

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

10 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

### **Panel Members Present**

Councillor M. Nazir (Chair)  
Councillor I. Shires (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor P. Bott  
Councillor S. Cooper  
Councillor S. Coughlan  
Councillor S. Craddock  
Councillor C. Creaney  
Councillor B. Douglas-Maul  
Councillor K. Ferguson  
Councillor A. Nawaz  
Councillor G. Sohal

### **Portfolio Holder**

Councillor A. Andrew – Deputy Leader and Economy,  
Infrastructure and Development  
Councillor L. Harrison – Clean and Green

### **Officers Present**

Paul Sheehan – Chief Executive  
Rory Borealis – Executive Director (Resources)  
Kevin Clements – Environmental Resources Manager  
Jake Thrush – Transport Strategy Manager (West Midlands  
Integrated Transport Authority)  
Chris Knowles – Services Finance Manager  
Craig Goodall – Committee Business and Governance  
Manager

### **16/15 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors L. Jeavons and L. Rattigan.

### **17/15 SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor S. Coughlan substituted for Councillor L. Jeavons.

Councillor B. Douglas-Maul substituted for Councillor L. Rattigan.

### **18/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

### **19/15 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

There were no agenda items that required the exclusion of the public.

## 20/15 **RESPONSE TO PETITION: 'CUT OUR COMMON'**

The Committee received a response to the petition entitled 'Cut Our Common' which had been handed in at a meeting of Council by Councillor G. Perry.

Councillor Perry introduced the petition to the Committee. He explained that the issues raised within the petition, to reinstate regular grass cutting and maintain the boroughs green spaces, had largely been dealt with. This was due to the fact that the new council administration had, on 24 June, 2015, reversed the decision of the previous administration to stop regular cutting.. He noted that the decision to cease grass cutting had raised important questions such as the best way to encourage bio-diversity and the growth of wild flowers. He noted that the Nest Common was now to be left to grow to encourage greater bio-diversity in Pelsall. Management of green space needed to be considered borough wide. He noted an example of good practice in Birmingham where community based social enterprises, managed by young people, had been established to cut grass and provide employment opportunities.

Councillor L. Harrison, Portfolio Holder (Clean and Green), responded to the petition. She highlighted that Cabinet had made the decision to reinstate grass cutting at 26 sites which had previously been reduced in 2015/16 budget.

The Committee then asked a series of questions to the Portfolio Holder.

Following a question, Members were informed that the cost of additional grass cutting was £28,000. This had been funded through savings made in the Clean and Green fuel budget.

A Member felt that the support local Friends groups received from the Council was disappointing. He explained that park management plans were not being delivered. If the Council wanted to invest in parks and assist in reducing the financial burden on the authority then support for Friends groups was also required with external funding bids. The Portfolio Holder agreed with these points. She felt that relationships and engagement with Friends groups were required. She had noticed that the level of support offered to groups had reduced from when she was a Portfolio Holder previously and wanted this to change.

A Member asked if it was possible to empower community groups to help manage local spaces? The Portfolio Holder felt that this was possible and referred to the Arboretum User Group as an example of an active Friends group that played a key part in the management of the park. A Member felt this was a bad example due to the significant resources invested in the Arboretum. He felt this was at the expense of investment in other parks.

A discussion took place about a possible grass cutting partnership between Walsall Housing Group and the Council. The Committee noted both organisations had their own grass cutting teams and would work in similar areas. Members felt it would be more efficient to co-ordinate work schedules and cut the grass on each other's land. A Member reported that he had previously taken this

issue up with WHG.. He hoped that discussions to take this idea forward were still continuing.

Members were advised that an application for a Black Country Geopark with United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) designation was being developed. An application would be submitted to UNESCO in October 2015. A UNESCO visit was anticipated in Spring 2016 with the application hopefully confirmed in September 2016.

**Resolved:**

**That the Portfolio Holder (Clean and Green) take forward the points raised by the Committee as detailed within the body of minute 20/15.**

**21/15 PROPOSALS FOR A COMBINED AUTHORITY FOR THE WEST MIDLANDS**

The Committee considered proposals for a combined authority (CA) for the West Midlands.

