

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

Tuesday, 6 February 2024 at 6.00p.m.

**Committee Members present:** Councillor J Murray (Chair)  
Councillor A Nawaz (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor A Hicken  
Councillor K Hussain  
Councillor T Jukes  
Councillor N Latham  
Councillor K Sears  
Councillor G Singh-Sohal  
Councillor V Waters

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

**Officers present:** Judith Greenhalgh – Executive Director of Resources and Transformation  
Dave Brown - Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Communities  
Shaun Darcy – Director of Finance, Corporate Landlord, Assurance and Section 151  
Alison Ives – Head of Planning and Building Control  
Stuart Wootton – Finance Planning Manager  
Matt Powis – Senior Democratic Services Officer

## 49. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Follows and P Bott.

## 50. **Substitutions**

Councillor Jukes substituted on behalf of Councillor P Bott.

## 51. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

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

There were no items to consider in private session.

53. **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on the 10 December 2023 was submitted [annexed].

**Resolved**

**That, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2023, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

54. **Walsall Borough Local Plan**

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration outlined the report and highlighted that work had commenced to prepare for a new Borough Local Plan. It was noted that the new local plan would replace the Black Country Plan which had formally ceased on 19 October 2022.

The purpose of the Local Plan was to ensure that the Borough had a development plan and form the basis of decisions on planning applications as well as other development matters. In addition, the Plan would set out the site allocations and ensure locally distinctive development.

It was noted that the Local Plan would replace existing development plans which comprised of the Black Country Core Strategy, Site Allocation Document, Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan and the remaining policies of the Walsall Unitary Development Plan.

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

- Supply of brownfield land available in the Borough was running out, which would only exacerbate existing housing pressures.
- Consultation had commenced for a call for sites, which invited the public to submit their ideas and thoughts to the Council to help shape the future Local Plan.
- There were concerns that the abolition of 'duty to cooperate' would only increase the shortfall of adequate housing supplies.
- The Council had formally commenced work with other neighbouring authorities on cross boundary issues. Recent consultations included Telford Council, Sandwell MBC, Dudley MBC and South Staffordshire Council.

- Engagement and cooperation with neighbouring authorities was critical as the Council had a duty to demonstrate cross boundary planning alignment.
- The Council had remediation strategies in place and was ready to work with developers on housing types and viability proposals.
- The Local Plan would endeavour to include existing plans, strategic policies and other aspects of legislation required.
- It was expected that the Local Plan would be adopted by 2027.
- Planning Services had successfully reduced its planning application backlog and was making progress delivering government targets.

**Resolved:**

**That, the progression and timescales of Walsall Borough Local Plan be noted.**

**55. Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2024/25 – 2027/28 – Supplementary Feedback.**

The Leader of the Council introduced the report which provided supplementary budgetary proposals and information since consideration of the item at Committee on 11 December 2023. He confirmed that the Council had a balanced budget for 2024, which would be presented to Council on 22 February 2024 subject to proposed mitigations. He expressed his gratitude for officers in respect of the finance preparations and the work conducted in accordance with the Proud Programme.

The provisional 2024/25 settlement was received on 18 December 2023 which confirmed referendum principles for the increase in Council Tax of 2.99%. In addition, there was a further 2% precept for Social Care authorities in 2024/25. Therefore, it was proposed that an increase of 4.99% was required for 2024/25. The Council was aware of other local authorities facing financial difficulties such as Birmingham City Council. However, it was highlighted that the Council had worked tirelessly to address budget shortfalls.

The net impact of the settlement was a £830k reduction compared to 2024/25 Medium Term Financial Outlook (MTFO) assumptions. The final settlement announced on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024 confirmed an additional £3m for social care across adults and children's and a further £0.4m across services grant, top up grant and Public Health Grant. There was a consensus from the Committee that there continued to be concerns on future local government funding and the budget for 2025/26 remained a challenge.

A discussion ensued in respect of the funding for social care. Adequate and sustainable funding for social care was required to address the issues within the sector. There was a commitment that no vulnerable adults or children would be put at risk regardless of funding shortfalls within the sector.

A question was raised regarding historic debt with Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB). In this respect, the Leader of the Council confirmed that the

Council had come to an agreement with the ICB. A new funding model was being developed and would result in a positive outcome for the Council.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That, the draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2024/25 – 2027/28 as presented on 6 February 2024 be noted.**
- 2. To note and thank the Cabinet and Officers on their work to secure a funding agreement with ICB.**

**56. Scrutiny Chair Feedback**

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

**57. Areas of focus – 2023/24**

The Committee noted the proposed areas of focus for the remaining meetings of the municipal year. [Annexed]

It was noted that the WMCA Update item be delayed until the next municipal year with an informal briefing note circulated on transportation.

**Resolved:**

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

**58. Recommendations 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.**

**59. Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the date of the meeting would be 14 March 2024.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.01p.m.

Signed:

Date: