

SCRUTINY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 June 2021 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present Councillor Murray (Chair)
Councillor Nawaz (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ali
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor Harrison
Councillor Hicken
Councillor K. Hussain
Councillor Rasab
Councillor Samra
Councillor Singh-Sohal

Officers Deborah Hindson – Interim Executive Director (Resources & Transformation)
Kerrie Allward – Executive Director (Adult Social Care)
Simon Neilson – Executive Director (Economy, Environment & Communities)
Elise Hopkins – Director – Customer Engagement
Craig Goodall – Principal Democratic Services Officer
Sian Lloyd – Assistant Democratic Services Officer

Portfolio Holders Councillor Bird – Leader
Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration
Councillor Perry – Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities
Councillor M. Statham – Internal Services
Councillor Butler – Clean and Green
Councillor Martin – Adult Social Care
Councillor Towe – Education and Skills

321/21 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Jeavons.

322/21 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

323/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

324/21 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

324/21 **MINUTES**

A member expressed concern about the accuracy of the information in the appendix to the s106 report considered at the previous meeting. Following a discussion it was agreed to consider an in-depth report on s106 and affordable housing at a future meeting.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. subject to the concerns on the accuracy of the information contained in the appendix to the s106 report, the minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2021, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved.**
- 2. an in-depth report on s106 spending and affordable housing to be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.**

325/21 **UPDATE ON PRIORITIES FROM LEADER AND PORTFOLIO
HOLDERS**

The Committee received presentations from the Leader, Deputy Leader (Regeneration), Deputy Leader (Resilient Communities) and Portfolio Holder for Internal Services on priorities in their portfolios.

Leader

The Leader reported on his priorities in the forthcoming year. He highlighted how it was important that the Council and residents learned to 'live with Covid'. He noted how previous investment in digital transformation had allowed Council services to be delivered remotely. The experience of the pandemic meant that the delivery style of some Council services would change permanently. He reported that the Council had assisted the payment of £110m of grants to businesses during the pandemic.

Looking ahead he wanted the Council to become increasingly commercial and take a 'Walsall First' approach to procurement. He noted the forthcoming greenbelt review and reiterated his preference to develop brownfield sites. He highlighted the work being undertaken by Walsall Proud to improve the Councils working practices and achieve financial benefits. Further priorities included looked after children, improving Walsall Town Centre and supporting the vaccination programme.

Following questions from Members of the Committee the Leader noted challenges with the recruitment of planning enforcement officers. He commented that no decision had been taken on whether to apply for City status as part of the Queens Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

Deputy Leader (Regeneration)

The Deputy Leader reported that his overarching priorities focussed on creating prosperity into the future and a safe and resilient road network. He highlighted the following forthcoming projects:

- Invest to save in LED street lights;
- M6 Junction 10;
- Train stations at Willenhall, Darlaston and Aldridge;
- Yorks Bridge;
- Improved integration with Clean and Green on highways issues.

Following a question the Deputy Leader outlined a series of regeneration projects that had or were taking place in the Darlaston area. He also confirmed that the Council is in the process of confirming exact numbers for the Afghan Resettlement scheme and that this would be communicated to Members as soon as possible.

Deputy Leader (Resilient Communities)

The Deputy Leader (Resilient Communities) reported that his overarching priority in the forthcoming year was to help Walsall's communities recover and echoed the Leader's comments about 'living with Covid' and the importance of adapting to that new way of living.

He re-iterated that community associations have been critical in the response to the pandemic, stating that a key priority is to continue to foster relationships and continue to support them.

Another priority highlighted was community protection, enforcement and safety. Upcoming projects in this area include the Street Safe Initiative and work around being less risk adverse in dealing with enforcement.

He also noted the importance of leisure centres and libraries having an opportunity to reset after pandemic and strengthen their places as part of the community.

Following questions from Members of the Committee the Deputy Leader (Resilient Communities) clarified that Members will have an input into the new Area Partnership Model under development and that there is nothing off the table with regards to the tougher stance on fly-tipping enforcement.