The Deputy Leader explained to Members that 7 West Midlands Metropolitan Councils would be the constituent members of the CA and that a shadow board had been established. Separate negotiations were taking place on the role of district councils and local enterprise partnerships. Negotiations were also taking place on a 'devolution deal'. Once agreed the 'devolution deal' would set out what powers would be devolved to the CA. He felt that the Government would demand an elected Mayor for the West Midlands in return for devolving significant powers. He added that the situation was changing daily.

The Chief Executive added that the CA was on schedule to be established in April 2016. Before this could happen there would be a period of public consultation. If the Government was to insist on an elected Mayor then he anticipated the election taking place in either 2017 or 2018. He explained that Walsall had allocated £300,000 towards the development of the CA supported by a significant amount of officer time. He explained that the CA proposals were moving very quickly.

The Committee pushed the question on an elected Mayor as Members wished to understand what powers the position would hold how critical it was to the devolution deal, how much the post would cost and what impact it would have on Walsall? The Deputy Leader explained that, in his opinion, if the region did not agree to an elected Mayor then the government would not agree to the devolution deal. Other than the expectation that the Mayor would be able to set a precept, he was unable to comment on the other questions as no discussions on these had taken place.

A question was raised about how an elected Mayor would be held to account? A Member of the Committee debated whether a Mayor would attend scrutiny meetings, have his own elected assembly to hold him/her to account or if scrutiny would take place through the leaders of the 7 constituent authorities. The Deputy Leader explained that a mechanism to hold the Mayor to account would be important and something to be negotiated as part of the devolution deal.

A Member of the Committee asked what the red lines were in the negotiations. The Deputy Leader stated that he wanted to bring more heavy rail services to the borough and added that a detailed snagging document was being prepared. Following a question, he confirmed that the CA would not be seeking responsibility for health.

A Member speculated whether a CA was a recreation of the former county councils. He also felt that the CA was not really devolution as a layer of decision making was being created that was a step further away from local people. Another Member expressed the fear that the area could lose money overall following the creation of the CA and that Walsall would not secure its fair share of the allocation. He felt that a Mayor would be imposed by Westminster therefore it was important to negotiate hard to ensure that Walsall benefited.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. the committee be informed of the cost of officer time invested in developing the proposals for a combined authority for the West Midlands;**
- and;**
- 2. the report be noted.**

**22/15 THE WEST MIDLANDS STRATEGIC TRANSPORT PLAN 'MOVEMENT FOR GROWTH'**

The Committee were informed about the strategic transport plan 'Movement for Growth' which had been drafted by the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (WMITA). The plan was out for public consultation until October 2015.

The Transport Strategy Manager (WMITA) gave a presentation on the 'Movement for Growth' strategy (annexed). He highlighted the ambitions to create a strategic transport network covering all modes of transport. The network would assist in developing the local economy. He added that the conurbation had a growing population. It was anticipated that an extra 1.2m journeys a day would be undertaken by 2035. In order to achieve the plans set out in the strategy additional funding was required.

Members felt it was important to take action to reduce congestion. Roads were already gridlocked and radical thinking was required. Increased use of heavy rail, together with more train stations in Walsall, were widely supported. Members wanted it be straightforward for local residents to link up with other Black Country Towns and the HS2 station in Birmingham.

Members told the WMITA that more investment in secure storage for bicycles was required if the proposed cycle network was to be a success. The WMITA were encouraged to link with the Sustrans green pathways plan.

A Member called for a response to the public consultation regarding a park and ride scheme at the Metro stop in Moxley.

It was highlighted that buses and other public transport options needed to link district centres with one another.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. Investment take place to improve heavy rail services and infrastructure in the borough to improve links from the area to other Black Country towns and Birmingham;**
- 2. Sustrans be engaged with regard to developing the West Midlands cycle network;**
- 3. Awareness of the 'movement for growth' strategy and consultation be raised through Area Panels;**
- 4. the report be noted.**

## **23/15 COUNCIL PURPOSE AND PRIORITIES**

The Committee considered the emerging purpose and priorities being developed by Cabinet to inform the budget setting process.

