

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Philip Bateman MBE (Chair)
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Simon Bennett
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Cllr Ellis Turrell (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr John Reynolds

In Attendance

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Leader of the Council)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Scrutiny Team Leader)
Charlotte Johns (Executive Director of Economy)
John Denley (Director of Public Health)
Richard Welch (Head of Partnerships – Public Health)
Julie Bell-Barker (Head of Project and Works)
Paul Yeomans (WV Active Service Lead)
Hetti Pigott (Senior Public Health Specialist)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutions**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Val Evans, Cllr Anwen Muston, Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman and Cllr Jasbinder Dehar.

There were no substitutions.

- 2 **Declarations of interest**
Cllr Phil Bateman MBE (Chair) declared that he represented Wolverhampton on the Birmingham Airport Board, and he was also the Chair of the Ashmore Park and Phoenix Nursery Schools.

The Leader of the Council declared his Membership as the WMCA Board, for the City Learning Quarter item on the agenda.

3 **Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **City Learning Quarter**

The Leader of the Council commented that he was pleased Scrutiny Board had asked for an item on the City Learning Quarter. It would unlock potential for the residents of Wolverhampton. Construction work had commenced.

The Executive Director of Economy gave a presentation on the City Learning Quarter, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

A Board Member asked for the systems that were in place to run the project and to mitigate against overspends and to ensure it delivered on time. The Executive Director of Economy responded that Governance was important. There would be regular updates to the Council's Audit and Risk Committee. The most recent had been in November, this helped to provide assurance. Cabinet also received reports as part of the overall governance structure, which included a number of other boards and Committees.

The Vice-Chair commented it was important to keep the governance arrangements of the project under review and ensure lessons were learnt from other major projects. He was thankful to the Government for the funding the project had received. He asked for more specifics on the Central Library phase of the works. He was concerned that issues could be encountered when works commenced on the old library. He was hopeful that the project would succeed.

The Head of Project and Works responded that one of the key parts for the library works was to fully understand the building. A drone survey had been completed on the roof and they had also reviewed documents relating to historical maintenance. A specialist historical architect was working on the project. A clearly defined scope of the external and internal parts of the building had been completed.

The Leader referred to the City Investment Board which also scrutinised the project. He raised the concerns of inflation, which had cost the project considerably. He did however believe the project to be groundbreaking and would give key opportunities for the City.

A Member of the Board asked for clarification on who the Programme Director was for the City Learning Quarter and whether the project had detailed planning permission. She raised the importance of the Grade 2 listed library and the need for sensitive development in its vicinity. She asked how often the financial monitoring reports would be considered and by which Committees and Boards.

The Executive Director for City Economy responded that the Programme Director was Mark Bassett, who had submitted his apologies for the meeting. Specialist historic advisors were ensuring that the historical value of the Central Library was

respected. Full planning permission had been granted and construction had commenced on site. There was a fortnightly financial report which went to the Financial Co-ordination Group and was escalated as appropriate throughout the Governance structure. The Head of Project and Works confirmed that the design was now fixed and was as per the photos in the report.

Two Members of the Board asked if Board Members could receive monthly financial reports on the project due to issues on major projects in the past. Another Member added that six monthly reports to the Board would be sufficient unless there was something that needed to be reported by exception.

The Leader of the Council commented that he was happy to provide quarterly reports on the City Learning Quarter to Scrutiny Board should it be the desire of the Board. He listed a number of Council projects that had received recent awards.

The Chair expressed his view that good governance structures were in place for the oversight of the project. He believed that the governance would be strong.

Resolved: That the report on the City Learning Quarter be endorsed.

5 **Physical Activity Strategy**

Four Officers jointly gave a presentation on the Physical Activity Strategy, these were, the Director of Public Health, Head of Partnerships (Public Health), a Senior Public Health Specialist, and the WV Active Service Lead. A copy of the presentation is attached to the signed minutes.

A Board Member raised the issue that having to booking certain classes online for WV Active was disenfranchising people who struggled with their website booking system. She was not able to book the class by visiting a centre. She praised the staff at Central Baths who worked well under pressure.

