

Minutes of the Scrutiny Overview Committee held in the Council Chamber at Walsall Council House

Thursday, 18 April 2024 at 6.00p.m.

Committee Members present: Councillor J Murray (Chair)
Councillor A Nawaz (Vice-Chair)
Councillor M Follows
Councillor F Hassan
Councillor A Hicken
Councillor G Singh-Sohal

Portfolio Holder present: Councillor Bird – Leader of the Council
Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Officers present: Dave Brown – Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Communities
Elise Hopkins – Director of Customer Engagement
Katie Moreton – Director – Place and Environment
Keith Beech – Director of Communications
Matt Powis – Senior Democratic Services Officer

73. **Apologies**

An apology was received from Councillor K Hussain.

74. **Substitutions**

Councillor Hasan substituted on behalf of Councillor K Hussain.

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

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

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

There were no items to consider in private session.

77. **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on the 14 March 2024 was submitted [annexed].

Resolved

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2024, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

78. **Marketing and Advertising Strategy**

The Director of Communications provided an overview of the Council's Marketing and Advertising Strategy including current engagement and priority campaigns taking place. [Annexed]

Members were informed that priorities were based on the Council's Plan and corporate priorities were refreshed each year. The following priority campaigns were noted for 2023/24:

- Regeneration
- Family Hubs
- Street Pride
- Heritage, Leisure and Culture
- Community Safety
- Local Borough Plan
- We Are Walsall 2040
- Staff Engagement and Culture
- Elections
- Children's and Young People's Health
- Sexual and Reproductive Health
- CQC Readiness

Working in tandem with priority campaigns, the Council was committed to working collaboratively with partners and the press to ensure successful delivery of campaigns. It was highlighted that more than 40 press releases were issued every month with majority released to promote services and support activities across the Council.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal point from the ensuing discussion:

- As part of the Council's income generation priorities, there was a commitment to grow and generate income from advertisements. Examples were highlighted such as the implementation of adverts on 41 roundabouts across the Borough.
- The Council had identified a number of sites around M6 Junction 10 with a view for advertisements to be located as appropriately to generate extra income.

- Any potential advertisement needed to comply with the Council's advertisement policy and terms and conditions. As such, there was a clear assertion that the Council was not endorsing any product advertised.
- There was an opportunity to advertise on lampposts in the Borough. However, further investigation and exploration was required with partners.
- Benchmarking was regularly carried out to ensure that the Council's fees and charges were up to date and within market conditions.

Resolved:

That, the Council's Marketing and Advertising Strategy including promotions and priority campaigns be noted.

79. **Emergency Planning**

The Director of Place and Environment provided an overview of Council's Emergency Planning function. [Annexed]

The Committee were informed that the Council's Emergency Planning Unit was an essential component of the Civil Protection Framework which set out each category of responder and the responsibilities of local responders including specific duties relating to preparedness, response, and recovery.

- Category 1 responders were the main agencies including emergency services, local authorities and NHS.
- Category 2 responders were cooperating bodies including but not limited to transport and utilities.

Both category responders joined together to form the Local Resilience Forum to share information and facilitation of responses at a local level.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal point from the ensuing discussion:

- The Council conducted a test within the last 12 months, which included multiple scenarios including national power outages and road traffic collisions.
- There was a requirement to refresh and review Business Continuity Plans annually.
- A Member highlighted the recent measles outbreak and sought clarification on whether Public Health were involved in emergency planning preparations. In response, it was confirmed that Public Health were involved in the Local Resilience Forums and coordinated measures on measles prevention across the Black Country.
- The Council did not organise specific training for commercial stakeholders. However, there would be training for stakeholders when required and necessary to provide an initiative response.
- A Member sought clarification on whether the Council had made preparations for the outbreak of war. In response, the Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Communities confirmed that generic incident

planning was considered. The types of exercises were chosen based on the community risk register to ascertain the principal priorities, which could include war in future.

- The Council utilises various communication tools including but not limited to social media, website and non-digital elements to effectively communicate any messages which would be paramount in a national emergency.
- There was a consensus that non-digital forms of communication were equally important especially when communicating with older people.
- Cyber security was regularly tested to ensure robustness.
- There was a view that Elected Members should be engaged with civil emergency planning and testing.