Portfolio Holder for Internal Services

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Services presented the key priorities within his portfolio. He clarified that Internal Services was the new title of the portfolio previously known as Personnel and Business Support.

His key priority was developing a procurement strategy with a strong focus on local needs including increased spending with local businesses, where possible.

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Services also discussed HR policies which included:

- hybrid and blended working policies;
- developing a Workforce Strategy to attract and retain skilled officers;
- use of Equalities Framework to promote equality, diversity and inclusion;

- review of recruitment and selection processes;
- review of training packages.

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Services was asked questions regarding the number of disabled and black and minority ethnic employees who were recruited in the last year. He advised he would come back to Members with figures.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. the report be noted;**
- 2. Members be provided with information on the number of disabled and black and minority ethnic Council employees.**

326/21 **AREAS OF FOCUS**

The Committee considered potential areas of focus for 2021/22.

The Principal Democratic Services Officer highlighted the remit of the Committee and carry over items recommended in the previous municipal year.

The Director of Customer Engagement gave a presentation that provided an overview of Customer Engagement and highlighted specific issues that they would like the Committee to consider scrutinising. A discussion took place on access to Customer Services in which Members were informed that access would increasingly be online through the website and that a Council app was under consideration. Following concerns expressed by Members they were reassured that face-to-face access would be maintained for vulnerable residents. The meeting discussed challenges with contacting the Council through the switch board noting that there was often significant waiting times before calls were answered. The Director acknowledged that there had been significant challenges with phone access but additional staff had been employed in the call centre to address this. Following a question she confirmed that the Council had systems in place to protect against cyberattack.

The Interim Executive Director (Resources and Transformation) gave a presentation that provided an overview of the Resources and Transformation Directorate and issues the Committee could potentially consider. Following a question she clarified that all staff members have Annual Performance Reviews and 1-to-1s with their managers, usually monthly but this can vary depending on department requirements.

The Executive Director (Adult Social Care) gave a presentation on the Council Hub to share the direction of travel of a number of services which fall within the remit of the Committee and will be aligned into the Hub. Following a question she confirmed that Executive Directors had their roles re-aligned roughly a year ago.

Members reviewed the information presented to them and agreed their areas of focus.

Resolved:

That the following areas of focus for 2021/22 be agreed:

- 1. Scrutiny survey;**
- 2. Getting the basics right member communication review;**
- 3. Covid-19 rates and vaccination updates;**
- 4. A working group be established to develop policy on diversity in the workforce and how it can be improved to reflect the area's diverse communities with the following Members:
a. Councillors Nawaz, K. Hussain, P. Bott, Rasab and Samra.**
- 5. Corporate Finance Monitoring 2021/22 financial and quarter 2 outturn;**
- 6. Corporate Plan 2021/22 performance monitoring;**
- 7. Section 106 report;**
- 8. Affordable Housing;**
- 9. Fly-tipping enforcement;**
- 10. Organised and serious violent crime;**
- 11. West Midlands Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee;**
- 12. Domestic Abuse Strategy and Service Delivery Model;**
- 13. Corporate Finance Monitoring report for 2021/22 quarter 1 and quarter 3 reports to be circulated to Members via email for information;**
- 14. Electric Vehicle Charging Points and the Black Country Plan to be referred to the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

327/21 SCRUTINY SURVEY

The Principal Democratic Services Officer presented a report on the proposed scrutiny survey and requested Members' feedback on the proposal attached as Appendix 1.

Members noted that the answers given to some of the questions, particularly those concerning which Committees the Member sat on, could reveal which Member's submission this was. It was agreed it would be preferable for the survey to be anonymous but leaving the option for a Member to put their name to their submissions should they wish to do so.

A Member also suggested that more questions could be added which are directed at Members who do not sit on a Scrutiny Committee to better understand the value they see in the scrutiny process. It was agreed this would meet the purpose of the survey and that the Committee was in favour of this addition.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. subject to the inclusion of the comments made by Members the Scrutiny Survey be approved, and;**

- 2. the results of the survey be reported to a future meeting of the Committee to enable areas of improvement to be identified.**

328/21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be 28 September 2021.

The meeting terminated at 8.50 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....