

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Philip Bateman MBE (Chair)
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Simon Bennett
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Cllr Ellis Turrell (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Harbinder Singh (Substitute)

In Attendance

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Leader of the Council)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Scrutiny Team Leader)
David Pattison (Chief Operating Officer)
Richard Lawrence (Director of Regeneration)
Laura Collings (Head of Policy and Strategy)
Ian Culley (Lead Planning Officer – Regional Strategy)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for absence and Substitutions**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Wendy Thompson, Cllr John Reynolds, Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman and Cllr Anwen Muston.

Cllr Harbinder Singh substituted for Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 **Local Development Plan - Issues and Preferred Options Consultation**
The Lead Planning Manager gave a presentation on the Local Development Plan – Issues and Preferred Options Consultation, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes. He stated that the Local Development Plan was one of the most significant documents produced by the Council. It outlined the future strategy for the City for the next 15 years. The plan was currently in draft form and would be formerly consulted on. He described the plan as being about balance. The plan contained no green belt sites.

The Leader of the Council spoke on the Local Development Plan and gave his views on the national shortage of housing. He spoke on the importance of protecting the green belt in the City. The Local Plan was somewhat limited by national legislation. There were major sites which had to go through the framework including Brownfield Land due to the industrial heritage of the City. Employment land was important as well as housing. The consultation was due to finish in April 2024.

A Board Member referred to the importance of infrastructure to be able to service new house builds. There had been new builds in South Staffordshire, which were impacting on the infrastructure of Wolverhampton, such as Schools and GP surgeries. The Lead Planning Manager agreed, stating that developments in South Staffordshire needed to recognise the impact that they could have in the City. The Council had made these points to South Staffordshire and had made particular reference to the need for new Schools and GP Practices when South Staffordshire had consulted on their Local Development Plan. South Staffordshire were currently reflecting on the recent national changes introduced by Government in relation to Local Plans.

The Leader of the Council agreed with the Board Member on the difficulties in providing infrastructure. The financial difficulties of the Public Sector would also add further pressure to infrastructure.

A Member of the Board commented on the importance of green spaces in the City, which were particularly important for children who did not have access to a private garden.

The Chair asked a number of technical questions about SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and the Lepus Consultation report. The Lead Planning Manager responded that the SSSI was Cannock Chase which the Lepus report was referring to and parts of the City were in the zone of influence. Developers in the zone of influence were required to financially contribute to improve the Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The potential negative influence which the Lepus report referred to were in relation to areas of biodiversity habitat importance within the City. The Local Plan could recognise these and steer developments away from the habitats and look to improve them, including potentially better public access.

The Leader of the Council commented that if residents had concerns about areas of particular biodiversity habitat they could make them known by responding to the consultation.

The Chair raised the importance of the Canals and asked when Walsall would be signing the agreement with Wolverhampton. The Leader said he would press the case in the Black Country Joint Committee, which the leader of Walsall Council attended. The Chair responded that National England had to sign off the final document and so asked for the Leader to give the matter some attention.

A Member of the Board remarked that she wanted to see attractions for younger people by the Canals such as Cafés to make it a vibrant community. She felt enterprise by the Canals would work well as in Birmingham. The Leader responded that there was considerable opportunity in the Canals of Wolverhampton. He saw them as heritage sites that could be used more to reach their potential.

A Board Member asked about the progress on the site of Nelson Mandela House in Oxley as residents were very interested to know. The Leader responded that Officers would provide an update direct to her.

The Chair thanked the Officers and the Leader on behalf of the Board for their contributions during the item. The Lead Planning Manager and Leader of the Council gave particular thanks to Michele Ross for her work in the development of the Local Development Plan to date.

4 **West Midlands Combined Authority Single Settlement Memorandum of Understanding**

The Head of Policy and Strategy gave a presentation on the West Midlands Combined Authority Single Settlement Memorandum of Understanding, a copy of the presentation slides are attached to the signed minutes. She provided the background to the Memorandum of Understanding.

The Chair asked what public involvement there was on the new way of working and how Manchester Combined Authority compared to the West Midlands.

The Leader of the Council commented it was important for Wolverhampton to have an active membership in Combined Authority matters. He commented that each Combined Authority was similar but different in their local delivery. He spoke on the subject of the skills deficit.

The Head of Policy and Strategy commented that it was a pre-requisite from national Government that local communities be consulted as they went through the single settlement process. A considerable opportunity for Wolverhampton was in the development of the Place Plan.

A Member of the Board commented on the difficulty of planning for the future if the Council was uncertain as to the level of funding which would be provided. The Head of Policy and Strategy agreed with this assessment.

The Chair asked for a legal opinion, as the report outlined it was not a legally binding document. The Chief Operating Officer responded that there was uncertainty on funding until the figures had been released. There was a risk that decentralisation could be moved away from until the figures on funding were released, otherwise it was a series of promises rather than a formal legal agreement.

The Chair highlighted the importance of the changes to funding arrangements. Scrutiny was therefore critical, as was a strong legal approach. The Chief Operating Officer agreed it was important to have good legal governance, he cited the recent success the Council had at the Supreme Court, where the Court ruled in the Council's favour on street racing injunctions. He also cited the success the Council had in calling the Government to account in relation to asylum dispersal policy. This had led to a fundamental change in policy by the Secretary of State.

The Leader commented that the governance at the West Midlands Combined Authority had been disappointing, he had been asking for a review for some time.

He was pleased to report that Wolverhampton Council was very robust at all levels of the Combined Authority. He felt more reports on the work of the Combined Authority should be received by Full Council and Scrutiny meetings at the Council. He paid tribute to the Officers at the Council who had been working with the WMCA on the Single Settlement.

5 **Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

The Forward Plan of Key Decisions was received by the Board.

6 **Scrutiny Work programme**

The Scrutiny Work Programme was received by the Board.

The meeting closed at 7:45pm.