The Committee were reminded of the Council's governance and decision-making operations during the COVID-19 Pandemic. There was assurance that the Council had appropriate delegations with the Council's Constitution to ensure decisions could still be taken in an emergency. The Leader of the Council confirmed that in the event of a national crisis, Elected Members would be consulted as appropriate, as was practice in the COVID-19 Pandemic.

At this point, Councillor Hasan left the meeting at 6.27p.m.

Resolved:

That, information provided in respect to the Council's Emergency Planning function be noted.

80. Operation Freeway

The Director of Place and Environment provided an overview of Operation Freeway, which was a strategic response plan, owned and managed by National Highways. [Annexed]

Members were informed that the strategic plan aimed to mitigate the impact of exceptional events on the road network particular focusing on the M6 between Junctions 3a and 11a. In the event of a major incident resulting in the M6 motorway being inoperable for more than 24 hours, the regional tactical group would be consulted to consider divert options for traffic. Following this, authorisation from the Secretary of State for Transport would be required in order to suspend toll charges on the M6 Toll for a period time up to three days in order to alleviate traffic flows.

It was noted that the protocol had never been used since the inception of Operation Freeway in 2008.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal point from the ensuring discussion:

- A lengthy discussion occurred in respect of the responsibility of activating Operation Freeway. Subsequently, there was a view that the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority should be given the power to use and manage the coordination of Operation Freeway.
- A Member highlighted that consistent stop and start traffic on the M6 Motorway already had a negative impact on the economy. As such, economic impact, should be considered as part of the framework for Operation Freeway.
- There was a view that the M6 Toll Road should be nationalised to alleviate traffic in the West Midlands and the wider road network.
- Whilst the Council had no direct involvement with Operation Freeway, the Council would be consulted and engaged as part of the multi-agency response in the event of the protocol being activated.

Resolved:

That, Operations Freeway be noted.

81. School Gate Parking Working Group – Recommendation Monitoring

The Director for Place and Environment informed Committee of the progress made in respect of the recommendations made by the School Gate Parking Working Group. [Annexed]

Members noted that 16 recommendations were made by the Group and as several of the recommendations already aligned with existing Council policies, significant progress had been made, such as the implementation of moving traffic enforcement. Due to this policy change, the Council issued 2,556 enforcement and 432 penalty charge notices across ten school streets in the Borough during autumn school term in 2023.

Members welcomed the progress made by the Council and thanked officers for their attendance.

Resolved:

That, the progress made against the recommendations from the School Gate Parking Working Group be noted.

82. Housing Standards Working Group – Final Report

The Chair invited Councillor Hicken as Chair of the Working Group to outline the report for consideration. [Annexed]

The Committee noted that the Housing Standards Working Group had been established following concerns regarding housing standards across the Borough. Councillor Hicken highlighted that since January 2024, the Group

had considered a wide range of topics in relation to housing including the impact of HMOs and the impact of Article 4 Directions.

The Chair of the Group thanked Members, Officers, and the Portfolio Holder for their input into the Group's final report.

Resolved:

That, the final report of the Housing Standards Working Group be forwarded to the next meeting of Cabinet.

83. Scrutiny Chair Feedback

The Chair invited each Scrutiny Committee Chair to present their feedback since the last meeting of the Committee.

At this point, the Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader left the meeting at 7.15p.m.

84. Areas of focus – 2023/24 and Forward Plans

The Committee considered the areas of focus and noted the remaining items would be considered by the Committee in the new municipal year. [Annexed]

Resolved:

That, the areas of focus for 2023-24 and forward plans be noted.

85. Recommendations Tracker

The Committee received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items. [Annexed].

It was noted that the action in respect of the Customer Dashboard would be considered by the Committee as a future item.

Resolved:

- 1. That the recommendation tracker be noted.**
- 2. That, the Committee consider an item on Customer Dashboard at a future meeting.**

86. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the date of the meeting would be determined at Annual Council. Members noted the important work carried out by the Committee over the municipal year and thanked participation from all Members.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.26p.m.

Signed:

Date: