

SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Thursday 8 October 2020 at 6.00 pm

Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

Held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020; and conducted according to the Council's Standing Orders for Remote Meetings and those set out in the Council's Constitution.

Committee Members present: Councillor J. Murray (Chair)
Councillor A. Nawaz (Vice-Chair)
Councillor S. Ditta
Councillor K. Ferguson
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor K. Hussain
Councillor L. Jeavons
Councillor W. Rasab
Councillor S. Samra
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor M. Statham

Portfolio Holders present: Councillor A. Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration
Councillor O. Buttler – Clean and Green
Councillor S. Craddock – Health and Wellbeing
Councillor G. Perry – Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities
Councillor C. Towe – Education & Skills

Officers present: Deborah Hindson - Executive Director – Resources & Transformation
Stephen Gunther – Director of Public Health
David Brown – Interim Director, Place & Environment
Elise Hopkins – Interim Director of Customer Engagement
Helena Kucharczyk – Head of Service – Quality Assurance and Performance Information
John Elsegood – Interim Director, Communications, Marketing and Brand
Craig Goodall, Senior Democratic Services Officer

WELCOME

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, and explaining the rules of procedure and legal context in which the meeting was being held. He also directed members of the public viewing the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information system (CMIS) webpage.

Committee Members confirmed that they could see and hear the proceedings.

274/20 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

275/20 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

276/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

**277/20 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
(AS AMENDED)**

There were no items of business that required the exclusion of the public.

278/20 COVID-19 LOCAL OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The Portfolio Holder (Health and Wellbeing) informed the Committee of the latest information regarding Covid-19 within Walsall.

The Committee noted that neighbouring authorities had restrictions on gatherings in private houses imposed on them by the Government but Walsall did not. Questions were asked if further restrictions for Walsall were to be introduced? The Portfolio Holder explained that the Government was anticipated to launch a tiered method for managing restrictions across the country to assist in improving public understanding of restrictions. There had been good compliance with 10pm pub curfews. No current outbreaks were linked to hospitality venues.

A Member queried the governance overseeing the boroughs response to the pandemic. He noted that the Local Outbreak Engagement Board (LOEB) had limited representation from opposition members and that the Incident Management Team (IMT) had no elected members amongst its membership. The Portfolio Holder explained that the LOEB did include elected members amongst its membership as well as health partners. He noted that the IMT was an operational group. He added that the LOEB accepted questions from the public at its meetings and encouraged members to submit questions. Further to this he and the Chief Executive wrote to all members to keep them informed of latest developments.

Further to a question on the current extent of Covid-19 in the Borough the Director of Public Health explained that outbreaks in schools were being experienced. There had been some asymptomatic cases identified in care homes but prevention methods were currently preventing larger outbreaks. No cases as yet had been reported at the Walsall Campus of Wolverhampton University. However, there was increased community transmission taking place which required a management approach to try

and reduce ongoing transmission of the virus.

There had been three small outbreaks in the Manor Hospital related to staff. At this point there were 26 people receiving hospital care for Covid-19 in hospital including 6 in critical care.

A Member asked what the data told about the current outbreak. The Director of Public Health explained that there were high numbers of cases in 10-19 year olds and those aged 40-50 which suggested outbreaks amongst family groups. In terms of occupations it was noted that any job that exposed individuals to others was higher risk. This included retail, hospitality and bus drivers amongst others.

Resolved (by assent):

That the report, and the information contained within it, be noted.

279/20 REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADES 2020

Members were provided with a verbal update on the plans for Remembrance Day Parades.

The Deputy Leader (Resilient Communities) explained that due to the ongoing challenges with the Covid-19 pandemic and the government restrictions that prevented gatherings of more than six people the decision had been taken to cancel all Remembrance Day Parades. Acts of remembrance would still be permitted but residents would be encouraged to not attend their war memorials on Remembrance Sunday. Having said that it was anticipated that residents may still attend war memorials therefore the Council would close roads around local war memorials to enable residents to pay their respects safely.

The Deputy Leader (Regeneration) added that whilst the current pandemic was ongoing and restrictions were in place it was safer for local people to observe Remembrance Sunday from home.

The Chairman added, as Chair of a local Remembrance Day Parade Group, that no service of remembrance was taking place in his ward and discouraged others from attending the war memorial. A recorded service would be broadcast instead.

Committee Members were supportive of the approach being taken and clarified aspects of wreath laying in the lead up to Remembrance Sunday.

The Portfolio Holder (Health and Wellbeing) added that it could be the case that the Government introduced further restrictions prior to Remembrance Sunday.

RESOLVED (by assent):

That the report be noted.

280/20 **GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Members were informed with an initial review of the response to councillor enquiries known as 'getting the basics right' as outlined in correspondence issued to staff and councillors in July 2019.

The Interim Director (Customer Engagement) introduced the report highlighting its key findings. She noted that due to the range of different methods used to collect data it was not possible to provide full assurance. The Head of Service (Quality Assurance & Performance Information) provided further details on the data held and work required to make improvements. The Interim Director (Communications, Marketing and Brand) reported on a forthcoming Customer Relationship Management system that was anticipated to assist in improving customer engagement and the recording of enquiries.

Following a series of questions it was acknowledged that many methods of enquiry and communication between elected members and officers were not being recorded. This typically happened when elected members knew which officers to approach for assistance with case work. Committee Members stated a need for developing improved data collection methods.

A discussion took place on the potential benefits of electronic casework management systems for elected members and the possibility of linking this into Council systems for improved monitoring. The Committee supported the idea of this being explored.

Resolved (by roll call):

That:

- 1. The Interim Director of Customer Engagement develop a consistent method of data collection and reporting for councillor enquiries and report back to a future meeting;**
- 2. The Interim Director of Customer Engagement assess the viability of an external casework management systems for elected members;**
- 3. The report be noted.**

281/20 **AREAS OF FOCUS**

The Committee considered its work programme and the Forward Plans of Walsall Council and the Black Country Joint Executive Committee.

Following a discussion the following items were identified for the next meeting of the Committee:

- Draft budget 2021-22;
- Budget monitoring;
- Corporate Plan performance to Quarter 2.

The Chair reported that he had been notified of a late item going to Cabinet on the infection control fund.

Resolved (by assent):

That the Areas of Focus and Forward Plan be noted.

282/20 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on 1 December 2020.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.55 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....