

**ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**24 November 2022 at 6.00pm held at Walsall Council House, Lichfield Street,**  
**Walsall, WS1 1TW.**

**Committee Members**

Councillor M. Follows (Chair)  
Councillor P. Bott  
Councillor C. Creaney  
Councillor A. Garcha  
Councillor P. Kaur  
Councillor R. Larden  
Councillor A. Nazir  
Councillor J. Whitehouse  
Councillor K. Sears  
Councillor F. Mazhar

**Portfolio Holders**

Regeneration

Councillor M. Bird      Leader of the Council  
Councillor A. Andrew      Deputy Leader and

Councillor G. Perry      Deputy Leader and Resilient  
Communities

**Officers Present:**

Simon Neilson      Executive Director, Economy,  
Environment and Communities  
Paul Gordon      Director, Resilient  
Communities  
Fraz Hussain      Lead Accountant, Economy,  
Environment and Communities  
Sian Lloyd      Democratic Services Officer

**Invited Attendees:**

Chief Superintendent      West Midlands Police  
Phil Dolby

**30/22 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen, I Hussain and Worrall.

**31/22 Substitution**

Councillor Mazhar substituted for Councillor Worrall and Councillor Sears substituted for Councillor Allen.

**32/22 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

33/22 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to consider in private session.

34/22 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2022, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

35/22 **Off-road Bikes**

The Portfolio Holder for Resilient Communities advised that this item had been brought to the Committee to demonstrate the seriousness of tackling the issue of off-road biking which 85% of respondents to a survey advised they had experienced across the borough, with 101 locations of activity being identified, some of which were particularly troubled. He highlighted that there were two concerns in relation to off-road bikes; firstly their use on green and open spaces across the borough and secondly their use on roads which may be linked to other criminal activity.

The Director of Resilient Communities underlined the gravity of the problem in Walsall and emphasised efforts to make it more difficult for bikers to access green and open spaces in problem areas. He also showed footage obtained from a trial using drone technology to track and record instances of off-road bike usages. He confirmed that the drones do have the ability to zoom in on the faces and registrations of bike users but as of yet this had not been done as the powers to do so had not been sought. It was acknowledged that the users of these bikes had personal responsibility but demonstrated a disregard for the law and safety of operation and the Director of Resilient Communities suggested that it would be prudent to consider a range of different ways to combat the issue.

Chief Superintendent Dolby added that this activity was completely illegal and completely unacceptable however the Police were duty bound to ensure that any tactical response doesn't lead to injuries either for police officers or those riding off-road bikes. He emphasised that West Midlands Police do not use tactical contact in pursuits and the fact that those riding the bikes often have no formal training on how to ride meant pursuing them would bring its own dangers. The Chief Superintendent stated that the use of stingers was also more difficult with two-wheeled vehicles. He advised that West Midlands Police did have access to drones but this was shared across the region so could not be immediately responsive to incidents reported.

Following discussions the Committee recommended that the prospect of acquiring a drone or drone service for community protection be explored by Cabinet in relation to the cost of purchase and maintenance of a drone, any

relevant training and licenses for an operative and partnership working with the Police. Chief Superintendent Dolby advised that drones were subject to specific aviation legislation and specific permissions would be required for their use to investigate alleged crimes but that West Midlands Police would be able and happy to assist in the process of investigating this possibility. A Member of the Committee requested that posters containing the relevant contact information be placed on notice boards in parks so residents could report any instances to the correct people.

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. The Committee notes the presentation and its contents;**
- 2. The Committee recommends Cabinet to investigate the acquisition of a drone or drone service for community protection to use in conjunction with West Midlands Police.**

**36/22 Corporate Financial Performance – Quarter 2 (August) Financial Monitoring Position for 2022/23**

The Lead Accountant for Economy, Environment and Communities presented to the Committee a report which gave specific details of revenue and capital forecast for the financial year-end 2022/23 for the services that fall under the remit of the committee. It was noted that the current net revenue forecast position, after the net use of reserves was an £0.432m underspend and the current net capital position was a proposed £30.699m carry forward. The Lead Accountant also advised the Committee of the allocated reserves for Economy and Environment and the potential risks which totalled £0.168m. He highlighted that if the risks became certainties, they would need to be included in the forecast position as overspends unless alternative action could be identified to mitigate these costs.

**Resolved:**

**That the Committee notes the revenue and capital forecast for the financial year-end 2022/23 for the services that fall under the remit of the committee.**

**37/22 Town Centre Delivery**

The Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Communities provided the Committee with a report and presentation detailing the latest works in relation to town centre delivery following the 2019 Town Centre Masterplan which had identified a number of objectives to enhance the lived experience, built environment and economic performance of the town centre including topics such as housing, jobs and transport improvements. It was noted that there had been a number of changes that had taken place since

2019, not least the effect of the pandemic on footfall which was still reduced by 10% in comparison to pre-covid levels.

The Committee were informed of specific interventions that were made use of during the pandemic to support the recovery of the high street and public health and safety through the Welcome Back Fund and Accelerated Towns Fund. The Executive Director explained that following this key regeneration projects such as the Connected Gateway and Town Deal were prioritised to drive economic regeneration and deliver urban regeneration, skills and enterprise infrastructure and connectivity.

Following questions from the Committee the Executive Director advised that the council had received over 2000 responses to the town centre survey and was committed to ensuring that residents' feedback was taken on board as part of the process. The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration also highlighted that all work on the Town Deal went through the Town Deal Board which also broke down further into regional groups. He noted that the scheme itself was ambitious with tight timescales so change would start to be seen quite quickly.

**Resolved:**

**That the Committee notes the report and its contents.**

#### **38/22 Areas of focus – 2022/23**

The Chair of the Committee noted that a date had not yet been scheduled for the report on the Waste Strategy and new HWRC and transfer station and requested that this was considered this municipal year.

**Resolved:**

**That the areas of focus 2022/23 and forward plans be noted.**

#### **39/22 Recommendation Tracker**

The Democratic Services Officer updated the Committee on the recommendations from previous meetings of the Committee. She advised that all actions had been completed as requested.

**Resolved:**

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

#### **40/22 Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 17 January 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated 7.21pm.

Signed: .....

Date: .....