

SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 12 JULY 2023, 6:00pm

In the Council Chamber at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members present:

Councillor Murray (Chair)
Councillor Nawaz (Vice Chair)
Councillor Bott
Councillor Ditta
Councillor Hicken
Councillor Sears
Councillor Singh-Sohal

Portfolio Holders present:

Councillor Bird
Councillor Ali
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Perry

Officers present:

Shaun Darcy	Director - Finance Corporate Performance & Corporate Landlord
Michele Leith	Director – HR, OD and Administration
Nikki Gough	Democratic Services Officer
Edward Cook	Democratic Services Officer
Sian Lloyd	Democratic Services Officer

In attendance (for part of the meeting, as described in the minutes):

Starting Point

Prof. Paul Cadman – Chief Executive Officer, Starting Point.

Ayesha Rees – Chief Operating Officer, Starting Point.

Dr Wray Irwin – Consultant.

Steve Stuart – Consultant.

West Midlands Employers

Rebecca Davis – Chief Executive, West Midlands Employers.

Sharon Phillips – Director of Finance & Governance, West Midlands Employers.

Brad Sinclair – Managing Director, Opus People Solutions.

9 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Follows.

10 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

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)**

That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items set out in the private part of the agenda for the reasons set out therein and Section 100A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

13 **Exclusion of public**

Resolved

That during consideration of the remaining items on the agenda, the Committee considers that the items for consideration are exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972, and accordingly resolves to consider the items in private.

14 **Call-in of Cabinet decision – Temporary Workers (Agency) Provision**

The decision taken by Cabinet on 21 June 2023 relating to Temporary Workers (Agency) Provision was called in by five Members of the Committee on 30 June 2023.

The Chair outlined the order of business and invited one of the call-in Members to explain the reasons for the call-in. The Member outlined the reasons as set out in the call-in notice. These included how the decision was arrived at; the consultation process prior to the decision being taken; the basis of why a company carrying out work for Walsall Council for over 20 years needed to be changed; the level of social engagement of the new contractor; whether there had been a fair and transparent tendering process; and whether this was the best direction for Walsall.

The Committee was addressed by representatives from two temporary worker providers, Starting Point and West Midlands (WM) Employers. The Chairman reminded Members that Starting Point and West Midlands Employers did not have a copy of the full Cabinet report as it contained exempt information and as such information contained within this report should not be discussed with either party and it was stressed that Members should not disclose any information that either party disclosed during presentations. Starting Point and West Midlands Employers were in attendance by invitation to assist the committee in their deliberations. Members posed questions and were provided with points of clarification to enable them to gain an insight into the challenges and opportunities within the sector. Starting Point and West Midlands Employers were advised that presentations could last up to 15 minutes, followed by questions from Members.

Starting Point addressed the Committee first, including the delivery of a presentation, and questions. At the conclusion of questions, the representatives of Starting Point left the meeting.

The representatives of West Midlands Employers then entered the meeting, addressed the Committee – this included a presentation and questions, before leaving the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder (Internal Services) responded to the call-in outlining that recruitment and retention of staff was a critical issue for local government in general and this had also affected Walsall Council. He explained that it was vital that the Council had access to good quality and cost-effective agency staff in all areas and at all levels of the Council. He noted that the agreed contract would provide this access with an offer that included specialist agencies and executive recruitment. Assurance was provided that the report presented to Cabinet detailed the rigorous process that officers had undertaken to arrive at the options considered by Cabinet, and these were described to the Committee. Assurance was provided to the Committee in relation to the procurement process.

The Chair opened the meeting with questions to Portfolio Holder and Officers, - questions were received in relation to the following:

- The assurances sought by Cabinet in relation to the impact on each service.
- How Cabinet had arrived at their decision.
- For further detail regarding consultation and the opportunities provided to providers to engage with tender processes.
- Whether there had been a fair and transparent process in selecting a provider for the contract of temporary workers.
- How quickly a response could be provided (to supply temporary workers) in the event of a crisis.
- The social impact that the contract would have and how much influence Walsall Council would have in shaping this.
- How Council contracts were managed.
- Level of confidence on the projected figures.

Committee Members debated the information provided and concluded that it was satisfied with the responses given and the subsequent decision made by Cabinet. Further to this the Committee considered it to be of importance that Walsall residents were given every opportunity to access employment, upskilling and access training. Members also wished to ensure that there was a robust process (within the Council) for managing current and future contracts to ensure they were providing value for money and having a beneficial social impact in Walsall.

Resolved:

That the Scrutiny Overview Committee was satisfied with the decision, and the process used to arrive at it, made by Cabinet.

However, the Committee recommended that Cabinet considers that:

- a. **The provider of the temporary (agency) worker contract should be set a target in their agreement with the Council regarding the use of employees from the Walsall borough.**
- b. **Upskilling of workers for employment in Walsall is a priority - the provider of the temporary (agency) worker contract should work with the council to support residents into employment (with the possibility of this taking place in local community hubs).**
- c. **All Council contracts should be reviewed in a timely manner to ensure value for money and a benefit to the community in the Walsall Borough.**

15 **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting would be 28 September 2023

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 8:40pm.

Signed:

Date: