

SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2020 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present Councillor Murray (Chair)
Councillor Nawaz
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Hussain
Councillor Rasab
Councillor Samra
Councillor Shires
Councillor M. Statham

Officers Present Paul Gordon – Head of Business Change
Elise Hopkins – System Leader (Money, Home, Job)
Susan Dicks – Interim Community Safety Manager
Michelle Dudson – Housing and Welfare Benefits Lead
Craig Goodall – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Portfolio Holders Councillor Bird - Leader
Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader
Councillor Perry – Community, Leisure and Culture
Councillor Towe – Education and Skills

Others Present Chief Superintendent Andy Parsons – West Midlands Police
Nasser Iqbal – Black Country Innovate

216/20 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Harrison and Jeavons

217/20 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor D. Coughlan substituted for Councillor Jeavons.

219/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

Councillor Nawaz declared an interest in item 222/20 'Safer Walsall Partnership Plan 2020' as a director of Black Country Innovate

220/20 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)

There were no items in private session.

221/20 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 13 January 2020 and 4 February 2020, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

222/20 SAFER WALSALL PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2020

The Committee received a presentation on the work being undertaken to achieve the priorities in the Safer Walsall Partnership (SWP) Plan.

The Head of Business Change gave a presentation (annexed) highlighting the membership of SWP, the six priorities which included a new priority on domestic abuse, links to the resilient communities model and a case study on the PREVENT priority.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing question and answer session:

- Youth offending – a £100k pilot project was taking place with Walsall College to develop an approach that supported victims and helped prevent young people turning to crime. The success of the pilot would be evaluated and if successful would be rolled out.
- Serious incident in Caldmore – it was noted that the recent violent incident in Caldmore was unusual. Work was being undertaken to engage the community with mediators and ex-gang members. The Police were appealing for any information which could take the case forward. Information could be reported anonymously.
- Gangs – Members were concerned that gangs from other areas were moving into Walsall. Reassurance was provided that the levels of activity were not a risk to residents.
- Drug dealing and prostitution – the connection between these two activities and organised crime was discussed. A partnership approach to tackle this issue was required. When drug dealers were taken off the streets they were replaced by others. The need to reduce users to reduce drug dealers was acknowledged as Members encouraged the use of rehabilitation facilities. The need to recognise the vulnerabilities that sex workers had was discussed.
- The important role played by taxi drivers to identify safeguarding issues was noted as was the need to ensure that all drivers were trained to recognise vulnerable groups. The efforts to ensure this was delivered locally were welcomed but the need for a common approach was identified as many drivers were licensed by other local authorities who had lower thresholds for driver registration.
- Extremism – it was acknowledged that there was Islamic and right-wing extremism in the borough. Intelligence was required to identify extremism.
- Knife crime – the need to provide a nuanced response to young people caught carrying knives was discussed.
- Cross boundary policing – reassurance was provided that the Police worked a borderless system with the nearest police unit responding to incidents.

- Community – the Plan was centred around the community. It was essential that all protected characteristics were supported and felt empowered. This was particularly true when it came to reporting hate crime.

Resolved:

That further details on the plans to deliver the six priorities in the Safer Walsall Partnership Plan 2020 be shared with Committee Members.

223/20 POLICING IN WALSALL

The Committee discussed policing in Walsall with Chief Superintendent Andy Parsons, Walsall Commander.

The Chief Superintendent highlighted the police resources available in the borough. There was a total of 80 Police Constables (PCs), 50-60 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). These were supported by a small team of Sergeants and Inspectors. A 'Force Response' team was also operational at all times. He noted that recruitment of new PCs had begun but due to rigorous training requirements the number of PCs would not be likely to increase before the end of 2021. The area had 5 Special Constables. They were assigned to neighbourhood teams.

Members asked a series of questions about the consistency of officers at neighbourhood level as the perception was that they changed frequently. It was explained that this was not planned but officers did move on. This could be for operational reasons to tackle issues in other areas or promotions. The neighbourhood team that covered the town centre was larger. If there was a need for more PCs to manage a particular problem then PCs could be diverted to different neighbourhoods to add capacity.

