

SCRUTINY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

09 November 2021 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present Councillor Murray (Chair)
Councillor Nawaz (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ali
Councillor Harrison
Councillor Hicken
Councillor K. Hussain
Councillor Jeavons
Councillor Rasab
Councillor Samra
Councillor Singh-Sohal

Officers Deborah Hindson – Interim Executive Director (Resources & Transformation)
Stephen Gunther – Director – Public Health
Dr. Uma Viswanathan – Consultant in Public Health Medicine
Emma Thomas – Public Health Intelligence Manager
Michael Brereton – Group Manager – Planning
Neil Hollyhead – Senior Housing Strategy Officer
Stuart Wootton – Finance Planning Manager
Craig Goodall – Principal Democratic Services Officer
Sian Lloyd – Assistant Democratic Services Officer

Others in attendance Geraint Griffiths-Dale – Clinical Commissioning Group

Portfolio Holders Councillor Bird – Leader
Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration
Councillor M. Statham – Internal Services
Councillor Butler – Clean and Green
Councillor Towe – Education and Skills

341/21 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor P. Bott.

342/21 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

343/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

344/21 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

345/21 **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2021, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved.

346/21 **SECTION 106 PLANNING OBLIGATIONS**

The Group Manager for Planning presented the Committee with the most up to date Council position regarding section 106 (s106) planning obligations. He explained that these were legal obligations entered into to mitigate the costs and impacts of a development proposal and form a reason for granting planning approval if the tests are met. It was noted that Planning Committee was provided with a report on 4 November detailing updates on the completion and processing of s106 in the financial year 2020/21 and that this report formed an update on the report presented to this Committee on 15 April 2021, particularly in regards to Member involvement.

The Group Manager for Planning explained that following the Scheme of Delegations all development proposals featuring s106 are referred to Planning Committee and officers seek delegation to carry out the negotiation of s106 contributions but any projects would still need to fall within the tests of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations to be permissible. He added that it was subsequent to this process that Members would become involved in the discussion and reassured the Committee that Officer training and consultation templates had been introduced to ensure consistency of Member consultation and that any input was recorded.

The current position showed that the Council had received £4.5 million in contributions and of this £1.8 million had been spent or allocated to be spent. It was highlighted that the Team Leader for Technical Support had recently been given responsibility for ensuring that paper and digital records of s106 funds were combined to give the most up to date version possible in subsequent reports.

Concerning the £28,000 allocated on Wards Keep the Group Manager for Planning advised that quotes for prospective work at George Rose Park Lodge were being assessed and the monies had not yet been spent but were allocated for key work which was to be completed as part of this project.

The Leader of the Council added that Members were concerned about their lack of involvement in the process and two requests had been made for the s106 process to be reviewed at Audit Committee. He noted that s106 planning obligations had previously been very well monitored.

Following questions the Group Manager for Planning clarified that the planning service was responsible for procuring funds and consulting with Members. Following this the relevant service areas were then ultimately responsible for ensuring the funds were spent in the way proposed. He also advised that s106 agreements may include specific timescales by which time the money must have been spent or given

back to the developer. Following this comment several Members reported that they could not recall ever being consulted on the spending of s106 planning obligations and requested that this be improved.

The Committee reviewed the appendices of projects and the s106 obligations noting projects in their wards that they were not aware of or where work recorded was not completed.

The Committee also discussed the purchasing of vacant properties to create additional temporary accommodation for homeless households which it was noted would be reviewed by Cabinet on 15 December. Following questions the Deputy Leader (Regeneration) explained that it the properties would be refurbished as required once purchased. The Committee were supportive of the proposal to use vacant properties to support homeless households.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The Committee notes the report on infrastructure secured through s106 Planning Obligations during the financial year 2020/21 (April 2020 to March 2021) including details of committed/spent funding and infrastructure secured;**
- 2. The Committee endorses the procedure for securing necessary infrastructure through s106 Planning Obligations and the role of Members in the process;**
- 3. The Committee agrees with the principle of using section 106 money allocated for affordable housing in a strategic manner to use the Compulsory Purchase Order process in order to provide much needed housing for Walsall's homeless people and families.**

347/21 COVID-19 INFECTION AND VACCINATION RATES UPDATE

The Public Health Intelligence Manager updated the Committee on current Covid-19 infection rates in Walsall and the vaccination uptake to date. She advised that case rates had begun to decrease across the borough which was a positive development and that nearly a quarter of all 12 – 15 years olds in the borough had received their first vaccination, rising to 51% in 16-17 year olds. She highlighted that at the time of reporting there were 50 confirmed Covid inpatients in Walsall hospitals and of those 8 were in critical care.

