

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Paul Sweet (Chair)
Cllr Jonathan Crofts (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Alan Bolshaw
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Phil Page
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Val Evans

In Attendance

Cllr Beverley Momenabadi

Digital Innovation Champion

Employees

Richard Lawrence
David Pattison
Laura Phillips
Julia Cleary
Earl Piggott-Smith
Martin Stevens
Charlotte Johns
John Denley
Chris Jellyman

Director of Regeneration
Director of Governance
Head of Governance
Scrutiny and Systems Manager
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Officer
Director of Strategy
Director of Public Health
Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Welcome and Introductions**
Cllr Paul Sweet, Chair, welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting and advised it was being live streamed on the Council's website. The press and public would be able to either record or take pictures of the meeting. A recording of the meeting would be available for viewing on the Council's website.

Cllr Sweet advised that he was not expecting any exempt or restricted items on the agenda.

2 Apologies for absence

The Chair wanted to record the condolences on behalf of Board to Cllr Rita Potter following the recent death of her mother.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Rita Potter.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 June 2020

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5 Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2020

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

7 Renewal of the Public Space Protection Order - Drinking Restrictions

John Denley, Director of Public Health, introduced the report and outlined the background to the report and presented it to the Board for comment.

The Director advised the Board that the current Public Space Protection Order - Drinking Restrictions (PSPO) covered the period April 2017 to April 2020. The report was seeking support for the recommendation to renew the PSPO with the same restrictions as before.

The Director invited Chris Jellyman, Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator, to share the findings of the public consultation exercise about the proposal to renew the existing PSPO to prohibit public drinking and also to extend this restriction to cover the whole City.

The Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator outlined the key findings from the public consultation exercise about proposed changes to the PSPO, that was recently held. The PSPO granted powers to the police to stop people drinking and to surrender alcohol if they were either causing or likely to cause ASB.

The public consultation ran from 27 May 2020 to 29 June 2020 and 537 responses to the survey had been submitted by the public. The Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator gave a summary of the public response to the survey questions and then outlined the next steps in the process to renew the PSPO. The Chair thanked the Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator for the presentation and invited questions from the Board.

The Board requested a comment on the statistics for ASB in Wednesfield North area which were unexpected. The Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator advised the data presented was collected by the police and he was able to share more detailed

findings if needed. The Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator advised that the policy was not focused on enforcement but also aimed to provide education and support to change behaviour.

The introduction of PSPO would also support the work of the police during the summer months to enforce reasonable behaviour. The Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator advised that he had regular meetings with the police to discuss any issues.

The Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator added that the PSPO would be reviewed regularly and an application to apply to other areas would be considered, if there was evidence to support this.

Resolved: The Board supported the report recommendations and thanked the Neighbourhood Safety Co-ordinator for his presentation.

8 **Recovery**

Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy, advised the Board that the presentation would give an update on the recovery framework report that was presented at the previous meeting.

The Director of Strategy outlined the overarching principles that would underpin the approach to helping the City recover. The Director of Strategy outlined the key elements of the three-step approach locally and how linked issues will be considered and other cross cutting themes. The Director of Strategy commented on the findings of the impact assessment and the learning from COVID-19 which had provided intelligence about how future services could be delivered. The findings of an employee survey were reported in respect of a number of key themes and the challenges and opportunities presented.

The Director of Strategy commented on the specific findings which considered the impact of COVID-19 on specific groups and areas of the City and the work being done to better understand the issues; particularly those individuals and businesses adversely affected by the pandemic.

The Director of Strategy outlined the findings at ward level and also highlighted future risks which may affect the City and the unknown scenarios which could impact future recovery plans. The Board was given details of both short term and longer-term priorities or actions that could support the recovery plans for the City. The Board commented on the references in the report to the negative effects of COVID-19 but queried if there were any positives from the research that could be shared, for example, increased online sales. The Director of Strategy accepted the focus of the negative impact of COVID but did acknowledge a number of positive outcomes, for example encouraging people to innovate and to develop new skills and learning.

The Board while accepting the challenges, highlighted the potential benefits of the rollout of 5G across the City to businesses and citizens. The Board queried the impact of the decision by Government to remove equipment supplied by Huawei from the network and how this may affect the economic plans and proposals detailed in the presentation for the City in the future. The Director of Strategy invited Cllr Beverley Momenabadi, Digital Innovation Champion, to comment. Cllr Momenabadi commented that Huawei provided only 35 percent on the kit for the mobile operating

network. The Government had announced that no new 5G equipment could be bought after 31 December 2020, but this did not apply to older kit which could remain until no longer needed. There was a commitment to roll out the 5G infrastructure network because of the benefits it could bring, but discussions were ongoing to consider in detail the implications of the decision.

The Board queried the findings of a report on foodbank usage and specifically the finding that Springvale ward had the highest number accessing the service and how this differed from the information reported in the presentation. The Director of Strategy confirmed that a detailed response could be provided with an analysis of the data and a detailed breakdown behind the information presented about the use of food banks and the food hub during the response phase. The Board requested similar data for the Tettenhall.

The Board commented on the difficulty in getting up to date unemployment data on a regular basis. The Director of Strategy agreed to provide food bank data analysed by ward and agreed that unemployment ward data would be sent to Councillors. The Director of Strategy suggested that the information could be included in the weekly Councillor update bulletin published by the Director of Governance. The information on unemployment trends was published on the Council website. The Board thanked the Director of Strategy for her presentation.

Resolved:

- The Director of Strategy to share information on foodbank usage at the ward level with the Board.
- The Director of Strategy to liaise with the Director of Governance to include unemployment ward data in the weekly Councillor update bulletins.