A Board Member praised the investment in the gym equipment, which had made a significant difference in the number of users in the WV Active gyms. Increase in membership was good, but it was important that this did not put people off, if classes and equipment became hard to access due to demand. Some classes could potentially need to be increased as people could sometimes struggle to find spaces.

The Director of Public Health commented that he wanted WV Active to be as inclusive as possible and so other booking methods could be explored. The variety of offer was important for WV Active to be successful. This is how it differed to the commercial sector. The huge increase in Membership had caused some problems that needed to be overcome.

The Vice-Chair commented on the importance of the Physical Activity Strategy. Wolverhampton had quite high physical inactivity and were one of the worst areas for child obesity when comparing national figures. He referred to the new swimming pool at Smestow School, which he also hoped would receive some community use. Out of the 14,000 members in WV Active, he asked how many were Wolverhampton residents. He also asked what the average length of WV Active Membership was for individuals. The Director of Public Health offered to provide the figures.

A Member of the Board commented that she was aware of a number of residents in her areas that had really appreciated the extra investment in the equipment at the WV Active sites. She praised the report and was pleased to read the efforts being made to increase opportunity for Wolverhampton residents. Anything to improve life expectancy and improve equality in the area of life expectancy was welcome. She hoped the membership figures would stay high.

The Director of Public Health raised the importance of partnership working and working at a system level to improve health outcomes.

A Member of the Board commented that education was important to help people realise the benefits of healthy living. Schools needed to promote healthy living. Dentistry and diet were key components in addition to physical activity. Children needed to fully understand how to live a healthy life. She praised the presentation the Board had received.

The Director of Public Health responded that education was important and relaying the different types of physical activity. The benefits of physical activity to mental wellbeing could also not be underestimated.

There was a consensus amongst Board Members that the investment in equipment at WV Active was positive.

A Board Member asked if there could be an App which would show when the WV Active gyms were busy, he had experienced this technology at other gyms in the past. Being able to book by the use of an App, he also believed would be a positive innovation.

The Director of Public Health responded that they were currently looking at making improvements to the technological systems used by WV Active. He appreciated the importance of innovation.

A Board Member raised the benefit of local community centres. He did not want this to be forgotten as part of any Physical Activity Strategy for the City.

The Chair remarked that there was considerable support for the progression being made in WV Active. He raised the work of voluntary groups in physical activity which was not necessarily captured by the Council, such as Football Sunday leagues. The social background to sport in Wolverhampton was wide, he made reference to boxing Clubs, martial arts, indoor bowling and cricket. This work was not necessarily captured by national surveys. Capturing this work was important going forward. He wanted to monitor the Physical Activity Strategy more in the future. Monitoring data and reacting accordingly was essential to the future success of the strategy.

The Director of Public Health responded the question of how more community activity could be enabled was an important one, in addition to capturing community data. These two questions were vital in helping to improve the health and wellbeing of the City.

A Member asked at what point membership of WV Active would reach saturation point. She was hearing people were having difficulty accessing equipment due to

demand on the service. The Director of Public Health responded that they did not want people to leave due to demand on equipment. Looking at flows, was important and spreading activities out to the community, such as at a local park with the activity led by WV Active. Membership had increased so rapidly, more so than he had expected.

Resolved:

- a) That WV Active / Physical Activity Strategy be added as an item for Scrutiny Board in six months' time.
- b) That the recent investment into WV Active and the impact upon population health physical activity targets and, linked impact upon Public Health outcomes be noted.
- c) That the published Health and Wellbeing Together Physical Activity Strategy be noted.

6 Scrutiny Work Programme

The Vice-Chair remarked that since the Scrutiny Board agenda had been published there had been an update to the Scrutiny Board agenda for the 16 April 2024. There would now be an item on RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) in Council buildings following a motion that had been agreed at Full Council. He hoped the Leader of the Council would attend the meeting. He was particularly interested in how the communications had been handled regarding RAAC in part of the roof at the Civic Centre.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Work Programme be agreed.

7 Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Board received the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

The meeting closed at 7:27pm.