

Minutes of The Cabinet

**Thursday 18 November 2021 at 2.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Crompton (Chair);
Councillors Ahmed, Bostan, Carmichael, Hartwell,
Millard, I Padda, Piper and Simms.

Also present: Councillors E M Giles, Mabena and Moore.

Officers: Kim Bromley-Derry (Interim Chief Executive), Nicholas Austin (Interim Director of Borough Economy), Melanie Barnett (Acting Operational Director – Children and Education & Statutory Director of Children’s Services), Rashpal Bishop (Director of Adult Social Care), Neil Cox (Director of Business Strategy and Change), Gillian Douglas (Director of Housing), Simone Hines (Director of Finance) Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth), Lisa McNally (Director of Public Health), Surjit Tour (Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer) and Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager).

201/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Giles and Shackleton.

202/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared at the meeting.



203/21 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

204/21 **Extension of the arrangements for decommissioning purposes of the temporary mortuary at Birmingham Airport**

Approval was sought for the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer to be authorised to extend or enter into all requisite agreements (including leases/licences) and any arrangements necessary for the ongoing decommissioning of the additional storage and accommodation facilities at the temporary mortuary at Birmingham Airport.

Furthermore, subject to this, approval was sought for the Council to commit up to 10.35% of the total overall costs (estimated £250,000) from its contingency budgets as Sandwell's agreed contribution toward the contractual and lease arrangements. Also, that any necessary exemptions be made to the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules to enable the course of action be approved.

Reason for Decision

Emergency Committee Minute No's 7/20, and 14/21 noted the Council's past need to ensure it had in place sufficient arrangements so that it could respond flexibly to sustained increases in the mortality rate for the storage of deceased persons due to COVID-19.

Whilst the need for the facility had now ceased, Sandwell Council had been notified by the lead authorities for decommissioning Birmingham CC and Walsall MBC that additional time was required to appropriately decommission the site. It was now proposed to extend the lease until the completion of the work and lease arrangements could be ended which was anticipated to be by 28 February 2022.



The decommissioning would therefore exceed the current lease arrangements which ended on 30 November 2021. The estimated cost of the decommissioning work including transportation arrangements was £250,000, which would be shared between the West Midlands and Warwickshire regional Local Authorities. Sandwell was the lead contractor for the site so had to undertake the necessary activities on behalf of the other Local Authorities.

Alternative Options Considered

There were no alternative options. The assets/equipment in the hangers large and requires specialist decommissioning. Upon termination of the lease the units must be handed back with vacant possession, so all equipment must be removed from the site or Birmingham airport could take action against the Council, charge rent for storing the equipment or remove and destroy the assets/equipment.

Agreed :-

- (1) that the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to extend or enter into all requisite agreements (including leases/licences) and any arrangements necessary for the ongoing decommissioning of the additional storage and accommodation facilities at the temporary mortuary at Birmingham Airport;
- (2) that in connection with (1) above, the Council commits up to 10.35% of the total overall costs (estimated £250,000) from its contingency budgets as Sandwell's agreed contribution toward the contractual and lease arrangements;
- (3) that any necessary exemptions be made to the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules to enable the course of action referred to above to proceed.



The report sought for Cabinet to note the outcome of the consultation and that approval was given to Option 3 as the preferred option, which was to look at upgrading Walker Grange building to ensure it was fit for purpose to provide Extra Care Housing and to meet the changing needs of older people including those with Dementia.

Furthermore, subject to Option 3 being approved, a further report would be prepared and presented to Cabinet setting out a detailed implementation plan and the allocation of requisite financial resources.

The Chair of the Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board highlighted the decrease in demand at Walker Grange and the decision to close admissions due to COVID 19 and to effectively manage infection control and questioned whether this had now been reopened. The Cabinet Member for Living and Ageing Well undertook to report this information back.

Reason for Decision

Following the permission to consult given at the September Cabinet meeting, there was a requirement for the outcome of the consultation to be reported back to Cabinet. This was to ensure an informed decision could be sought in relation to the options outlined in the original report.

Prior to the first report to Cabinet on the 1st September 2021, management at Walker Grange had been made aware of a number of potential issues to the building which would need to be responded to in order to ensure the continuation of service provision. These included upgrading or replacing the heating system, repair or replacement of a number of windows and work undertaken on parts of the flat roofs. It was thought that work in these areas would be necessary if the service was to continue at Walker Grange and would need to be costed and agreed. Via the consultation process agreed by Cabinet, this presented officers with the



opportunity to gather views from directly affected stakeholders as well as information, including a full survey to understand the condition of the building, to ensure that resident needs are met and inform future decisions. From the consultation, a clear message from tenants, their families and staff were that they valued and wanted Walker Grange to continue to provide services to the current cohort of people and potentially develop and promote the service further.

During the consultation period it became clear that further investment, rather than purely maintenance, could potentially provide the Council with a resource to provide additional support to vulnerable adults through extra care provision.

The consultation with tenants, their family and the staff at the unit had now concluded and the preferred option arising from that consultation was Option 3.

There was further work to be undertaken to provide a detailed plan of work that was required to the facility along with a comprehensive financial analysis that cabinet would be required to approve.

Alternative Options Considered

If Cabinet did not approve the recommendation to agree to Option 3 then the two alternative options put forward as part of the consultation would need to be considered. These were:-

Option 1 – Do nothing – continue to provide Extra Care Housing at Walker Grange

This was an option initially supported by tenants, families and their staff, but the survey found that Walker Grange would still require investment to address immediate areas of improvement required – heating, roof, windows, lighting, and investment to make it fit for the future and for an ageing population. If Option 1 was preferred, the survey undertaken detailed that the cost of undertaking this element of work to be in the region of £536K, however, this would not provide



upgrades to the building in order to support the development of dementia friendly support services.

Option 2 – Look at the closure of Walker Grange & the transfer of Tenants to other suitable Extra Care Housing provision

This was the least preferred option by tenants, families and their staff. There was an established risk to frail older people who are moved. This would need to be part of a further assessment of need for the individuals who are in this position as this option may have an impact on their health and wellbeing. The consultation process had shown the current tenants to be a well-established and settled group of people within the Extra Care scheme at Walker Grange who feel a real affinity to the local area and community. Under this option tenants would be placed in different Extra Care schemes homes across the borough, breaking up established friendship groups and potentially increase distance for family to visit.

Cabinet Members expressed their gratitude to residents of Walker Grange care home and their families and for their work with the Council during the consultation. The dementia provisions within the report were also welcomed by the Cabinet members.

Agreed :-

- (1) that the outcome of the consultation be noted, and that approval is given to Option 3 as the preferred option, which is to look at upgrading Walker Grange building to ensure it is fit for purpose to provide Extra Care Housing and to meet the changing needs of older people including those with Dementia;
- (2) subject to Option 3 being approved, a further report be prepared and presented to Cabinet setting out a detailed implementation plan and the allocation of requisite financial resources.



Meeting ended at 2:15pm.

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

