

SCRUTINY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 June 2022 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present Councillor Murray (Chair)
Councillor Nawaz (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Bains
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor Cooper
Councillor Ditta
Councillor Follows
Councillor Hicken
Councillor K. Hussain
Councillor Samra
Councillor Singh Sohal

Officers Kerrie Allward – Executive Director, Adult Social Care (virtual)
Paul Gordon – Director, Resilient Communities (virtual)
Deborah Hindson – Interim Executive Director, Resources and Transformation (virtual)
Elise Hopkins – Director, Customer Engagement (virtual)
Simon Neilson – Executive Director, Economy, Environment and Communities
Craig Goodall – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Edward Cook – Assistant Democratic Services Officer

Others in attendance Angela Hosford – Head of Sprint Development, Transport for West Midlands (Virtual)
Jason Griffin – Head of Sprint Delivery, Transport for West Midlands (Virtual)

Portfolio Holders Councillor Bird – Leader of the Council
Councillor Ferguson – Internal Services
Councillor Perry – Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities (virtual)
Councillor Ali – Customer (virtual)
Councillor Murphy – Clean and Green (virtual)

Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration
Councillor Pedley – Adult Social Care
Councillor Flint – Health and Wellbeing
Councillor M. Statham – Education and Skills
Councillor Wilson – Childrens’

401/22 **APOLOGIES**

No apologies for absence received.

402/22 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

No substitutions received

403/22 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

404/22 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

There were no items in private session.

405/22 **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2022, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as an accurate record.

406/22 **A34 SPRINT – Walsall to Solihull**

An update on the A34 Sprint project was introduced by the Head of Sprint Development, Transport for West Midlands. A brief introduction to the project was given and Phase One was explained. New one-way bus lane and contraflow system is now operational at the Upper Rushall – Ablewell Street Junction, but bus lane enforcement still needs to be installed. Junctions are being remotely observed to see if changes are required, with full operationalisation by September 2022. Outstanding tasks were covered including a full road safety audit.

A response to the motion regarding compensation, from the previous meeting of the Committee held on 28 April 2022, was received [annexed].

There then followed a period of questioning. Disappointment was raised by members to the response regarding compensation. The letter outlining the compensation option of business rates rebates will be published online on the Council's website. Clarity was requested on whether private hire vehicles can use bus lanes, with the Head of Sprint Development, Transport for West Midlands this would need checking but ideally be in line with policy throughout the borough and West Midlands. This information will be provided to the Committee.

Responding to Member questions, the Head of Sprint Development, Transport for West Midlands outlined that the rationale for the Sprint scheme and bus lanes was to build in reliability where there are lots of bus delays. Some new interventions have reduced delays by 10 minutes. There is no planned provision to remove the bus lanes if they do not work, but they will be monitored to ensure optimum results.

The zero-emission vehicle fleet will be fully operational by 2030 and Phase 2 funding and decisions will not circumvent the usual process of consultation with the public, Members and cabinet.

Resolved:

- 1. That the Committee note the update;**
- 2. That the letter received from TfWM outlining the options for compensation via business rate rebates be published on the council's website;**
- 3. That this item will not be kept as a substantive item for further meetings of the Committee.**

407/22 **AREAS OF FOCUS 2022-23**

The Committee received presentations from Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Officers on services within the remit of the Committee.

Leader of the Council:

The Leader of the Council highlighted a balanced budget, the Asset Management Access Plan, and Equality and Diversity and culture change, as priorities for the new municipal year. Suggestions for scrutiny include considering budgetary approaches; use of offices and workspaces; digital engagement and inclusiveness; and how big issues can be discussed by Scrutiny and fed into Cabinet.

Following the presentation there was a discussion about the effectiveness of scrutiny and a desire from Members and the Leader for more effective scrutiny.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Resilient Communities:

Highlighted the priority for the year as being taking the next step forward with the key concepts of resilient Communities, focusing on areas and issues where the public frequently come with issues, and refining actions. The 100 Days of Action, motor vehicle crime summit, CCTV modernisation and expansion, and working with communities at Hub level are key projects. Responding to questions, the Deputy Leader of the Council identified that there are currently no plans to expand Trading Standards or Food Hygiene teams. Police numbers have increased though not as much as would be preferred and Community Protection are keeping a high presence in order to improve safety, but societal issues remain. The Town Deal will help address some of these.

At this point, Councillor Nawaz raised the following points for consideration later in the meeting. The Black Country Plan should come to either this Committee or the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the next consultations begin in August. Secondly, the effectiveness of scrutiny across the Council should be assessed, including updates from Executive Directors and the effective engagement with council services.

Councillor Nawaz left the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer:

Highlighted the Customer Experience Centre as important for providing Customer engagement and interaction, especially on issues such as levies, benefits and housing issues. Responding to concerns surrounding lack of public accessibility, the Portfolio Holder identified the importance of libraries and the planned local hub strategy as means of addressing this. Digital services are a key part of future plans, but in-person services are also being considered.

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Services:

The portfolio was introduced with priorities identified as the delivery of HR projects and action plans, including the Workforce Strategy, streamlining of administration, and supporting transformation The Equality and Diversity inclusion Strategy and changes to the use of corporate building facilities are other priorities.

Officers

The Committee also received presentations from the Executive Director, Adult Social Care; the Interim Executive Director, Resources and Transformation; Director, Resilient Communities; and Director, Customer Engagement. These presentations outlined the key services within directorates which fall under the remit of the Committee; the structure of directorates; priority focuses within service areas; and suggested areas of focus for the Committee.

The Principal Democratic Services Officer provided an overview of the outstanding items identified in the previous Municipal Year which included COVID 19 data, affordable housing, the Equalities working group and the School Gates Parking working group. It was suggested the Committee engage with budget scrutiny, Council Plan performance review and scrutiny of Proud Workstreams. The Principal Democratic Services Officer explained that due to staffing challenges Democratic Services would only be able to support one working group for the 2022-23 Municipal Year across all scrutiny committees.

The Committee considered the Forward Plans of Walsall Council and the Black Country Joint Executive Committee. The Committee discussed the approach to be taken regarding working groups and the importance of safety concerns around the school gates parking issue. There then followed a period of extensive discussion regarding proposed areas of focus and priorities for scrutiny during the 2022/23 Municipal Year, including those raised by Members earlier in the meeting

Resolved:

- 1. That the Committee establish the working group on School Gates Parking for the 2022-23 Municipal Year with the following membership:**
 - a. Cllr Cooper**
 - b. Cllr Hicken**
 - c. Cllr Nawaz**
 - d. Cllr Samra.**

2. That the following items be included as areas of focus for the Committee in the 2022-23 Municipal Year:

- a) The Black Country Plan, preferably before August 2022;**
- b) The effectiveness of scrutiny;**
- c) Council customer engagement ;**
- d) To Invite Chief Executives of registered housing providers including Walsall Housing Group to present to Committee;**
- e) Housing strategy;**
- f) Children’s play strategy and relation to children’s health (to be passed to the Chair of the Children’s Scrutiny Overview Committee);**
- g) Budget setting and quarter 2 update;**
- h) Council Plan performance report;**
- i) Officer responses to Member queries;**
- j) Section 106 and the Infrastructure Levy;**
- k) Enforcement (all areas excluding planning);**
- l) Role of Council Officers and their consultations;**
- m) Proud workstreams;**
- n) Recruitment and employee retention.**

408/22 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will be 4 October 2022.

The meeting terminated at 20:34

Chair:

Date: