Landlord approach to the management of its land and property assets in order to support the Council Plan Priorities.
- 4.2 At its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021, Cabinet received a report seeking approval to the draft Strategic Asset Plan 2022-27 (SAP). At the time of the December 2021 report, two of the appendices to the SAP were in development, being the Accommodation Policy and the Major Projects Handbook. The Major Projects Handbook was approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2022 along with a number of minor amendments to the suite of SAP documents.

#### Appendix 2 – Accommodation Policy

- 4.3 The Accommodation Policy sets out the Council's policies relating to the occupation of property in accordance with the adopted principles of blended working and presence with a purpose and ensuring our premises are fit for purpose to cater for our current and future needs. It also details requirements and expectations of service areas in terms of their occupation of buildings which, together with the Responsibilities Document, provides the framework for the "landlord" and "tenant" relationship between Corporate Landlord and Service Directorates. The document also provides guidance on the procedures to be followed by Service Directorates in cases when additional space is required for existing or new operational requirements.
- 4.4 The draft policy is contained in Appendix A of this report for approval.
- 4.5 The preparation of the Accommodation Policy has involved consultation with service directorates and elected members. The consultation with service directorates has been undertaken through the Corporate Landlord Working Group.
- 4.6 The Accommodation Policy has also been reviewed by the Strategic Investment Board.

#### ***Council Plan priorities***

- 4.7 As set out in Our Council Plan 2022-2025, the Council's vision is to ensure that 'Inequalities are reduced and all potential is maximised. Together we are committed to developing a healthier, cleaner and safer Walsall and creating an environment that provides opportunities for all residents, communities and businesses to fulfil their potential and thrive.' This will be achieved by focusing on five key priorities. The implementation of the SAP will contribute towards the delivery of the following Council priorities and outcomes.

- Priority: Supporting a dynamic, resilient and diverse economy where businesses invest and everyone has the right jobs and the right housing in the right place
- Outcome: Regenerating the Borough to support places where people are proud to live and work, delivering affordable homes and attracting inward investment
- Priority: Internal focus – The Council will deliver trusted, customer focused, and enabling services, which are recognised by customers and our partners for the value they bring
- Outcome: Services will provide value for money measured through delivery of outcomes within agreed resources.

### ***Risk management***

- 4.8 The SAP sets out the scope and approach of the Corporate Landlord model for the management of the Council's property assets to establish clear responsibilities for actions relating to risks arising from property ownership and occupation.
- 4.9 The inclusive approach of the SAP which enables Directorates to interact with Corporate Landlord promotes strategic property thinking, and ownership of the SAP by Members and senior officers, provides valuable evidence of the efficient use of resources.
- 4.10 The clarified and revised governance arrangements established in the SAP will enable the Corporate Landlord, working with all occupiers of Council property, to minimise property related risks and to deliver a portfolio of safe and fit for purpose assets.
- 4.11 The Accommodation Policy sets out the policies and processes which will enable the Corporate Landlord to ensure that the built estate is occupied safely and in the most efficient way possible.

### ***Financial implications***

- 4.12 By developing a property strategy that reflects current and future patterns of service delivery, the Council is ensuring that scarce financial resources are targeted to maximum effect and for the maximum benefit of the residents of the borough. In this way, decisions to invest or disinvest in locations are directly linked to service models and it can be demonstrated that opportunities to share accommodation across services, or with other public and private partners, have been explored.
- 4.13 As the SAP is implemented further investment into our estate as well as disposals and repurposing of assets will be planned and prioritised and any further capital investment in addition to what is already included within the capital programme will come through Strategic Investment Board, Asset Strategy Group and Cabinet as required.

### ***Legal implications***

- 4.14 In developing the strategies outlined in the SAP, due regard has been taken to the Council's statutory obligations in terms of health and safety, employment, property

law, planning law and equality to ensure that its portfolio is fit for purpose. The governance arrangements contained within the SAP operate within the existing scheme of delegations set out in the Council's constitution.

- 4.15 This report does not seek directly to acquire or dispose of land or property. Such acquisitions and disposals will continue to be carried out in accordance with the Council's constitution. The Council has an overriding statutory duty to ensure that all property assets are managed efficiently to secure best value in service delivery and that in disposals the Council achieves best consideration.

#### ***Procurement Implications/Social Value***

- 4.16 There are no direct procurement or social value implications arising from this report. Corporate Landlord will manage the Council's property assets in accordance with the SAP. In doing so, there will be requirements to procure services and works from external providers which will be undertaken with the Council's Procurement team in accordance with the Contract Rules, national legislation including Social Value and the council's wider priorities.

#### ***Property implications***

- 4.17 The SAP sets out the governance, procedures, policies and strategies required to deliver an efficient and fit for purpose property portfolio. The Accommodation Policy provides the further detail relating to the occupation and day to day management of the Council's built estate.

#### ***Health and wellbeing implications***

- 4.18 The adoption of the SAP has no direct impact on health and wellbeing, however the corporate priorities reflect the key objectives of the Marmot review and the implementation of the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy can be supported by a co-ordinated and planned provision of property assets to enable the delivery of appropriate services in locations that meet identified needs.

#### ***Staffing implications***

- 4.19 Responsibility for the delivery of the strategy sits with the Corporate Landlord service. Across the wider Council, senior officers in all services are called upon to support the process. This support takes the form of attendance at Directorate Capital and Asset Groups, Working / Project Groups and Strategic Investment Board and assistance with general compliance with the policies and processes when considering property related matters. As assets are identified within the SAP programme as being surplus to requirements and/or for disposal, or as land and property is identified for acquisition, officers in Legal Services and possibly external providers will be involved, on a case by case basis.

#### ***Reducing Inequalities***

- 4.20 The effect of the adoption of the SAP is to provide more focused management of the Council's existing assets and a strategic approach to disposals and acquisitions, making the most of opportunities as they arise. The operation of the SAP will potentially affect existing occupiers, employees and service users of

Council assets. It may also affect how or where services are delivered. An initial EqIA has been carried out and is attached at Appendix B. Whilst this demonstrates that there is no adverse impact upon protected groups under the Equality Act by reason of the adoption of the Corporate Landlord model, it is envisaged that a series of projects and transactions will emanate from this strategy and, as those individual projects are developed and brought forward, a separate EqIA may need to be prepared for each.

- 4.21 The Council is committed to ensuring that equalities form an intrinsic part of its decision making. In respect of each project, detailed thought will be required about the needs of people with protected characteristics on a case by case basis and appropriate consultation will need to be carried out to ensure that protected groups, including employees, occupiers and service users, have opportunities to comment. Whilst the Council's services rightly focus on delivery rather than location, the SAP will enable the location of a service and its suitability for purpose to be assessed, to ensure that there are sufficient assets of the right type available to meet the services we deliver, so that assets are well used and cost effective.

### ***Climate Change***

- 4.22 The Council declared a climate emergency on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2019 and resolved to develop strategies to become carbon neutral by 2050 in line with national government targets. In 2020, a Climate Change Action Plan was presented to Cabinet, which set out meaningful and effective measures to enable the Council to deliver against its vision.
- 4.23 To meet the net zero carbon by 2050 target, and fully respond to the declaration of a Climate Emergency, the Council needs to ensure that reducing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and increasing climate resilience of our operations and assets is central to the work of the organisation. Including climate change as a mandatory element of Cabinet reports shows that the Council is taking measures to embed climate change within operations and normalise it as a key consideration for all projects. It will support the Council in reducing its own carbon footprint and help drive us to be carbon net zero by 2050.
- 4.24 The SAP embraces the objectives of the Climate Change Action Plan and notes the impact of the Council's property portfolio on the organisation's carbon footprint. A key aspect of the Corporate Landlord model is the maintenance of its assets. This includes building and land maintenance, fire, facilities management, services (gas, electricity, water etc), asbestos, Japanese knotweed, ground contamination etc. In addition, the maintenance element of the model enables consideration of energy resources, sustainability and carbon reduction methods, in line with the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.

### ***Consultation***

- 4.25 Consultation in respect of the preparation of the Accommodation Policy has been undertaken with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Children's Services, Economy, Environment and Communities, Adult Social Care and Resources and Transformation.

## 5. Decide

- 5.1 The Approval of the Accommodation Policy will complete suite of documents that makes up the Strategic Asset Plan which is the strategic and operational framework required to enable the Corporate Landlord service to manage the Council's land and property assets effectively and in accordance with the Council's priorities.
- 5.2 The ability for the Corporate Landlord service to effectively and strategically manage the Council's land and property assets will be significantly reduced without an adopted Strategic Asset Plan.

## 6. Respond

- 6.1 Subject to Cabinet approval of the recommendations in this report, Corporate Landlord will enact the policies and procedures and strategies contained in the Accommodation Policy in its management of the Council's built estate.

## 7. Review

- 7.1 Progress against the outputs from the enactment of the Accommodation Policy will form part of the regular update reports on the Asset Management Action Plan will be reported to Corporate Landlord Board and Strategic Investment Board.

## Background papers

Strategic Asset Plan

## Appendices

Appendix A – Accommodation Policy

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Councillor Andrew  
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