

## **SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2022, 6:00pm**

**In the Council Chamber at the Council House, Walsall**

### **Committee Members present:**

Councillor J. Murray (Chair)  
Councillor Nawaz (Vice Chair)  
Councillor B. Bains  
Councillor P. Bott  
Councillor Cooper  
Councillor Ditta  
Councillor Follows  
Councillor Hicken  
Councillor Samra  
Councillor Singh-Sohal  
Councillor Worrall

### **Portfolio Holders present:**

Councillor Bird  
Councillor Ferguson  
Councillor Ali (Virtual)  
Councillor Andrew (Virtual)

### **Officers present:**

Simon Neilson	Executive Director (Economy & Environment and Communities)
Deborah Hindson	Interim Executive Director (Resources & Transformation) (Virtual)
Shaun Darcy	Director – Finance Corporate Performance and Corporate Landlord (Virtual)
Karen Griffiths	Head of Service Strategy and Policy (Virtual)
Elizabeth Connolly	Senior Policy and Performance Officer (Virtual)
Craig Goodall	Principal Democratic Services Officer
Edward Cook	Assistant Democratic Services Officer

### **421/22 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received for Councillor K. Hussain,

### **422/22 Substitutions**

Councillor Worrall substituted for Councillor K. Hussain.

423/22            **Declarations of interest and party whip**

Councillor Worrall declared an interest on Item 11 regarding scrutiny of WATMOS.

424/22            **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no agenda items requiring the exclusion of the public.

425/22            **Minutes**

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2022 was submitted [Annexed].

The Principal Democratic Services Officer reported a minor editorial change to the minutes that would be signed by the Chair.

**Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2022, as amended, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.**

426/22            **Corporate Financial Performance**

The Committee received a report which considered the in-year financial performance of the Council [Annexed].

**Resolved:**

- 1. That the forecast 2022/23 year-end financial position for the council as a whole – a predicted net revenue overspend of c.£5.24m, and net capital break even position after re-phasing of £89.15m into 2023/24 be noted.**
- 2. That the forecast 2022/23 year-end financial position for services within the remit of this committee – a predicted net revenue underspend of (£0.80m) and net capital break-even position after rephasing of £13.81m into 2023/24, subject to ongoing review, be noted.**

427/22            **Council Plan: Markers of Success Quarter 1**

The Committee received a report on Quarter 1 of the 2022/23 Council Plan markers of success, which highlighted achievements from that period and future areas of focus [Annexed].

A presentation was delivered by the Head of Service Strategy and Policy. The new Council Plan continues to focus on five areas of priority with twenty Markers of Success. There were no identified areas of concern, although gaps in data were

acknowledged. The 'internal' priority area was identified as a key area of focus, with data measuring being a challenge and existing data not effectively fitting into the reporting formats used. A similar challenge existed with regards to the 'Communities' priority area. It is intended to bring more measures in which add value to reporting and enable benchmarking, as well as integrating HR and financial data.

Responding to questions, the Senior Policy and Performance Officer explained that it was planned in the future to break down data to ward levels where possible. The We Are Walsall 2040 consultation process, results from which are to be presented to Cabinet in December 2022, will provide more information with multiple breakdowns to provide a rich Borough-wide picture. The Policy and Strategy unit currently has 8 staff and will eventually have 14. The aim is to have a small core team able to cover a wide range of issues and significantly contribute.

Questions were raised regarding benchmarking data and other measures used to judge performance. It was explained to the Committee that the indicators used were those which are currently available. The objective was to increase the range of data available to enable the Council to better measure and compare its performance against others. Some national measures were used, and information was provided to and gained from the Local government Association (LGA), as well as the Council's own internal data and external audit data.

Whilst the measures used suggested the Authority was doing well, further investigations and measures will enable the authority to look further and deeper, potentially uncovering areas requiring improvement. There was a concern raised by Members that an area of priority (marked 7b. in Appendix 1 to the 18 October 2022 Cabinet report) with two markers of success rated 'amber' and one 'red', had been given an 'amber' rating overall, rather than 'red'. Gaps in data regarding the 'Communities' priority were primarily due to staffing issues at the time of reporting.

There was some discussion about recycling targets, which are set by Government. Work is underway to address shortcomings in this area and the We Are Walsall 2040 programme has provided data suggesting areas with recycling illiteracy. A challenge identified regarding recycling was that the National Recycling Strategy has not yet been published. This will mandate what local authority authorities must do and may dramatically change the market.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That the Scrutiny Overview Committee receive another quarterly report on Council Plan Markers of Success following the end of Quarter 2;**
- 2. That future quarterly reports on Council Plan Markers of Success incorporate and apply national benchmarking criteria, or benchmarking criteria from similar Local Authorities;**
- 3. That the following information be shared with Members of the Committee:**
  - a. The full data set which informed the presentation, as submitted as an appendix to the October 2022 Cabinet report;**

- b. The weblink to the Local government Association's 'LG Inform' database and benchmarking system;**
- c. Statistics regarding contamination rates in recycling services, on a ward-by-ward basis, or as close to a ward-by-ward basis as is possible.**

#### 428/22      **Effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny**

The Committee received a report which reflected on recent reviews and improvements to overview and scrutiny at Walsall Council and identified opportunities for improvement. [Annexed]

The Principal Democratic Services Officer presented options for possible approaches to budget scrutiny, including examples used by neighbouring local authorities.

There followed an extensive discussion regarding the options included in the report and possible approaches to Scrutiny. Members agreed that they wanted to see Overview and Scrutiny become more effective within Walsall and felt that where recommendations to Cabinet from Overview and Scrutiny Committees were rejected by Cabinet, responses should be provided to Scrutiny to explain these decisions. There were debates concerning whether scrutiny training should be:

- mandatory, encouraged or optional;
- a requirement for all Members, for Members sitting on Committees, or only for Members new to Scrutiny Committees;
- internally or externally provided; and
- generic or committee-specific.

Regarding budget and financial scrutiny, Members expressed concerns that they were often scrutinising decisions and information which they did not fully understand. It was felt that the involvement of all Overview and Scrutiny Committees was important, but that additional training and expert input from the finance team would be useful. Options considered to improve scrutiny of the budget included establishing a dedicated finance and/or budget scrutiny committee; a one-off workshop akin to a working group, to scrutinise budget-making; and budget-scrutiny by the Scrutiny Overview Committee.

#### **Resolved:**

- 1. That an in-person budget scrutiny training session, open to all Members of the Council, be provided by the Executive Director for Resources and Transformation prior to the draft revenue and capital budget being presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committees in January 2023.**
- 2. That external training for overview and scrutiny members takes place annually and that all members should be required to attend.**

429/22      **Feedback from Overview & Scrutiny Committees**

Members received feedback from the Chairs of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees on meetings of their committees since 4 October 2022.

**Resolved:**

**That the feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees be noted.**

430/22      **Recommendation Tracker**

Members received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items.

**Resolved:**

**That the recommendation tracker be noted.**

431/22      **Areas of Focus 2022-23**

Members received the Committee's Work Programme and considered the Forward Plans of the Council and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee [Annexed].

**Resolved:**

**That:**

- 1. The following items be considered at the December 2022 meeting:**
  - a. Customer**
  - b. WATMOS change of constitution**
  - c. Planning and development**
- 2. The Forward Plans be noted.**

432/22      **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting would be held on Monday 12 December 2022 at 6pm.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 8:40 p.m.

Signed:

Date: