

Scrutiny Board

Minutes - 5 September 2017

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Chair)
Cllr Barry Findlay (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Ian Angus
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Linda Leach
Cllr Louise Miles
Cllr Lynne Moran
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Ian Brookfield
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss

Employees

Claire Nye	Director of Finance
Julia Cleary	Systems and Scrutiny Manager
Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Neil White	Scrutiny Officer
Greg Bickerdike	Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Wolverson	Head of Service, Early Intervention

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman, for whom Councillor Julie Hodgkiss substituted, Councillor Paula Brookfield, for whom Councillor Ian Brookfield substituted and Keith Ireland.
- 2 Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 Minutes of the previous meeting (4 July 2017)**
Resolved:
That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

The Chair thanked Neil White for his contributions to Scrutiny Board in progressing training and advocating new ways of working. The Chair wished him well in his new position in Norfolk and the Board agreed.

5 **Annual Scrutiny Report and Work Plan**

The Scrutiny and Systems Manager introduced the report and informed the Board that the report was on the agenda for Full Council.

Officers highlighted the best practice which was in the process of being implemented and the importance of tracking recommendations. Training for Councillors was also a key component of the plan.

The Chair thanked all contributors, especially those who took on scrutiny reviews.

6 **Scrutiny Review of the City's Apprenticeship Offer**

Councillor Gakhall presented the report to the Board.

Councillors queried how many apprentices at the Council were employed on full-time contracts after their apprenticeships finished. Officers informed the Board that there were over 100 enquiries about work experience each year with around 30 apprenticeship positions available, with each apprentice taken on with a view to being employed afterwards, but not a guarantee. It was suggested that this could be improved by applying more pressure to service areas to accommodate people wanting work experience and providing them with day-long taster sessions in different service areas.

Concern was expressed that if people started their apprenticeships at age 16 then they would be 18 when they finished and it could be difficult to get a job outside the authority by this time. Officers informed the Board that there was no longer an age limit on apprenticeships and highlighted that there were many degree posts which were being converted into apprenticeships and more people were taking these up.

Councillor Gakhall discussed the barrier between schools and organisations, but reported that there were now 15 schools in the City who were on board with apprenticeships. He explained that this issue had been caused by a negative perception of apprenticeships, resulting in schools focussing on encouraging students to pursue an academic route rather than a vocational one.

The Panel discussed the need to make people aware of the opportunities that were available to them through the flexibility of modern apprenticeships. Councillor Gakhall concurred that communication was key and that children need to be educated early on about the options available so as to avoid missed opportunities.

The Chair suggested a target of employing 100 apprentices within two years. It was agreed that this recommendation be taken back to employees and Cabinet members for discussion.

Concern was expressed in relation to the low remuneration for some apprenticeships. Officers reported that apprentices at the Council were paid the National Living Wage and that this was a grade three on the Council's pay structure.

The Chair asked how the Council would be promoting the good work that was being done regarding apprenticeships. Officers informed the Board that there was an annual skills event at Wolverhampton Racecourse and National Apprenticeship week was in February each year. The Chair requested that this be publicised on the website and that efforts be made to push this into the WMCA.

Councillor Gakhal thanked Earl Piggott-Smith for his work on the review.

Resolved:

1. That clarification be provided to the Board regarding the remuneration received by apprentices at City of Wolverhampton Council.

7 **Feedback from the West Midlands Combined Authority**

The Chair provided a verbal update to the Board.

The Chair informed the Board that there have been delays to the process, due in part to late legislation and the election of the Mayor. The Mayor would be providing six key areas of priority, which would allow his vision to be resourced to achieve the benchmark standards.

The Chair informed the Board that there was now a call-in function, but there needed to be a discussion on how the surrounding counties could contribute to the Scrutiny process. Steer on this should be received by November. The Chair relayed that there was a desire to have the budget set in a similar process as in local government, with the same Scrutiny process.

The Chair also raised the issues of how business forums could contribute whilst being accountable, how to declare interests, how to deliver on education and how the Cabinet system holds the leaders to account as well as the Mayor. The Chair would be visiting the London Assembly next week to observe budget setting and this process would be used as a template. The Chair invited any Councillors with questions to submit them to him.

The question was raised as to whether the funding for Scrutiny at the WMCA was still for half of a Scrutiny Officer.

The Chair reported that this was still the case, but that he was pushing for the £25,000 contributed by each of the non-constituent authorities to be used for Scrutiny. The Chair emphasised the need to ensure that this was a key priority as observers from the House of Commons had flagged that the Scrutiny function was not robust enough.

The question was raised as to whether Scrutiny would be involved in 'question time'. The Chair explained that the Mayor had decided to have open forums, with one on the budget and one on priority setting.

Resolved:

1. That any questions for the Mayor to be made to the Chair by Monday 11 September.

8 **Quarter 4 Corporate, Social Care and Public Health Complaints Report**

The Board enquired as to whether the definition of complaint had been agreed upon and whether the timescale limitations for complaints had been clarified.

The Chair remarked on the opportunity to review the complaints procedure to ensure that it was user friendly. He stated that resources could be allocated to specific issues in the process. The Panel considered the possibility of a complaints app, similar to the Report It app.

Concern was expressed in relation to section 4.9 and 4.10 as issues which need addressing. The Chair agreed that these should be used as examples when investigating the policy and procedures, which would need to be reviewed every two years. Officers explained that for each complaint, the cabinet member was informed and action plans were created for the relevant service area. The action plans discussed the cause of the complaint and were intended to prevent further occurrences of the issue.

Resolved:

1. That the briefing note regarding complaint definitions and timescales be recirculated.
2. That the complaints procedure, policy and processes be brought to the Board as a workstream for review.
3. That the action plans relating to complaints in section 4.9 and 4.10 be investigated.

9 **Implementation of the Early Years Strategy**

Andrew Wolverson presented the report.

The Chair thanked Andrew for the report and suggested that outcomes could be improved if there was a nursery at the Council for employees' children.

The Panel requested information about how effectively the concept of 'school readiness' is communicated to parents. The Officer detailed that there was a checklist which needed to be part of the school induction process, but that the health visitors used this checklist at the age of 2 – 2 ½. It was stressed that readiness needed to start before school and to assist parents the online offer, especially that of the Wolverhampton Information Network, was being developed to ensure that all materials were available.

Some concerns were expressed regarding the long waiting list for 'Healthy Minds'. Officers reported that work was being conducted in partnership with Public Health to assess how the service was delivered. The Chair expressed that, as a preventative initiative, this would result in a greater cost later if it was not properly resourced.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet be requested to investigate greater resources for Healthy Minds.
2. That the issue of Healthy Minds be brought back as an item for Scrutiny Board in the future.