

Scrutiny Overview Committee

Thursday 28 September 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 Cooper
Councillor Ditta
Councillor Follows
Councillor Hicken
Councillor K. Hussain
Councillor Sears
Councillor Singh-Sohal

Portfolio Holders present:

Councillor Bird
Councillor Andrew
Councillor Ali
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Murphy

Officers present:

Judith Greenhalgh	Interim Executive Director - Resources
David Elrington	Head of Community Safety and Enforcement
Alison Ives	Head of Planning and Building Control
Neil Hollyhead	Customer Engagement Lead (Housing and Resettlement)
Elise Hopkins	Director – Customer Access
David Moore	Interim Director – Regeneration and Economy
Nikki Gough	Democratic Services Officer
Edward Cook	Democratic Services Officer

Others in Attendance:

Phil Dolby Chief Superintendent (West Midlands Police)

16 Apologies

There were no apologies.

17 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

18 Declarations of interest and party whip

No declarations of interest or party whip were received.

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

There were no agenda items requiring the exclusion of the public.

20 **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2023 and the special meeting held on 12 July 2023 were submitted.

[Annexed]

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2023 and the special meeting held on 12 July 2023, copies having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

21 **West Midlands Police – Update on Policing within Walsall**

The Head of Community Safety and Enforcement introduced the report, outlining the local authority's responsibilities regarding policing, community safety and the duty of co-operation through Community Safety Partnerships.

(Annexed)

Chief Superintendent Dolby delivered a presentation, providing an overview of policing within Walsall Borough.

(Annexed)

The presentation highlighted changes in the organisation of local policing through the establishment of the Local Policing Areas model, across West Midlands Police (WMP). Through this, the Chief Superintendent's responsibilities and control regarding policing resources had increased and performance had seen a general improvement. Statistics relating to arrests, intelligence submissions, expired bail and response times all reflected improved performance. Chief Superintendent Dolby provided an overview of the Serious Violence Duty and how this was being effected in Walsall.

There then followed an extensive period of questions to Chief Superintendent Dolby.

Chief Superintendent Dolby elaborated on the importance of partnerships working to produce visions of change and design approaches for achieving these, including with regards to the Bloxwich and Blakenall impact area zones. Engaging and building trust with communities was important for increasing intelligence flow, which was essential for informing police work. Partnership work was also important regarding the night-time economy, where work had been done with the Council's licensing and community protection team, local licensees, the Pub watch group and other town centre businesses. A 'safe space' was being established through a partner and street pastors were returning. Despite some initial concerns from licensees, it was believed the benefits were now being felt. Road safety and tackling road harm was identified as an area in which partnership working could be improved and community

involvement could be an important part of this. The Chief Superintendent highlighted the need to 'design out' rather than 'enforce out' some highways risks. Civil injunctions conducted in partnership with organisations such as social housing providers were a useful tool and WMP would like to co-locate in the Civic Centre with the community protection team.

In response to a question regarding dangerous dogs, Chief Superintendent Dolby explained that resources had been increased across WMP with increased kennel capacity and trained staff. It was often difficult to immediately identify dangerous dog breeds and the Chief Superintendent did have concerns regarding the scope of the Dangerous Dogs Act. Walsall had not experienced as many reported dangerous dog-related incidents as other areas, but continued difficulties were expected.

Regarding mental health, Chief Superintendent Dolby explained that the reality of how mental-health related issues were being responded to was not necessarily reflected accurately in the media. Recent years had seen a 'drift' of mental health cases being diverted to the police due to resource issues in other services with approximately 25% of cases associated with mental health. Whilst these should not be the police's priority nor were the police the most appropriate service for dealing with these issues, Chief Superintendent Dolby reassured members that whenever there was a risk, harm or threat identified relating to an individual with mental health concern, the police would always respond to deal with the situation.

WMP was actively engaged in schools, with dedicated schools team engaged with secondary schools and neighbourhood teams visiting primary schools. Regarding funding, Chief Superintendent Dolby could not provide an exact figure for police funding in Walsall due to the multiple sources of funding and the budget structure however, WMP were the fifth worst-funded force nationally with 800 fewer officers now than in 2010.

