

**Confident, Capable Council
Scrutiny Panel**

Minutes - 26 September 2018

Attendance**Members of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel**

Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Paula Brookfield (Chair)
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Ian Brookfield
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Jane Stevenson (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE

Employees

Chris East	Head of Service - Facilities
Claire Nye	Director of Finance
Martyn Sargeant	Head of Public Service Reform
Lisa Taylor	Head of Service Improvement
Laura Noonan	Project Manager
Alison Shannon	Chief Accountant

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies**
Apologies were received from the following Cllrs:

Cllr Udey Singh
- 2 Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest recorded
- 3 Minutes of previous meeting (13.6.18)**
The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4 Matters arising**
7. Smart Working

The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that Human Resources had confirmed that there is a leavers notification procedure which is completed by the line managers to

ensure that the relevant services are notified (ICT, Payroll, Agresso Business Support Unit) when an employee leaves. This process is currently being reviewed to ensure that it is effective and efficient and the panel members comments will be incorporated into this review.

5 **Treasury Management - Annual Report 2017-2018 and Activity Monitoring Quarter One 2018-2019**

Alison Shannon, Chief Accountant, presented the Treasury Management Annual report to the panel. The Chief Accountant gave an update on previous report that was presented to Cabinet in July 2018. The Chief Accountant gave an overview of the main points of the report.

The Chief Accountant advised the panel that revised code of practice aimed at supporting effective scrutiny of the Council's Treasury Management strategy and policies was recently published by CIPFA. The team is currently working through the revised guidance.

The Chief Accountant commented that the Council is seeking advice from financial advisers about the possible short-term implications of Brexit on council finances, but the consensus is that is too difficult to predict given the level of uncertainty about the terms on which the UK will leave.

The Chief Accountant agreed to provide an update when more information is available about the implications for long term investments.

The panel queried the sustainability of the estimates of increased levels of Council borrowing up 2020-21 detailed in section on prudential indicators in the main report. The Director of Finance explained that the figures quoted include a lot of historical debts and commented on the importance of checking that the income stream is sufficient to cover the projected borrowing costs. The main aim of the strategy is to minimise the borrowing demands on the Council budget.

The Director of Finance commented on the policy towards the use of Housing Revenue Account and advised the panel that there was an underspend of £731,000.

The Director advised the panel that the Council will look at debts will mature – they are profiled over many years and the aim is to minimise the level of exposure to new financial pressures.

The panel discussed the content of the report and whether a more user-friendly version could be published alongside the main report to make it more accessible. The Director of Finance commented that there are specific requirements detailed in the prudential code about how information in treasury management reports is presented.

The Director of Finance commented that the issue has been discussed with Councillor Development Group – for example, the use of crib sheets that can help members of the panel to meet their responsibility to ensure effective scrutiny of the Council's Treasury Management strategy and policies.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

6 **Visitors to the Civic Centre - briefing paper**

Lisa Taylor advised the panel that following a review she had taken on the management of the customer services and would be happy to attend a future meeting to brief the panel on the service.

Chris East, Head of Facilities, presented a briefing paper on behalf of Andy Moran which gave an update on the management of visitors to the Civic Centre and a response to concerns previously highlighted by the panel about the arrangements.

The Head of Facilities briefed the panel about the changes made to the access arrangements to the building and measures introduced to improve security. The Head of Facilities outlined the signing in process when visitors enter the building and the arrangements for managing public meetings held in either the committee rooms or the Council Chamber.

The Head of Facilities stressed the importance of all employees and visitors wearing their ID badges at all times and he had personally challenged employees wanting to access the building without displaying their ID. The Head of Facilities advised the panel that different colour lanyard is issued to visitors to the building – red – business, contractors – yellow and gold for VIP visitors.

The Head of Facilities advised the panel then when public meetings are held out of hours then badges can be pre-printed. The building keepers are responsible for monitoring the use of lanyards when people are in the building.

The panel commented on that committee room 5 was not considered to be suitable for public meetings as it was too small. The Head of Facilities agreed to review the arrangements and report back to a future meeting of the panel.

