

## **SCRUTINY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**23 APRIL 2019 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE**

**Committee Members Present** Councillor Murray (Chair)  
Councillor James  
Councillor Shires  
Councillor Singh-Sohal

**Officers Present** James Walsh – Executive Director (Resources & Transformation)  
Penny Mell – Assistant Director (Transformation & Digital)  
Rebecca Wassell – Assistant Director (Human Resources)  
Liz Murphy – Independent Safeguarding Boards Chair  
Mike Smith – Senior HR Manager  
Mark Fearn – Project Lead (Money, Home, Job)  
Sarah Barker – Walsall Safeguarding Boards Business Manager  
Craig Goodall – Senior Democratic Services Officer

**Portfolio Holders** Councillor Bird – Leader  
Councillor Harris – Personnel & Business Support

### **154/18 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Ferguson, Hussain, Kudhail and Rasab.

### **155/18 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions.

### **156/18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

### **157/18 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

**Resolved:**

**That item 13 ‘Use of consultants and agency staff’ be considered in private session under paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended), namely:**

- 1. Information relating to any individual.**
- 2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.**
- 3. information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).**

## 158/18 MINUTES

### **Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2019, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

## 159/18 WALSALL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND ADULTS BOARDS

The Committee learned about the role and activity of Walsall Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards. The Independent Chair of the Boards, gave a presentation (annexed) on the role, remit, membership and achievements of the Boards. She highlighted that the Boards would be replaced by Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in September 2019 as responsibility for safeguarding would apply to the Police and Clinical Commissioning Group as well as the Council from this point. Currently responsibility lied solely with the Council.

The Committee were pleased to understand the extension of responsibility for safeguarding on partner organisations as they felt it recognised the need to work across organisations to protect vulnerable people effectively.

The meeting discussed how individuals were supported at differing times of need. The Independent Chair explained that complex cases, such as child exploitation, meant that individuals required support over an extensive amount of time. Work was taking place with the Clinical Commissioning Group to enhance transition services for young people with special educational needs. Further to this feedback was sought from young people and their families on the support they required.

Members questioned how the Boards linked with localities to understanding the differing needs and inequalities across the borough? The Independent Chair explained that the Boards did not look at data at this level and their priority was that all vulnerable children and adults received a good service.

### **Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

## 159/18 WALSALL PROUD PROGRAMME

The Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Director (Transformation and Digital) on the Walsall Proud Programme (WPP).

(annexed)

The Committee discussed the need to recruit, develop and maintain IT expertise regarding the drive towards improving digital services. The Assistant Director reflected on recruitment plans and developing current staff. The Executive Director (Resources and Transformation) highlighted that the authority could call upon the resources of its IT partner, Microsoft, to provide critical skills and assist with knowledge skills transfer

into the Council. In response to a question about how services would improve for residents it was explained that one improvement was the plan to have a 'single view of customer' to reduce multiple records. Members were informed that the WPP would evolve and change through its lifetime as issues arose and the Council learned more about itself.

The Leader added that the Council could not carry on as it is. The WPP was part of the journey to transforming the Council. For this reason, he expressed the view that he wished for the WPP not to become politicised.

**Resolved:**

**That the Committee receive quarterly updates on the Walsall Proud Programme.**

160/18     **BUSINESS RATES**

The Committee considered a report on Business Rates (BRs)

The Project Lead (Money, Home, Job) informed Members about BRs, the valuation process, collection rate, the range of reliefs available and the pilot which the Council was participating in.

Following questions from Members the Project Lead explained the Council had discretion to apply BR relief and this was managed through Money, Home, Job. He added that there was an appeal process for BR operated by HMRC. He noted the appeal system used by HMRC had experienced problems and long delays which had a negative impact on businesses. Members were disappointed by this and asked the Project Lead to raise their concerns with HMRC.

Members discussed the impact of the government austerity and the principle that the revenue grant could be replaced with income from BRs. Reflecting on this point there was some concern on how the proposed system would be sustainable without a funding top up.

**Resolved:**

**That the Project Lead (Money, Home, Job) contact HMRC to ask for improvements to be made to the business rates appeals system.**

161/18     **EQUALITIES IN THE WORKFORCE**

The Committee considered a report regarding equalities in the workforce.

The Assistant Director (Human Resources) introduced the report and highlighted a range of statistical information regarding the diversity of the Councils workforce.

Following a range of questions from Members, the Committee were informed that male and female members of the workforce were paid the same rates for the same jobs. The reason for the gender pay gap reflected in the report was because female

members of staff took up the majority of part-time posts. With regard to the development of skills she explained that over half of the councils apprentices were existing staff developing their skill set. The Assistant Director agreed to report figures on abuse, assaults and workplace deaths experienced by staff including data on affected individuals with protected characteristics to a future meeting.

**Resolved:**

**That a report detailing figures on abuse, assaults, near miss accidents and workplace deaths experienced by staff including data on affected individuals with protected characteristics be presented to a future meeting.**

**161/18 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

The Committee discussed activity at recent meetings of the Councils Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Chair of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported on a recent call-in meeting which had made recommendation back to Cabinet on the decision to award a lease for Darlaston Recreation Ground. He also commented that the report of the Private Rented Sector Housing Working Group was referred to Council for debate to highlight the issues the Working Group had identified in the area to the whole Council membership and give other Members the opportunity to input.

**Resolved:**

**That the feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.**

**162/18 AREAS OF FOCUS 2018/19**

The Committee considered their work programme and the Forward Plans from Walsall Council and the Black Country Joint Executive Committee.

**Resolved:**

**That the reports be noted.**

**163/18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be agreed at Annual Council.

**Part II – Private session**

*As resolved under item 157/18 (above) the following item was considered in private session as the item required the disclosure and discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended), namely:*

1. *Information relating to any individual.*
2. *Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.*
3. *information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).*

*Whilst the discussion was held in private session the below minute is a full account of the discussion that took place.*

#### **164/19      USE OF CONSULTANTS AND AGENCY STAFF**

The Committee received a report on the Councils use of consultants and agency staff.

The Assistant Director (Human Resources) explained the rationale for the use of consultants and agency staff and highlighted their use from 2017/18 – 2018/19.

Members requested further information on the use of agency staff in the Adult Social Care Directorate during 2017-18 which the Assistant Director agreed to provide.

#### **Resolved:**

**That the Assistant Director (Human Resources) inform Members of the reasons for using agency staff in the Adult Social Care Directorate during 2017-18.**

The meeting terminated at 8.05 p.m.

Chair: .....

Date:.....