

ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
12 September 2023 at 6.00pm held at Walsall Council House, Lichfield Street,
Walsall, WS1 1TW.

Committee Members Councillor B. Allen (Vice-Chair)
Councillor S. Cheema
Councillor P. Gill
Councillor F. Hassan
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor R. Larden
Councillor M. Ward
Councillor J. Whitehouse
Councillor V. Waters

Portfolio Holders Councillor A. Andrew Deputy Leader and
Regeneration

Officers Present: Dave Brown Interim Executive Director,
Economy and Environment
Paul Leighton Group Manager, Highway
Network
Simon Tranter Head of Regeneration,
Housing and Economy
David Elrington Head of Community Safety
and Enforcement
Sian Lloyd Democratic Services Officer

9. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Follows and P. Bott.

10. **Substitutions**

Councillor Waters substituted for Councillor Follows.

11. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

12. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to consider in private session.

13. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

14. **Street Works Permit Scheme**

The Group Manager for the Highway Network presented a report to the Committee in relation to the permit scheme for street works, its operation and its constraints. He advised that the council introduced its permit scheme in 2019 under powers provided in Part 3 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 and the Traffic Management Permit Scheme (England) Regulations 2007 and that all works would require a permit to take place.

The Committee were informed that in 2020 the Government introduced a digital service called Street Manager and now all permit applications must be entered into this system which then gives a national overview of works taking place. The Group Manager stated that the council had a team of 8 people working on permits across the borough and that there were four main types of permits which all carried a small fee which was charged to all organisations except the council itself. He highlighted that the council were not permitted to make a profit from the permit scheme so these costs could not be increased beyond the organisational costs that the council incurs.

The Group Manager did advise that there were a limited number of emergency circumstances in which work could start before the council had been informed but it was still the obligation of the organisation conducting the work to inform the council within a two-hour window. He explained that, when issuing permits, the council could impose certain restrictions on times works can be conducted and advertisement before works commence and that they also had the ability to issue fixed penalty notices should these not be complied with.

Following questions from Members of the Committee the Group Manager confirmed that there were 4 inspectors operating across the borough and Councillors and members of the public could contact the council directly if they needed to make the team aware of any works that they suspected were not authorised or posed a danger to the public. He emphasised that it was ultimately the responsibility of the contractor to ensure the safety of the site but that the council would be able to issue fixed penalty notices and order more chargeable inspections of the site in response to any issues. It was also noted that there was a very small proportion of works that took place on the network which did not have the correct permissions and these were mostly dropped kerbs.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

- 1. Notes the legislative constraints imposed on the operation of a street works permit scheme; and**
- 2. Recognises the statutory rights held by the council and utility companies to undertake street and road works on the public highway.**

15. Derelict Properties Taskforce

The Deputy Leader introduced the item on the derelict properties taskforce, highlighting the £20 million secured for Willenhall from the Levelling Up Fund would aid in the regeneration of the area alongside the compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) that were in progress. He explained that the derelict properties taskforce was an internal taskforce which had been constituted to ensure that the various departments required to be involved in the process were brought together to discuss specific sites and progress any works required to bring them back into use.

The Executive Director of Economy and Environment advised that public discussions with the Committee would need to be handled sensitively at this stage in order to not prejudice any ongoing commercial negotiations with landowners. The Committee requested that discussions be held at a future meeting in private session so as to avoid this.

Following questions from Members of the Committee the Deputy Leader advised that if a property was not able to be occupied then no rates would be due on that property. He shared Committee Members' frustrations that landowners could use planning applications to delay CPOs and advised that he had requested to be part of a pilot of the new streamlined process for CPOs.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The Committee notes the progress set out in this report and the content of the associated Cabinet report; and**
- 2. Discussions in relation to specific sites to be held at a future meeting in private session within six months.**

16. Areas of Focus – 2023/24

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration gave a brief presentation on the priorities within his portfolio for the municipal year,

highlighting the 1.5 billion pound investment going into the borough and the amount of varied and successful regeneration projects were being pursued, which he noted would be the topic of the next meeting of the Committee. He emphasised the need to build communities and not just houses.

Following this presentation the Committee considered the items on the previously agreed list of areas of focus and if there were any items that needed to be added.

Resolved:

That the Committee requests an invitation to the Scrutiny Overview Committee meeting in relation to the Walsall Local Borough Plan.

17. Recommendation Tracker

The Democratic Services Officer updated the Committee on the recommendations from previous meetings of the Committee. It was noted that all items had been completed.

Resolved:

That the progress on recommendations from the previous meeting be noted.

18. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 19 October 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated 7.15pm.

Signed:

Date: