

Scrutiny Board

Minutes - 4 June 2019

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Stephen Simkins
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Phil Page
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Paul Sweet (Chair)
Cllr Mak Singh

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for absence**
There were no apologies for absence.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting(s)**
The Board noted that Dudley had appointed a Cabinet Member for the West Midlands Combined Authority and requested an update as to where the City of Wolverhampton Council was with its approach to the recommendations previously made by the Scrutiny Board which stated that:

the Cabinet be consulted in relation to the creating of a new member post with responsibility for representing the Council at all meetings and working groups associated with the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Managing Director confirmed that there had been a number of initial conversations regarding this and consideration was being given as to how best to address it.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the previous meetings be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

5 **Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities**

A report had been submitted to update Scrutiny Board on the new Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in May 2019.

The Board considered that the Guidance underlined a lot of the work that scrutiny should have been doing from day one and that it was fundamental for scrutiny to have an independent mindset.

It was agreed that it was vital to create a model that suited everyone, and that scrutiny had to continue to provide challenge.

The Board addressed the issue of resources and stated that it was important to ensure that there were adequate resources for scrutiny as there was an ever-increasing workload. These resources had to include training for both councillors and officers and that officers should be invited to scrutiny on a more regular basis so that they could understand the process and how scrutiny worked.

The Board considered that the Council did carry out good scrutiny but was not great at highlighting it and there has been some poor attendance at meetings.

The Board stated that it was important to understand how we monitored the effectiveness of scrutiny in the Council. It was agreed that this was a role for Scrutiny Board.

The Managing Director stated that there were sufficient resources for scrutiny but that a more cultural shift was required so that scrutiny became more integral within the Council.

The Board also considered that it was important to ensure ownership of recommendations that were made to Cabinet and that these recommendations were monitored with responses from Cabinet made in a timely fashion.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

6 **Work programme**

Resolved: That the work programme be noted.

7 **Consultation on All Age Travel Assistance Policy**

The Board considered a report going to Cabinet to approve the commencement of a 12-week formal consultation on the draft All Age Travel Assistance Policy from 2 September 2019 to 29 November 2019.

The Chair welcome Cllr Dr Hardacre, Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills and Cllr Reynolds, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young people to the meeting.

The report provided details of proposals to improve the Council's travel assistance offer to better support the needs of people of the City and to promote the development of increased independence where appropriate.

The report contained a set of consultation principals that the Council could move forward on which would shape the policy and recommend how the Council could move forward.

The function of schools and the education system was to help develop independent young people who were able to go out and about in the world. The aim was to create independence for young people within a proper structured programme. Anything that happened had to be underpinned by safeguarding and the safety of the young people concerned with each instance being dealt with on a case by case basis following in depth discussions with schools and any other relevant organisations.

The Board considered the presentation provided by the Director for Education.

It was confirmed that any approach would be based around independence and personalisation, it would not be a blanket policy approach. The assessment that would take place would consider what was right for that child and family.

The Director for Education explained that demand was increasing, that the children had more complex needs and that it was vital to ensure that they could get to school in an appropriate manner.

There were multiple policies at the moment and fantastic work had already taken place in adult services around the same issue. The Council needed a seamless policy and the proposals allowed the process to run through and promote independence.

The Board considered all the proposals in detail as contained in the report.

The Board questioned whether there would be a medical assessment and who would decide if they met the criteria as most of the applicants would have a disability, mental health or safeguarding concern.

The Board considered the proposed £3.9 million budget and queried how many young people this would be for; how big was the £3.9 million against the number of pupils under consideration.

The question was also raised as to how exceptional circumstances would be approached.

It was stated that any decision-making process would be a multi-agency discussion, the aim of the consultation was to go out and talk to people as to what shape the policy would take.

Regarding the exceptional circumstances description, it was too early at this stage to decide on exceptional circumstances and these needed to be done in consultation on a case by case basis.

Regarding the financing of the policy, the Council would need to be sensible about this and it would take a period of time for any projected savings to accrue. At the moment 750-800 young people were being transported on a daily basis.

The Board expressed some concerns with the current appeals process which they thought was not as independent as it should be as the panel comprised of councillors.

The Board agreed with the implementation in principle and the aim of providing young people with independence but considered that it must be a complicated logistical process. The Board stated that it was important to ensure that proper training was delivered to all those involved and that the Council needed to be confident that this would be adequate for individual needs. It was vital to maintain this training and agree how it was funded and monitored.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills agreed that an independent appeals panel would be preferable, there would be a cost element to this but it was in the best interests of all concerned.

It was also confirmed the independent travel training was already being implemented in Adult Services.

It was stated that there was no quick fix to independent travel, but it was very important to enable people to access employment and training. The Council was working closely with schools to look at how to embed this training and independence and there had already been a real success rate for adults.

The Board noted that some children with Special Education Needs (SEN) were traveling to schools outside of the City boundaries which could make the consultation harder.

The Board also questioned whether there was money in schools or academies to offset some of these costs as many schools had their own minibuses.

The Board considered that SEN covered such a huge spectrum and variety of needs which made this a really difficult area to get right and that the Council had always been very caring about the vulnerable people it was responsible for. The Board welcomed the case by case, individual basis proposed in the report and the long period of consultation that was planned.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills stated that he welcomed the support.

Some concern was expressed that the policy might have a detrimental impact on low income families and that not all parents would know what the process for appeals was and that they might just get left behind.

Some concerns were raised about the proposed removal of automatic eligibility and it was recognised that this was a small authority geographically and that if the Local

Authority were sending a child to go to a specific school that was some distance away that it should be funding that travel.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills stated that where a child had an Education and Health Care Plan, a school that could provide suitable care was normally named within the boundary of Wolverhampton. It was confirmed that the Council would fund transport for a child to go to a named educational facility in Wolverhampton and for a school named by the Council or other organisation outside of Wolverhampton. However, if a parent chose a school outside of the City then the Council would only cover the part of the journey that was inside the City.

The Director for Education stated that the Council had a statutory duty to ensure that children got to school and that consideration was given to areas such as whether the child could get to school by walking, whether a bus pass was available, whether a parent or family member could take the child or whether they already had a mobility car they could use (an allowance would then be paid to the family to do this).

It was also stated that the Council sought to, where possible bring children who were in education outside of City back into City and to find the right place for them to be educated with the right travel policy.

Resolved: That the comments be noted.

8

The Forward Plan

Resolved: That the Forward Plan be noted.