The panel commented that difficulties caused by the security arrangements when arranging planning committee meetings - when it possible that 20-30 people may attend depending on the topic. In the past members of the public would not have been required to sign-in. However, following the need to sign in Cllrs are receiving a number of notification emails when people sign in and when they leave the building. There is also a concern that members of the public may attend a meeting without giving notice.

The panel commented that committee room 5 is not suitable for people with a wheelchair and these concerns had been highlighted 18 months ago, when plans for the new working arrangements were first proposed, and it was disappointing that concerns raised at the time had not been heeded.

The Head of Facilities advised the panel that keepers can open the side door at the business entrance to allow easier access for people with a wheelchair for evening meetings in Committee Room 5.

The panel commented on separate issue of an incident where members of the people attending citizenship event in Mayors Parlour who were not wearing lanyards could not exit the building because they did not have a security card. As a result, it was necessary to help them to exit the building without be able to check their identity.

The panel commented on the concerns about the issue of lanyards to Cllrs and wanted them issued. The Head of Facilities agreed to discuss this issue with Member Support and arrange for lanyards and extra passes to be issued to all Cllrs to allow visitors to access toilet facilities. The Head of Facilities also agreed to clarify how long photos taken for ID badge were kept on file to ensure that the Council is complying with its legal responsibilities.

The panel expressed concern that the issue of employees not wearing ID badges has not been resolved and queried whether disciplinary action is taken to enforce the policy. The Head of Facilities advised the panel that employees are regularly reminded that they should always wear ID and there is the option of taking disciplinary action. The panel commented that they consider the process for signing was too complicated and does not give a good impression of Council when large numbers of visitors attend an event and have to go through the process. The panel commented on the idea promoted that Wolverhampton is open for business and would like a review about the balance between providing security and giving a professional gloss to visitors to the building.

The panel commented on the extra work placed on keeper's service and their concern about how they will manage their other responsibilities – the panel queried if the Council had enough staff for the task. Lisa Taylor agreed to present a joint report with the Head of Facilities to a future meeting of the panel about plans for responding to concerns from Councillors about issued related to the signing in process.

The panel requested details of the location of meeting rooms and suggested that as part of the induction a tour of the building should be arranged. Martyn Sargeant commented that this issue is part of the induction for new Councillors.

The panel discussed the need for clearer signage on the third floor to show the location of committee rooms.

Resolved:

1. Lisa Taylor, Head of Customer Services, and Chris East, Head of Facilities, to jointly present a report to a future meeting about plans for responding to concerns from Councillors about the signing in process and overall customer service experience.
2. The Head of Facilities agreed to review the use of Committee Room 5 as concerns about suitability for large public meetings and limited wheelchair access to a future meeting of the panel.
3. The Head of Facilities agreed to discuss the issuing of lanyards and extra passes with Member Support.
4. The Head of Facilities also agreed to clarify how long photos taken for ID badge is kept on file to ensure that the Council is complying with its legal responsibilities.

Local election - candidate expenses - briefing paper

Laura Noonan, Project Manager – Electoral Services, presented a briefing paper to explain the process for completing and returning candidate expenses.

The panel agreed to note the paper.

8 **Statutory polling place review - briefing paper**

Laura Noonan, Project Manager – Electoral Services, presented a briefing paper about the statutory polling station review.

The panel agreed to note the report.

9 **Voter registration and democratic engagement update - briefing paper**

Laura Noonan, Project Manager – Electoral Services, presented a briefing paper on the range of work done in the past few years to increase the numbers of people registered to vote. The Project Manager commented the work done to encourage students to register and the changes made to make the process easier.

The Project Manager commented on work done as part be a councillor initiative, which is linked to activities as planned for Democracy Week. The Council is hopeful that there will be increase by 10% in the number of people registered for postal votes.

The Project Manager commented on the work done with local schools to encourage pupils to register and the service is happy to arrange visits to any school suggested by Councillors to explain the registration process.

The panel welcomed the report and also wanted to formally record their appreciation of the changes introduced and the excellent range of activities delivered by the election service in response to the recommendations from the scrutiny review.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the progress made to increase the number of people registered to vote and also to raise awareness about support available from the service.

10 **Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel Draft Work Programme - 2018/19**

The scrutiny officer presented the draft work programme report for comment. The panel agreed to consider the report on print services at the meeting on 28.11.18

Resolved:

The draft work programme to be updated.