If an area was experiencing incidents outside of normal Policing hours then it was possible for the neighbourhood teams to amend their working hours. A discussion took place on car crime and the level of priority response that would be provided.

The potential of using Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras across the borough was discussed as a potential method of monitoring and identifying criminal activity.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

224/20 HOMELESSNESS

The Committee considered a report on homelessness in the borough.

The Systems Leader explained that the Council's Homelessness Strategy committed the Council to an annual performance report to scrutiny. She highlighted the

collaborative approach taken across services and with partners which contributed to low numbers of rough sleepers and prompt rehousing of homeless households.

Following information requests made at the last meeting the Systems Leader highlighted that:

- 6 civil penalties against private landlords for non-compliance with housing standards had been issued. A further 16 intention notices had also been issued. These would either resolve the issues or lead to further civil penalties being issued.
- 24% of complaints about housing standards concerned housing association properties.
- Research was taking place to understand the impact of Universal Credit on evictions in the social and private rented sector. Initial evidence suggested it could be a factor at the end of tenancies in the private rented sector.

The Committee congratulated the Money, Home, Job Service for its excellent work and for the recent awards it had won. The meeting discussed various issues about the service such as its low use of temporary accommodation, now it managed young people ostracised from their families and work with partners.

The Deputy Leader highlighted an upcoming report to Cabinet which proposed using the Councils compulsory purchase powers to buy numerous long term empty properties across the borough to increase the supply of local housing.

The Committee went on to discuss an ongoing senior management restructure that would see the creation of a Director of Customer Services post managed by the Executive Director for Children's Services. Some Members expressed concern about making changes to an award winning service and felt that the existing management structure should continue.

It was moved by Councillor Nawaz and seconded by Cllr D. Coughlan, that:

This Overview and Scrutiny Committee asks the Chief Executive to recognise and congratulate Money Home Job for the excellent work being carried out for residents.

The Committee asks that Money Home Job stays within its current structure and is not moved and broken up which we believe could put this work at risk.

With the agreement of the Members moving and seconding the resolution and the meeting the above resolution was replaced by the following resolution, which was moved by Councillor M. Statham and seconded by Councillor Samra.

That a Special Scrutiny Overview Committee meeting be called for the Chief Executive to explain the logic to move Money Home Job to the Children's Services Directorate.

On being put to the vote the resolution was agreed unanimously. Following discussions at the meeting, regarding the implementation of structure before 1 April, Members made it clear that they expect this meeting to take place before this date.

Resolved:

That a Special Scrutiny Overview Committee meeting be called for the Chief Executive to explain the logic to move Money Home Job to the Children's Services Directorate.

225/20 SCRUTINY-CABINET PROTOCOL

The Committee considered a draft Scrutiny-Cabinet Protocol.

The Chair introduced the report and highlighted the main features of the draft protocol which had been drafted in consultation with himself, the Vice-Chair and the Leader and Deputy Leader. It was explained that the draft Protocol had been sent to all elected Members for feedback prior to the meeting.

Members discussed the protocol including how engagement with Cabinet in setting work programmes would assist with adding structure. A Member highlighted how it was important for scrutiny to have parity of esteem with Cabinet.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the draft Scrutiny-Cabinet Protocol be referred to Council for inclusion as a Protocol in the Constitution;**
- 2. The effectiveness of the Scrutiny-Cabinet Protocol be reviewed in 12 months time.**

226/20 RESILIENT COMMUNITIES WORKING GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Resolved

That the terms of reference for the Resilient Communities Working Group be approved.

227/20 FEEDBACK FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees present feedback on the recent activity at their respective committees.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

228/20 **AREAS OF FOCUS 2019/20**

The noted that a new Forward Plan had been tabled (annexed).
Members requested that the special meeting to discuss the senior management restructure also include an item on the Walsall Proud Programme.

Resolved:

That the special meeting of the Committee to consider the senior management restructure include an item on the Walsall Proud Programme.

229/20 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the scheduled date was 28 April 2020 and that Members would be advised of the date for the special meeting in due course.

The meeting terminated at 8.26 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....