Following recent national events, Chief Superintendent Dolby explained that it was a difficult time for firearms officers but that in the UK and West Midlands they were only deployed after thorough processes were followed and firearms were rarely discharged. Police officers put themselves in every time they were deployed and firearms officers were regularly deployed as first responders to incidents not associated with weapons, such as serious medical emergencies.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

- 1. Note the presentation and verbal updates from the Borough Commander.**
- 2. Commend the work carried out by Walsall Police together with its partners, including the Walsall Council's community safety team, and the excellent leadership provided by Chief Superintendent Dolby to make our residents and Borough safe.**
- 3. Request Cabinet to:**
 - a. Identify potential opportunities to improve collaboration between Walsall Council and West Midlands Police to improve road safety and reduce road harm in the Borough.**

b. Consider the feasibility of co-locating the Council's community protection teams alongside West Midlands Police to increase co-operative working.

22 Section 106 monitoring report

The Head of Planning and Building Control introduced the Section 106 (S106) monitoring report.

(Annexed)

A breakdown of S106 contributions and agreements by ward was provided and the process for securing S106 agreements was explained. An overview of the responsibilities and constitution of the S106 board was provided and it was explained that regular performance reports were presented to Planning Committee. Within the Planning service there had been a number of successes, including a 52% reduction in the backlog for processing major applications, 85% of minor applications and 63% of major applications were determined within targeted time frames, with 76% of appeals being dismissed.

Responding to questions, the Head of Planning and Building Control explained that the planning team was responsible for agreeing and collecting S106 funds, but not for spending them as this was the responsibility of relevant service areas. The information included in the report regarding how funds had been spent had been provided by service areas. There was a discussion regarding the accuracy of some of the data provided and concerns were also raised regarding costing for projects. It was as yet unclear whether the proposed infrastructure levy would come into force or have any effect on the current S106 framework.

Regarding staffing, the Head of Planning and Building Control explained that the previous, temporary development monitoring officer had now left, but that the role would be advertised as soon as possible on a permanent basis. Regarding negotiations with planning applicants and recent changes to introduce a one amendment policy, the Head of Planning and Building Control explained that these changes had facilitated faster determination of applications but had also led to increased complaints.

The Customer Engagement Lead (Housing and Resettlement) explained that regarding affordable housing, 'locality' legally meant anywhere within the Borough, with S106 contributions for affordable housing often pooled together to enable the acquisition of temporary accommodation for housing the homeless. The Council did have a list of long-vacant properties.

The Deputy Leader and portfolio holder for Regeneration added that the new process for Councillors calling-in planning applications had only been in place for a short time

and it was too soon to change this, however he recognised Councillors' concerns regarding timeframes.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The infrastructure funding secured through S106 planning obligations during the financial period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 including details of committed/spent funding and infrastructure secured be noted.**
- 2. The approved procedure for securing necessary infrastructure through S106 planning obligations and the role of members in the process be noted.**
- 3. That Councillor Nawaz be provided with information on delays to funds allocated by Section 106 being received and spent, and whether urban open spaces are included in Section 106 arrangements.**
- 4. Officers arrange a meeting with Councillor Bott to discuss his concerns regarding the spending of Section 106 funds.**

23 Recommendation Tracker

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

[Annexed]

Resolved:

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

24 Areas of Focus 2023-24

Members received the Committee's Work Programme and considered the Forward Plans of the Council and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee [Annexed].

The Committee received feedback from the Chairs of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees on meetings of their committees since 15 June 2023.

It was agreed that Councillor Nawaz, Councillor Hicken and Councillor Bott would work with Officers to set the housing allocation policy.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted;**
- 2. The following items be considered at the November 2022 meeting:**
 - a. Recruitment and retention**
 - b. Housing waiting list**
- 3. The Forward Plans be noted;**

- 4. Democratic Services assess the feasibility of collating all items related to police and judicial matters which could be considered by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.**

25 Co-ordination of Scrutiny Working Groups

The Committee received and discussed the report from Democratic Services regarding the co-ordination of working groups for the 2023-24 municipal year.

[Annexed]

Resolved:

- 1. That the Primary care access and GP Services Working Group be established to commence immediately, with its membership to be determined by the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 2. That the Housing Standards Working Group be established to commence in January 2024, or earlier should Democratic Services be able to facilitate this, and that its membership be as follows, subject to consultation with Councillor Waters:**
 - a. Cllr Bott**
 - b. Cllr Follows**
 - c. Cllr Hicken**
 - d. Cllr Nawaz**

26 Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be 9 November 2023.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 8:48pm.

Signed:

Date: