

## **CORPORATE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**6 April 2017 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall**

**Panel Members Present**      Councillor A. Andrew (Chair)  
Councillor D. Barker  
Councillor M. Bird  
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul  
Councillor E. Hazell  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor G. Sohal  
Councillor M. Ward  
Councillor R. Worrall

**Portfolio Holder**              Councillor S. Coughlan – Leader  
Councillor J. Fitzpatrick – Community, Leisure and Culture  
Councillor C. Jones – Clean and Green  
Councillor A. Nawaz – Personnel and Business Support  
Councillor I. Shires – Agenda for Change

**Officers Present**              Paul Sheehan – Chief Executive  
Julie Alderson - Executive Director (Change and Governance)  
Tony Cox - Head of Legal and Democratic Services  
Elise Hopkins - Systems Leader, Money, Home, Job  
Mike Smith - Senior HR Manager – Strategic Services  
Patrick Morrison - Project Lead, Money, Home, Job  
Lynne Hughes - Community Safety Manager  
Susan Wright - Electoral Services Manager  
Paula Bayes - Electoral Services Deputy Manager  
Craig Goodall – Senior Democratic Services Officer

### **169/17 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Nazir, M. Nazir, L. Rattigan and S. Craddock.

### **170/17 Substitutions**

Councillor B. Douglas-Maul substituted for Councillor L. Rattigan. Councillor E. Hazell substituted for Councillor S. Craddock.

### **171/17 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

## **172/17 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to consider in private session.

## **173/17 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was noted that Rushall Library was listed as an asset of community value.

### **Resolved**

**That the minutes of the meeting, as amended, held on 21 February 2017 copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

## **174/17 Elections and proposed pilot to require voters to use identification**

The Committee considered a report on electoral integrity pilots proposed by the Government.

The Chief Executive provided the background to the proposed pilots in 2018 local elections which would require voters to produce identification at polling stations before being allowed to vote. The Government was currently seeking volunteers to participate in the pilot. Currently there were no plans for Walsall to volunteer. It was expected that areas such as Tower Hamlets would participate. The Chief Executive thanked Members for supporting the work of the Elections Service and for the fair manner in which they participated in elections.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services highlighted that concerns regarding voter impersonation were low. This was even reflected in the research conducted as part of the 'Securing the Ballot' investigation led by Sir Eric Pickles.

Members of the Committee requested that further information on the proposed pilot and the position of the Council be sent to all Members.

### **Resolved:**

**That information on the proposed pilot and the position of the Council be sent to all Members**

## **175/17 Petition scheme review**

The Committee considered a report on the Councils petition scheme.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services set out the background to the report and a number of options that could be introduced into the petitions scheme if agreeable to Members.

The Committee discussed the report and petitions scheme. Members were in favour of introducing a system where petitions on local issues should be limited to local people. It was felt that the thresholds for debating petitions at Council and Committees were satisfactory. The Committee noted that this was a whole Council issue and asked that all elected members be consulted on the options contained within the report so that a revised petition scheme could be drafted for approval at Annual Council.

**Resolved:**

**That all Elected Members be consulted on the options contained within the report with the intention of a revised petitions scheme being presented to Annual Council in May 2017.**

**176/17 Report on activity from the Portfolio Holder for Agenda for Change**

Councillor Ian Shires, Portfolio Holder for Agenda for Change, presented a report on activity within his portfolio (annexed).

Following the report a question and answer session took place. The session is summarised as follows:

- The ICT Strategy was being developed to support a modern local authority. The Portfolio Holder (Personnel and Business Support) added that there was a drive to reduce the number of premium Apple devices in operation, to reduce the number of platforms in operation and increase functionality and usability on Microsoft based systems.
- Whilst the Portfolio had no direct resources under its control it was there to seek an influence on all areas of the Council.
- The operation of and communication links with the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee (WMCA OSC) was discussed. The importance of building links between the WMCA OSC and Walsall Scrutiny Committees was emphasised.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

**177/17 Monitoring the recommendations of the Welfare Reform Working Group**

The Committee considered a report updating them on progress with the recommendations of the welfare reform working group.

The Portfolio Holder (Social Care) provided an overview of activity to support local people impacted upon by the welfare reforms as set out in the report. She noted there was increased demand but less money available to help

people. She noted that assistance was being targeted at care leavers to help assist them make the leap from local authority care to independent living.

The Project Lead (Money, Home, Job) reported that the a joint piece of research had been commissioned to identify those residents most affected by the welfare reforms to enable proactive support to be put in place to prevent crisis situations occurring.

A Member raised concerns that requirements on landlords to improve housing could see tenants adversely affected if rents were increased to pay for home improvements. National issues concerning section 28 of the Housing Act were debated with the Leader noting that it was important to target issues at a locality level.

A discussion took place on kinship payments and the implications this had on the benefits cap. Concerns were expressed about delays in processing universal credit payments.

A Member queried what work had been undertaken to encourage schools to include budgeting lessons in the school curriculum? The Systems Leader (Money, Home, Job) reported that this had been raised at the Children and Young Peoples Board and would be reiterated.

Clarity was sought on debt advice offered to local residents. The Portfolio Holder (Social Care) explained that information available online had been improved. A further project was taking place with St Basils 'Money House' to help improve budgeting skills.

### **Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

## **178/17 Changes to staff terms and conditions**

Members were updated on the outcome of changes to staff terms and conditions.

The Senior HR Manager (Strategic Services) reported that, following the decision of the Personnel Committee, a number of changes to staff terms and conditions, as set out in the report, had been accepted by 99.4% of staff.

Following a question about appeals the Senior HR Manager (Strategic Services) reported that the appeals for 8 individuals had been heard recently. The appeals were dismissed by the Employment Appeals Committee. Following the outcome of the appeals 7 of the appellants had subsequently been deemed to accept the changes with one individual dismissed.

Members noted the response rate and several commented on the benefits of the new flexi time scheme. A number of Members commented on staff smoking outside during the working day and felt that this should stop.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

#### **179/17 CCTV in Walsall**

Members were updated on the current position relating to CCTV.

The Portfolio Holder (Community, Leisure and Culture) reported that a 7 year contract with the West Midlands Combined Authority, under its 'Transport for the West Midlands' branding, had recently been agreed to provide CCTV facilities in Walsall.

Several Members of the Committee expressed dissatisfaction with the current number of CCTV cameras available across the borough. In addition to this the quality of pictures was also criticised. It was hoped that the new service would provide high quality images to evidential standard to enable criminal prosecutions.

The Community Safety Manager reported that CCTV provision would be improved through the new contract. Currently 25% of mobile cameras were not operational and others were of low quality. Cameras would be overhauled and upgraded with up-to-date technology introduced. The Service would be managed at West Midlands Combined Authority headquarters.

A Member queried if it was possible to manage all the different CCTV operators, for example traffic and community safety, required by the Council together? The Community Safety Manager explained that this was the long term vision.

**Resolved:**

**That the West Midlands Combined Authority CCTV lead be invited to a future meeting.**

#### **180/17 Discussion on engagement with social housing providers**

The Committee discussed opportunities for engagement with social housing providers.

The Chair introduced the report and put forward the view that all social housing providers should be invited to a scrutiny meeting to improve engagement and understanding between the council and social housing providers. This was supported by the remainder of the committee.

**Resolved:**

**That, in the new municipal year, the Committee hold a meeting to discuss social housing in Walsall with all local providers invited.**

#### **167/17 Areas of focus 2016/17**

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. The areas of focus 2016/17 be noted;**
- 2. The forward plans be noted.**

#### **168/17 Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be agreed by Annual Council in May.

#### **Termination of Meeting**

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.37 pm.

Signed: .....

Date: .....