

# Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 23 November 2017

### Attendance

#### Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Ian Angus (Chair)  
Cllr Mary Bateman  
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE  
Cllr Greg Brackenridge  
Cllr Val Evans  
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal  
Cllr Keith Inston  
Cllr Arun Photay  
Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz

#### In Attendance

Cllr Steve Evans (Cabinet Member – City Environment)

#### Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)  
Tim Pritchard (Head of Corporate Landlord)  
Helen McGourlay (Finance Business Partner)  
Gwyn James (Head of Strategic  
Transportation)  
Steve Woodward (Head of Environmental  
Services)

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*    *Title*

- 1        **Apologies**  
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr John Rowley, Cllr Mak Singh and Cllr Christopher Haynes.
- 2        **Declarations of interest**  
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3        **Minutes of the previous meeting**  
The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 September 2017 were approved as a correct record.
- 4        **Matters arising**

The Chairman reported that the issue of parking near schools had been looked at in depth at the last meeting and it was clear legislative changes were needed. It had been agreed that three or four Councillors would form a sub-group to work through the recommendations. On the 13 November a document had been emailed to the Panel Members for their consideration and comment. The Scrutiny Officer, Earl Piggot-Smith, had requested that any comments should be emailed to him by the end of the following week. There were eighteen recommendations, the majority of which the Chair believed were practicable and achievable.

## 5 **Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-19 to 2019-20**

The Finance Business Partner (Place) presented a report on the Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-2019 to 2019-2020. The purpose of the report was to seek the Panel's feedback on the Draft Budget 2018-2019, that had been approved by Cabinet to proceed to formal consultation and scrutiny stages. The Panel's feedback was also sought on the approach to the budget consultation and key budget reduction proposals that were built into the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. There were no new savings currently proposed in the service area for the forthcoming financial year.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment stated there were three main strands in the savings portfolio over three financial years. Corporate Landlord had a target of £1.2 million savings. The Council was on track to achieve the £1.2 million in savings. Whilst there had been overspend in some areas there had also been underspend in others. There were some issues in Catering Services but overall the Council was on target. Over the next two financial years there was a target of a further £2 million in savings. He personally believed the City was moving, office space and buildings were having a much better take up. i10 had been a success in helping to attract other businesses to the City.

The Chair requested further information on the overspend in catering services. In response, the Head of Corporate Landlord stated there had been a £590,000 reduction in the Catering Services income. The service was however still bringing in £900,000 in income, so it was not a net loss to the service. The principal reason for the reduction in income was the market becoming more competitive. The current offer to schools was higher in costs compared to the market but extra services were included in the overall cost. The Council would therefore have to offer these extra services for an additional charge to remain competitive. An action plan was being devised reprofiling the service, with a report due in the near future. The review that had been completed was partly to help manage a decline in the service as schools became more autonomous. In excess of 70% of primary schools were still using the Council's catering service. A review had been undertaken with the intention of helping to stabilise the service. A panel member asked what had caused the decline and was keen to ensure that nutritional standards remained high. In response, the Head of Corporate Landlord confirmed that the Council was currently charging more per school meal than the market. The food however was provided to a higher standard and a kitchen maintenance and food advisory service were provided as part of the package. In future, the Council would have to provide a price for a food only service, to remain competitive and offer the additional services as extras with a

corresponding additional charge. The Panel noted the good work undertaken in Corporate Landlord in achieving the savings to date.

A panel member asked if the Civic Hall fell within the remit of the Head of Corporate Landlord. In response, the Head of Corporate Landlord stated that the Civic Hall fell within his remit from an asset management perspective but not service operation. The panel member asked how long it would take to recoup the costs for the refurbishment of the Civic Hall through the running of events held there. The Head of Corporate Landlord stated that the Service was currently reviewing the business case. The Finance Business Partner (Place) stated that a business case would be drawn up and would include commercial income that could fund the refurbishment and also grant funding.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment stated that for 2017-2018, there was a target saving of £3.8 million in the City Environment Division. £1.7 million of that saving had been reprofiled into next year's savings due to a contractual dispute with the waste and recycling contractor – Amey Environment Services. Of the £3.8 million savings target, £2 million had been saved through reconfigurations, transformations and contract efficiencies. The division was broadly on track to achieve its saving target.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment stated that the proposed changes to the waste collection service were currently on hold whilst the Council was in legal dispute with Amey Environment Services. Seventy-Five percent of Local Authorities had moved to fortnightly or three weekly collections, which had consequently had a significant financial impact on Amey Environment Services. There was a legal meeting scheduled to take place with Amey Environment Services to try and resolve the legal dispute. The Council had been left with no alternative but to go to Court. The Council Officer responsible for the service was extremely knowledgeable, experienced and capable and believed the Council had a good case against Amey Environment Services. The Council had a number of options available including taking the service back in-house. The Cabinet had also looked at the option of a super site which could provide a number of services, resulting in a significant saving. Extra land did not need to be purchased and a workable transport solution had been devised. He suggested that the Panel meet the Council Officer to discuss the waste and recycling service at a future meeting of the Panel. The changes in the waste collection proposals were ready from a Council perspective, which included fortnightly collections and a chargeable garden waste service. The food collection service was not viable and could be switched off relatively simply once the legal dispute had been resolved with Amey Environment Services.