The Deputy Leader introduced the high level vision explaining that changes had been made from the priorities used by the previous administration.

A Member commented that he was disappointed that the purpose and priorities were not centred around the Marmot objectives. He was also disappointed with the pre-ambles to the priorities that emphasised the lack of help residents would receive from the Council. He felt this pre-ambles was not reflected in the priorities which sounded positive but were unachievable in this period of severe government budget reductions.

Members noted that the priorities were being developed to support the budget setting process and moved onto questioning the Deputy Leader about what budget consultation would take place? Members felt that the consultation which took place in 2014 was excellent and there was support for producing another budget booklet to inform the public consultation. The Committee also felt that young people should be targeted for their views. The Deputy Leader noted the Committees views regarding the budget consultation and resolved to follow previously successful engagement tools.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. Young people be specifically targeted for their views in the upcoming budget consultation;**

and;

**2. the report be noted.**

#### **24/15 COMMUNITY COHESION WORKING GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee considered and approved the terms of reference for the Community Cohesion Working Group.

Councillor A. Nawaz, Lead Member for the Working Group, introduced the terms of reference. He highlighted that in order for the investigation to be successful Members needed to engage with those with strong views.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

**1. the terms of reference for the Community Cohesion Working Group be approved;**

and;

**2. Councillor A. Nawaz be appointed Lead Member of the Community Cohesion Working Group.**

#### **25/15 CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE –REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2014/15 (PRE-AUDIT) AND UPDATE FOR 2015/16**

The Committee considered the pre-audit revenue and capital outturn position for the year end 31 March 2015, subject to external audit. Members also considered an update on the financial position for 2015/16 based on performance April-May 2015 for services within the remit of the Committee.

The Services Finance Manager reported that there was a £2m revenue under spend against budget for the 2014/15 net the use of earmarked reserves and carry forwards. He added that there was a capital under spend of £214,000 net of approved carry forwards into 2015/16.

For 2015/16 he informed Members that the current predicted outturn for services under the remit of the Committee was a revenue overspend of £196,000 and a capital under spend of £824,000. The revenue overspend was mainly caused by an income shortfall in markets and an over spend in Money, Home, Job regarding accommodation costs for vulnerable people.

A Member noted that the Council was required to make financial savings. He asked how much money the Council had saved in previous financial years and how much more the authority had to save? The Deputy Leader answered that during the last five years the Council had saved around £100m. The Services Finance Manager added that a further £82m of savings was anticipated. The Committee asked for a detailed breakdown of savings the Council had made in

the last two years and a forecast of when the authority was expected to have completed making financial savings based on current estimates.

From the capital programme a Member noted that funding existed for a one way scheme in Caldmore Road. He asked if this project would go ahead? The Deputy Leader reported that funding was still allocated for this project.

In response to a question it was explained that the Creative Development Team were finding it difficult to achieve their income target due to reduced staffing levels.

A Member made a number of suggestions on how the presentation of the finance report could be improved. The Services Finance Manager noted the suggestions.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. the Committee be provided with a detailed breakdown of savings the Council had made in the last two years and a forecast of when the authority was expected to have completed making financial savings based on current estimates;**
- 2. the Committee be informed about how much European Funding the Council receives;**
- and;**
- 3. the report be noted.**

**26/15 AREAS OF FOCUS 2015/16 AND FORWARD PLANS**

The Committee reviewed their areas of focus for 2015/16 and the forward plans for the Walsall Council and Black Country Joint Committee.

Following the earlier item on the Combined Authority proposals Members requested a report back to the next meeting.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. an item on the Combined Authority be considered at the next meeting of the Committee;**
- 2. the Walsall Council Forward Plan be noted;**
- and;**
- 3. the Black Country Joint Committee Forward Plan be noted.**

**27/15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place at 6pm on 22 October 2015.

The meeting terminated at 8.30 p.m.

Chair: .....

Date:.....