

SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Tuesday 25 August 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 L. Harrison
Councillor K. Hussain
Councillor L. Jeavons
Councillor W. Rasab
Councillor I. Robertson
Councillor S. Samra
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor M. Statham

Portfolio Holders present: Councillor M. Bird – Leader of the Council
Councillor O. Buttler – Clean and Green
Councillor B. Chatta – Personnel and Business Support
Councillor S. Craddock – Health and Wellbeing
Councillor G. Perry – Communities, Leisure and Culture
Councillor C. Towe – Education & Skills

Officers present: Deborah Hindson - Executive Director – Resources & Transformation
Paul Gordon – Director, Resilient Communities
Uma Viswanathan – Consultant in Public Health
Lorraine Boothman – Regulatory Services Manager
Paul Rooney – Environmental Health Team Leader
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.

Members and officers confirmed that they could both see and hear the proceedings.

264/20 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor K. Ferguson.

265/20 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions.

266/20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

267/20 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
(AS AMENDED)**

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

267/20 **COVID-19 LATEST INFORMATION WITHIN WALSALL**

The Portfolio Holder (Health and Wellbeing) informed the Committee of the latest information regarding coronavirus within Walsall. In addition to the information contained in the report he highlighted the following latest information from the last seven days:

- there were 23 cases of coronavirus. This equated to 13.1 cases per 100,000;
- four care home staff had tested positive for coronavirus. However, there have been no transmission to residents. This is because of effective PPE procedures;
- there had been four hospital admissions;
- the majority of current testing and cases were focused on younger people;
- a further testing station was scheduled to open in the Town Hall during September.

Following questions there was a discussion about the forthcoming reopening of schools. Members were informed that every school had been contacted by the Council in order to offer support towards reopening. Each school be required to carry out a risk assessment on prevention methods and how they would deal with an outbreak should one occur.

A debate took place about the use of facemasks in schools. The Committee were informed that current government guidance did not require them, however, it was noted that the Scottish government was requiring pupils over 12 to wear them in communal areas and corridors. The Portfolio Holder and Consultant in Public Health referenced the government guidance and explained that universal mask wearing would

assist in reducing transmission, however, it was not advisable for children under 12 to wear mask.

Resolved (by assent):

That the report be noted.

268/20 CORONAVIRUS AND BUSINESS COMPLIANCE

The Committee were given an update on business compliance activity that had taken place to assist with the implementation of coronavirus related government guidance.

The Portfolio Holder (Communities, Leisure and Culture) reported on the number of complaints and enforcement action that had taken place, advice provided to the hospitality sector prior to reopening and details on the number of visits and warnings that have been issued since the hospitality sector reopened.

Following a question about how non-compliant businesses would be addressed the Portfolio Holder explained that the approach was to work with local businesses to support them in becoming COVID compliant. However, he noted that the council would take enforcement action if it was required.

A Member queried whether there had been any illegal parties or raves in the borough. The Portfolio Holder (Communities, Leisure and Culture) explained that he was not aware of any raves, however, there were lots of complaints about residential parties. These events have caused lots of frustration for local residents and were investigated as required.

The Portfolio Holder (Health and Wellbeing) commented that a licensed premises was due to hold an open-air concert with up to 450 people in attendance at the weekend. Public health had advised against it taking place, however, it was still going ahead with the introduction of numerous safety measures. He noted there was a fine line between public safety and returning to normal life.

Following a further question the Portfolio Holder (Communities, Leisure and Culture) reported that the work was due to take place with local organisations about Remembrance Day.

Following a query from a Member of the committee the Leader of the Council explained that the Council had issued £48 million of business support grants. The date to apply for grants had now closed and any surplus monies had been returned to the government. The Leader thanked the team in the Economy and Environment Directorate for their hard work in distributing the grants.

RESOLVED (by assent):

That the report be noted.

269/20 **CURRENT POSITION RELATING TO UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS**

Members were updated on the current situation relating to unauthorised encampments (UEs) in the borough.

The Portfolio Holder (Communities, Leisure and Culture) explained that despite the coronavirus pandemic restrictions imposed nationally to restrict non-essential travel Walsall had continued to see high levels of UEs. He explained the background to a UE that had travelled around the borough during the summer causing high levels of disruption. The UE had initially been served a legal notice by Staffordshire Police. The Portfolio Holder committed to sharing it with all Members for information. He noted the Equality Act and the responsibilities placed on the council for traveller welfare. He reported that advanced discussions were taking place regarding the purchase of private land on which a transit site was planned to be constructed in the future. This transit site would enable the council to meet its Equality Act responsibilities for travellers as well as reducing disruption for local communities.

The Portfolio Holder (Clean and Green) reported on the clean-up operations required after a UE. He added that defences were to be added to some locations to increase their security, however, it was difficult to stop some UEs which were prepared to break in or cut down trees to gain access.

The meeting discussed recent UEs and the use of bailiffs. The Portfolio Holder (Communities, Leisure and Culture) explained that the use of bailiffs had been extended to protect staff and create capacity to evict UEs seven days a week.

A discussion took place on traveller welfare and the need to ensure that this was taken into account. A Member raised the opportunity to provide for welfare through a new transit site. A best practice example in Warrington was referred to where the local transit site was also run by a traveller family. The Portfolio Holder (Communities, Leisure and Culture) highlighted that there had been cases over the summer where the eviction of a UE had been delayed to allow for welfare issues to be addressed.

Following questions about the location of a transit site the Leader reported that this could be announced upon the completion of the land purchase.

In closing the item the Chair thanked all Members and Officers who had worked hard to manage the presence of UEs during the summer.

Resolved (by assent):

That the report be noted.

270/20 **FINAL REPORT OF THE COVID-19 WORKING GROUP**

The Committee received the final report and recommendations of the COVID-19 Working Group which was established by the Committee at its meeting in May 2020.

The Lead Member of the Working Group, Councillor Shires, introduced the report and its recommendations. In doing so he thanked Members of the Working Group and its

support officers for their work. In presenting the findings he noted that there had been considerable good work completed in responding to the pandemic. He explained that the reports findings and recommendations should not be viewed as criticism but merely suggestions for the future based on lessons learned as reported to the Working Group.

A Member of the Working Group emphasised the positive way in which he wished the Working Group the report to be seen. He highlighted the section of the report on the Crisis Support Scheme and the potential challenges if demand exceeded the available budget over the winter.

The Portfolio Holder (Health and Wellbeing) noted the Working Group findings on mental health and referenced the mental health plan approve by Cabinet. He also highlighted mental health training that was available to all Members.

Resolved (by roll call):

That the final report of the COVID-19 Working Group be forward to Cabinet for consideration.

272/20 **AREAS OF FOCUS**

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

The Chair reported that this was the last meeting where the Committee was considering any issue that affected the local area as the Councils remaining Overview and Scrutiny Committees would begin meeting again from September after being paused in March due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Following a query from a Member of the Committee it was reported that three transport related items from the Forward Plan, previously requested to be considered by the Committee, would be considered by the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

- COVID-19 update;
- Member communication review;
- Remembrance Day parades.

Resolved (by assent):

That the Areas of Focus and Forward Plan be noted.

273/20 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on 8 October 2020.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.30pm.

Chair.....

Date.....