A panel member asked how long the legal dispute was likely to last and how the Council was going to effectively communicate the changes to residents and take into account the lessons of what had happened in Birmingham. The Cabinet Member in response stated that communication was key. He was dismayed that the Express and Star had misled the public by missing key parts out of the Council's press release regarding the proposed changes to the service, such as residents being given a larger household waste bin. Social media would be utilised and a comprehensive communications drive would be devised including use of Wolverhampton Today, letter distribution, radio, stickers on bins and visiting

properties. When the new Council Tax electronic system was implemented the Council would obtain additional email addresses allowing further electronic communication. He hoped the legal dispute with Amey Environment Services would be resolved by early next year. He couldn't see any changes to the waste collection service before April, the changes were more likely to be in the Summer or potentially even later in the year. He didn't envision all the proposed changes to commence on the same day, rather a staggered approach.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment stated that whilst the Council did not undertake grass cutting every week, choosing to do it every three weeks, the work was still of a high standard compared to other Local Authorities in the West Midlands region. The number of complaints had dropped dramatically but was subject to weather conditions. A number of vacant posts had been deleted in the City Environment Division meaning that team members had taken on extra responsibilities. The Chair asked the Cabinet Member to keep the Panel informed of the efforts to resolve the ongoing legal dispute with Amey Environment Services and the Panel noted the good work that had been undertaken in the City Environment Division.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment stated that the Council was currently reviewing the Passenger Transport Service, mainly in the area of yellow buses. The City Environment Division's role was largely centred around the maintenance and upkeep of the vehicles.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment gave an update on City Housing. The Council had achieved £100,000 in savings in 2017-2018 through the review of Homelessness and Housing Options services and the transfer of services to Wolverhampton Homes. Further budget reductions and income generation targets of £100,000 over the forthcoming two financial years were planned for City Housing. Options to achieve the target were being developed. Wolverhampton homes were carrying out good work and compared to other local authority areas they did a very good job and delivered a comprehensive service. He did not have any issues dealing with the Officers at Wolverhampton Homes. For the first time in 30 years, the Council was moving forward with building houses and had setup a separate company to kick start the construction of private housing. Four hundred new private houses and a further four hundred for social letting were being developed. He was delighted with the innovation undertaken to achieve the income streams for the development.

A panel member asked about the £100,000 reduction in homelessness services. He asked if the service was being reduced to achieve the savings target. The Cabinet Member responded that Wolverhampton Homes were already delivering a service and it made sense for them to take on the Homelessness Service to avoid unnecessary costly duplication. Wolverhampton was highly regarded across the West Midlands for how they helped the homeless. Everybody that was homeless was given an offer of help, but some did not wish to take up the offer. The Chair stated that in theory the Homelessness service would improve with the savings implemented due to the consolidation of the service with Wolverhampton Homes.

The Cabinet Member for City Environment asked for his sincere thanks to Gwyn James (Head of Strategic Transportation) to be placed on the record for his many years of exemplary service to the Council, as he was about to leave the authority. The Panel echoed the Cabinet Member's sentiments.

The Chair asked for comments specifically on the Budget Consultation process. A panel member stated that the Council was doing everything it could to engage appropriately with residents on the budget proposals. A panel member stated that as time had progressed the digital engagement process had grown stronger. Whilst the Council had legal obligations regarding the budget consultation, it was important for the Council to look at how many public meetings were actually needed, given the relatively low attendance. The Cabinet Member for City Environment agreed that attendance was not high and was continuing to decline year on year. A number of strands needed to be addressed but he believed the public should still have the opportunity of attending a public meeting.

**Resolved:**

- A) That the feedback received at the meeting be forwarded to Scrutiny Board for consolidation and onward response to Cabinet.
- B) That the Scrutiny Panel response be finalised by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Panel and be forwarded to Scrutiny Board for consideration

The meeting closed at 6.55pm.