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Scrutiny work programme

David Pattison, Director of Governance, outlined the proposed way forward for the future Scrutiny Work Programme. The Director of Governance outlined three potential priority areas for Scrutiny Panels and Scrutiny Board and invited Panel Members to comment on the suggested topics below and agree a priority for the Work Programme:

- Connected City
- Employment – post Covid
- Voluntary and Community Partnership Working

The Director of Governance advised the Board that the plan was that the chosen topic would be a cross-cutting theme where each Scrutiny Panel would consider a specific aspect of the issue as part of their Work Programme.

The Director outlined the background to each of the topics and possible areas of investigation by each of the Scrutiny Panels. At the end of each PowerPoint presentation the Board were invited to ask questions and comment on the suggested topic.

Connected City – Discussion

The Board queried the comment about the Council moving from digital by design to digital by default and whether this was something the public wanted to see happen and added that there would be members of the public who would want to continue to speak to someone in person at the Civic Centre. The Director of Governance responded that this was the opportunity to have a debate about how to make Council services accessible, while at the same accepting that some members of the public would need support to access the help needed. The Director of Governance commented on the how older members of the population had responded positively to using technology to access services and the importance of also offering people a choice of meeting people face-to-face where this was needed. The Director of Governance commented on cost savings to the Council of providing services digitally 24 hours a day and the benefits of this to the public.

The Board commented on the benefits to Councillors of using Microsoft Teams but expressed concern about the problems caused by the lack of printing facilities at home and the process involved in sending documents or printing letters. The Board stressed the importance of involving the representatives of local faith groups and to offer training and support to residents on using new technology. The Board expressed concern that some children and young people had lacked the equipment to take part in online school learning and highlighted the need to improve this situation by working in partnership with other agencies.

The Director of Governance acknowledged the importance of partnership working with communities which was seen to be critical and which also provided an opportunity to provide digital training to local residents. The Council had applied for funding to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to help fund local training and also support disadvantaged members of the community to get access to IT equipment. There was an important role for scrutiny in helping to support the work.

The Board expressed concern that 44 percent of people under 60 did not have digital skills and queried how the situation had happened as schools had included ICT lessons for many years. This issue presented a challenge for the City. The Director of Governance reported that it was estimated that 35,000 people did not have basic digital skills and also not been online for the last three months and of those groups 44 percent were under aged 60, which represented 15,400 people under 60 who have not been online in the last three months and was the opportunity to work with these groups to provide them with the necessary digital skills. The Director of Governance commented on the need for people to have basic digital skills to access a range of services that were provided online. It was also noted that the 44 percent of people who could not get online include people who may not have had a device, or the home connectivity required and also that some of these people would have been able to use equipment at libraries and Wolverhampton learning platform before restrictions were introduced.

The Board discussed the potential benefits for new and existing businesses as a result of technological innovations and the importance of Wolverhampton being a leader locally in preparing to taking advantage of these new opportunities. The Director of Governance endorsed the comments and added the plans reflected the ambitious view of the both the Council and the City about the future. The important role of scrutiny in shaping the Council's response to these challenges facing the City was highlighted.

Cllr Beverly Momenabadi, Digital Innovation Champion, commented on the opportunities presented by improved digital infrastructure and the range of work being done in the City and the wider West Midlands to help business and local residents to benefit in the future. Cllr Momenabadi commented on the report on digital infrastructure strategy that was presented to Stronger City Economy Panel which set out how businesses would be affected by changes in technology and how this technology could improve Council services and provide alternative options.

Employment – post Covid

The Director of Governance outlined the background to the topic being suggested as a cross-cutting theme for Scrutiny Board and the Panels to include on their Work Programme. The Director of Governance added the topic had been the subject of previous reviews and there was a lot of work ongoing to develop plans in response to the economic challenges facing the City post Covid.

The Director of Governance added that the Leader of the Council was Chairing a West Midlands group which was looking at the issue of youth unemployment and also listed a range of initiatives aimed at improving employment opportunities.

The Board discussed the issue of employment and the potential for choosing this topic, but concern was expressed at the scale of the project and the need to avoid duplication of work being done elsewhere.

The Board suggested the performance of the Wolverhampton's Town Deal Board and the funding bid for the Town Fund bid could be added to the list of possible topics to be scrutinised. The Director of Governance suggested that the Towns Fund should be considered separately and offered to meet with Councillors to discuss the issue further. Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration, advised the Board of the governance arrangements for Wolverhampton's Town Deal Board which had been set by Government. The submission of the town investment plan would be presented on 31 July 2020 to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and a decision was expected late September.

Voluntary and Community Partnership Working

The Director of Governance outlined the background to the topic being suggested as a cross-cutting theme for Scrutiny Board and the Panels to include on their work programme.

The Director suggested that to start work on this issue in September might not be timely for the sector as a number of the groups were still involved in supporting people affected by the pandemic.

In addition, the University of Wolverhampton, had been commissioned by the Council to undertake specific work on how the community and voluntary sector was working. The results were expected to be available in the next few months and this could be the opportunity for scrutiny to consider this issue.

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Scrutiny next steps

David Pattison, Director of Governance, outlined the next steps for scrutiny and the proposed way forward. The Board were invited to consider which of the three topics should be selected.

The Board supported the topic of digital innovation as being the topic for cross cutting theme. The Director of Governance invited members of the Board to indicate if there were in favour or against the proposal. The majority of the Board supported the proposal.

Resolved: The Board supported the selection of digital innovation and the connected city theme and a progress report would be presented at the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm