

# Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 13 June 2018

### Attendance

#### Members of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Alan Bolshaw  
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz  
Cllr Payal Bedi-Chadha  
Cllr Paula Brookfield (Chair)  
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre  
Cllr Udey Singh  
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal  
Cllr Peter O'Neill  
Cllr Jane Stevenson (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE

#### Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)  
Claire Nye (Director of Finance)  
Denise Pearce (Head of Human Resources)  
Peter Farrow (Head of Audit)  
Alison Shannon (Chief Accountant)  
Sukhvinder Mattu (Human Resources  
Business Partner)

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*    *Title*

- 1        **Apologies**  
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman and Cllr Ian Brookfield.
- 2        **Declarations of interest**  
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3        **Minutes of previous meeting**  
The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record subject to Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz apologies being recorded.
- 4        **Matters arising**  
A Member of the Panel asked for an update on the progress on the strategy for public access to the Committee Rooms on the third floor and the Council Chamber on the fourth floor of the Civic Centre. The Scrutiny Officer stated he understood

work was still taking place on an Access Strategy and expected Officers to be in touch in due course.

## 5 **Work Programme**

The Chair stated that she saw ownership of the Work Programme as being with the Panel with oversight by Scrutiny Board. It was a live document and she wanted Panel Members to contribute to the Work Programme moving forward.

A Member of the Panel commented that the Civic Hall was currently on the Strategic Risk Register. One of the risks in relation to the Civic Hall was in relation to finance. There was nothing currently listed on the risk register about the lack of grants or capital receipts to help fund the project. He asked how the situation regarding the grants and capital receipts would be monitored in the future, so it did not affect the revenue budget. The Chair said a new project manager was being appointed for the Civic Hall. She stated a report could be written on all of the assumptions with regards to the disposal of Council's assets and how they contributed to the financial position going forward. The Director of Finance agreed a report could potentially be brought to the Panel in September covering, Council capital receipts, the Disposal Strategy, the assumptions in the Capital Programme and how that linked in with the Civic Hall project. There was a new governance structure for the Civic Hall Project and she was now a member of the Board. A new Programme Director was in place and she suggested that they be invited to the meeting in September. There was also going to be a Councillor group setup to oversee the major projects, which included the management of the capital receipts. A "lessons learnt" report on the Civic Hall project would be received by the Audit and Risk Committee in the near future, which could also be reflected on at the Panel meeting in September. She offered to contact the Chair of the Panel after the Audit and Risk Committee meeting had taken place to discuss the contents of the future Scrutiny Panel report.

The Head of Audit stated that the Strategic Risk Register captured briefly an update comment against each of the risks listed and did not capture everything surrounding each risk. He would speak to the risk owner to see if they felt the assumptions on grants and capital receipts funding for the Civic Hall was of significant importance to include into the register. As it had been raised in the Panel, the risk owner may consider its inclusion in the future.

A Member of the Panel in reference to the item on the Work Programme regarding the future use of the Mezzanine area and the temporary Councillor accommodation area, asked if the report could be widened to the Piazza. He saw this as an underdeveloped area but thought on reflection it was potentially an item for the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel. The Chair suggested the future use of the Mezzanine area and temporary Councillor accommodation item could be a briefing note, rather than a formal scrutiny report.

A Member of the Panel suggested the print and design team as a potential item for the future Work Programme of the Confident, Capable, Council Scrutiny Panel. He considered this a very important service at the Civic Centre. Since the new machines had been installed he wanted to see how well used the service was being utilised by internal Council departments, arms length organisations and external customers. A report had been received by Cabinet Resources Panel in the previous year raising some issues and concerns and so effectively the report could be an update on the current state of affairs and to see if the issues had been resolved. He

was aware of new printing machinery having been installed and wanted to understand if they were all working as intended and were value for money. He added that the postal service provided at the Civic Centre for internal and external customers could be included as part of the report.

A Member of the Panel asked if there could be some information available on the subject of election expenses when Local Government Elections were considered by the Panel later in the year. He felt the support for agents was excellent up until polling day, but it would be useful for more support on the completion of election expenses forms. Some Members commented that help with completing election expenses forms had always been completed by political parties and the elections office were unlikely to get involved.

There was a discussion about the apprenticeships item on the Work Programme for the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel. It was considered important to report on the postcodes area people lived in that were undertaking apprenticeships. A Member added it would be useful to have the data on postcode areas for people attending University. There was also a huge amount of work to be completed, to ensure a higher amount of students obtained five GCSE's within the Wolverhampton area. They added it was important to change perceptions that apprenticeships were for people who didn't perform well enough academically to attend University or College.

## 6 **Strategic Risk Register**

The Head of Audit presented a report on the Strategic Risk Register. The former Chair of the Scrutiny Panel had requested a number of questions be answered with reference to the Strategic Risk Register. The report provided answers to those questions. The Strategic Risk Register was facilitated by the Audit Services Department and attempted to capture the top strategic risks the Council faced. Each risk was assigned a risk owner and the relevant Cabinet Member. Audit Services met regularly with the risk owners to ensure the register had accurately captured the current state of the named risks. Audit Services used a scoring methodology which was detailed within the report circulated to the Panel. There was also a set of Directorate and Departmental risk registers where the lower level and more operational risks were captured. There were always discussions ongoing as to whether these risks needed to be escalated up to the Strategic Risk Register. One area which Audit Services was hoping to improve was the Directorate Risk Registers. Over the next 12 months work would be taking place to embed the importance of these registers within the Directorates and to improve their content.

The Head of Audit stated the responsibility for the monitoring of the Strategic Risk Register lay predominately with the Audit and Risk Committee. Benchmarking exercises did take place with other authorities to assess the Strategic Risk Register, where Wolverhampton always did well. The Strategic Risk Register was seen regularly by the Strategic Executive Board. The College had recently been added to the Strategic Risk Register at their intervention. It was undoubtedly the case that some risks were more difficult to manage than others. The Strategic Risk Register circulated with the papers had first been published in February, the latest version would be published in July and would be received by the Audit and Risk Committee. An area currently identified as high risk on the register was the Civic Hall project.

A Member of the Panel raised the difficulties that had been associated with the re-location of the outdoor market. These had included asbestos issues, human remains being discovered and dangerously located petrol tanks. The Head of Audit in response stated that the outdoor market may in the future be listed as an individual risk on the Strategic Risk Register, if after further discussions with the risk owner it was considered appropriate.

A Member of the Panel asked what happened in a situation where a risk had not diminished after a great length of time. The Head of Audit in response said in this situation the risk owner would ordinarily be called to an Audit and Risk Committee meeting to explain why this had occurred and what action was being taken to mitigate the risk.

A Member of the Panel stated data protection was a very significant risk at the current time especially because of the new GDPR legislation. There were potentially severe financial and legal implications for non-compliance.

A Member of the Panel complimented the Head of Audit Services for his work on risk within the Council.

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### **Smart Working**

The Head of Human Resources commented that the briefing note on Smart Working responded to the concerns and questions raised by the Panel Members at the previous meeting. The overall draft policy had not been changed in any way as the answers contained within the note were felt sufficient to respond to the concerns raised by the Scrutiny Panel. The report on the draft policy had been delayed going to Cabinet for a decision, in order for the Scrutiny Panel to be able to consider the briefing note. The Human Resources Business Partner presented the briefing note and highlighted the key areas.

A Member of the Panel commented that they were surprised there was no defined business case for Smart Working. He felt there being no business case also raised questions on Officer accountability for the Smart Working Policy. In response, the Head of Human Resources said the Council employees had morphed naturally into smart working practices through the advances in technology such as laptops, skype and mobile phones. The desk sharing practices and the Future Space project had also been major drivers. A large proportion of employees were already using smart working practices and the policy merely was formalising the practices already taking place within the Council. A Member commented that there was no need for a business case and the monitoring of how successful smart working practices had been, could be managed through performance management.

A Member asked what systems were in place for logging where a person was working from. They were also keen to understand what the reactions of employees were, who were unable to carry out smart working practices. They expressed a concern that energy levels and communication within teams might fall if people were not working in the same office together. Members raised a concern that call centre staff might not have the full flow of information available during a crisis if they were working in separate places. In response the Human Resources Officers responded that whilst smart working might offer benefits to the individual, Managers would only

approve certain smart working practices if it was in the best interests of the organisation. When a person applied for a role they were made aware on whether practices such as working from home would be possible or not. Employees appreciated that smart working practices were a relatively new concept and were being piloted. Employees were expected to keep their calendars up to date with their working location and inform managers of the work they were undertaking. Extensive guidance was available to managers on diary management and using technology such as Skype and Microsoft Teams to stay in contact with their staff.

A Member of the Panel expressed their concern with the Hot Desking approach, their experience in the past was that communication within teams had suffered. They were concerned that the schools had not fully dealt with single status issues and the concept of smart working, thus potentially enabling equalities claims in the future. They were also concerned that managers were not fully compliant with ensuring their staff had an annual appraisal. The Head of Human resources stipulated that there were sometimes good reasons why appraisals were not at a 100% compliant rate. These included long-term sick leave and maternity leave. Managers also had one-to-ones with their staff throughout the year.

A Member of the Panel raised a concern over the current inclement weather policy where people were not able to work from home unless it had been previously agreed. They were also alarmed that staff may not have been paid, if their normal place of work had been closed.

A Member of the Panel asked about the process for updating the Council's systems when a person had left the Council. They were aware of incidences where people were still able to leave a message on a person's Council voice mail answerphone service many months after they had left the organisation and others which were listed in the email global address book. The Head of Human Resources responded that a set process was followed for leavers and she would look into the matters raised.

There was a discussion about how Smart Working should be considered by the Panel in the future.

**Resolved:** That the Scrutiny Panel undertake an assessment and evaluation of the Smart Working Policy at the meeting of the Panel scheduled for the 10 April 2019. Information on performance management and data on appraisals should also be included as part of the report.

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### **Finance Training for Councillors & Finance Explanatory Booklet**

The Chief Accountant presented a briefing note on Finance Training for Councillors. In May, two sessions were held as part of the Councillor Induction Programme for newly elected Councillors. A training session was also booked for Councillors as part of the Development Programme on 4 October 2018. Training was also provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) which was offered to Councillors as part of their LGA membership. There was an option available for some external training with the Council's external management advisors, Link Asset Services. The

estimated cost of the training was £1,500 and they would give training on treasury management and would make it relevant to Wolverhampton Councillors. The Finance Guide 2018-2019 had been included with the agenda and would be sent out by the Cabinet Member for Resources to all City of Wolverhampton Councillors.

A Member of the Panel asked for Audit Committee Members to be included on the proposed external training by Link Assets on treasury management. Several Members of the Panel expressed the need for political party leaders to encourage members to attend training sessions and in particular on important areas such as finance. Finance Training could also be completed on the Council's Intranet system through the Learning Hub.

**Resolved:** That the Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Councillor Development Advisory Group that Link Assets be asked to conduct training on treasury management for Councillors.

**Resolved:** That the Scrutiny Panel endorses the Finance Guide Booklet for 2018-2019.