The Walsall Managing Director of the Black Country and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group (the Managing Director) added that around 75% of people currently eligible for a booster vaccination had come forward and that this had mostly been facilitated through GP surgeries. He advised that vaccinations for 12 – 15 year olds were being offered at schools and at the Saddlers Centre and no capacity issues had been reported. He stated that flu jabs and Covid boosters could be administered at the same time. The Managing Director reassured the Committee that

there was a full winter plan in place and that anybody who wished to come forward for a vaccination would still be able to receive one.

Following questions the Managing Director confirmed that there were no current plans to close any test centres and that whilst the rate of vaccinations in 12 – 15 year olds appeared low in comparison to other age groups this was likely due to the fact that they had only recently been invited to come forward for a vaccination. He also noted that there were challenges receiving parental consent at short notice before vaccination teams visited schools. Therefore the Saddlers Centre was continuing to offer walk in appointments. Members requested more information on vaccination rates in 12-15 year olds and pregnant women at the next meeting.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the report be noted;**
- 2. Figures relating to vaccination rates in pregnant women and 12 – 15 year olds be provided to the Committee at the next meeting.**

348/21 FORECAST REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN FOR 2021/22 – 5 MONTH POSITION ENDED 31 AUGUST 2021

The Leader of the Council presented the forecast revenue and capital outturn for 2021/22 based on the 5 month position as ended 31 August 2021. He highlighted that the reported council wide revenue overspend of circa £2.42 million had been reduced from £4.9 million and that this would need to be considered as part of the 2022/23 budget process if it was not addressed within the financial year. Services within the remit of the Committee were projected to have a net revenue underspend of £0.75 million. The Leader emphasised the impact of Covid on these figures.

Following questions the Interim Executive Director for Resources and Transformation advised that Directors would need to bring their service areas into balance by year end and that whilst the services within the remit of the Committee had achieved an underspend there were continuing cost pressures in other service areas.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The Committee notes and the forecast 2021/22 year-end financial position for the council as a whole – a predicted net revenue overspend of c£2.42m, and net capital break even position after re-phasing of £91.19m into 2022/23.**
- 2. The Committee notes the forecast 2021/22 year-end financial position for services within the remit of this committee – a predicted net revenue underspend of (£0.75m) and net capital break even position after**

rephrasing of £7.35m into 2022/23, subject to ongoing review.

**349/21 DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2022-23 – 2025-26 –
COUNCIL WIDE AND SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE
COMMITTEE**

The Leader of the Council presented a report on the draft revenue and capital budget 2022-23 – 2025-26 on both a Council wide level and on services within the remit of the Committee, noting that this was based on all known pressures and assumed that all savings for 2021/22 and 2022/23 were to be fully delivered and no further pressures would arise. He advised that a gap of £43.88 million over the next three years had been identified and that steps would need to be taken to rectify this.

Members sought to understand what the impact of the budget savings would have on services to residents. The Executive Director (Resources & Transformation) explained that by utilising different ways of working it was possible to generate operational efficiencies but maintain services. Members noted the importance of scrutiny in reviewing the budget proposals and asked about the delivery plans for the proposed savings.

Following questions about which Directorates were the most financially vulnerable the Executive Director (Resources & Transformation) explained that these were areas which operated demand led services, such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services. This was because they were always vulnerable to significant unexpected demands and thus were the main source of risk within the budget and MTFO.

A Member asked how much Walsall Proud was due to save. The Executive Director (Resources & Transformation) explained that £20m of savings being delivered by Directorates through Proud would come through implementing new ways of working and new approaches across third party spend, income generation, customer access and technology during 2022/23.

OP saving 90 'Review of Older People existing long and new residential nursing and domiciliary placement costs support packages for learning disabilities including supported living and mental health'

A Member expressed concern about the potential impact this saving could have on local residents and asked for reassurances that impact assessments had taken place. The Leader explained that no individual would be placed at risk and that the Council was making significant investment in mental health.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. Further details on OP saving 90 'Review of Older People existing long and new residential nursing and domiciliary placement costs support packages for learning disabilities including supported living and mental**

health' be provided to Members;

2. The Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2022/23 – 2025/26 be noted.

338/21 FEEDBACK FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Chairs of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees each provided an update on meetings of their Committees this municipal year. It was noted that external participants may need additional support when attending Scrutiny Committees to ensure they are aware of the demands of the process.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

339/21 AREAS OF FOCUS

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

Following a discussion Members agreed that due to the cross cutting nature of the topic the issue of school gate parking should be considered by the Scrutiny Overview Committee.

The following items were identified for the next meeting of the Committee:

- Update on Covid-19 infection and vaccination rates to include details of vaccination uptake in pregnant women and 12 -15 year olds;
- Scrutiny Survey results;
- Domestic Abuse Services Delivery Model
- School Gate Parking; and
- Feedback from Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the Areas of Focus and Forward Plan be noted;**
- 2. The issue of school gate parking be considered by the Scrutiny Overview Committee.**

350/21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 13 December 2021.

The meeting terminated at 8.30 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....