

### Attendance

#### Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Chair)  
Cllr Paula Brookfield  
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal  
Cllr Peter O'Neill  
Cllr Arun Photay (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Linda Leach  
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE  
Cllr Greg Brackenridge  
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar  
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre  
Cllr Sohail Khan  
Cllr Martin Waite  
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal

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

*Item No.*     *Title*

- 1        **Apologies for absence**  
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Sweetman. Cllr Gakhal was in attendance as a substitute.
  
- 2        **Declarations of interest**  
There were no declarations of interest.
  
- 3        **Minutes of the previous meeting**  
It was noted that there were omissions in the minutes relating to the issues of gender equality and black and minority ethnicity (BME). It was also noted that the Equality Champion had agreed to investigate how the Council employed people and that he would report that back to the Board regarding this.  
  
Resolved:     That the noted omissions be included in the minutes.
  
- 4        **Matters arising**  
  
The Board welcomed Lisa Taylor, Head of Customer Services and Chris East, Head of Facilities to the meeting who were in attendance to update the Board on the issues that had been identified at the previous meeting regarding access to public meeting rooms.

It was stated that Customer Services and Facilities were working together to address these issues and that some changes had already been made on an interim bases whilst more permanent solutions were considered.

Facilities had agreed to locate a Keeper on the ground floor and the third floor to enable members of the public to have more movement around the building. All of the meetings would also be put on the public display boards and a digital display board would be placed on the third floor. Officers were also looking at the security protocol for the building to see if it was currently fit for purpose, this included physical access and whether areas currently requiring swipe card access could be altered. It was vital to ensure that any changes would not compromise security protocols and it was noted that there would be a cost implication.

The Board queried the situation with the Mayor's parlour which was where most members of the public would be visiting, and it was confirmed that this was on a separate system.

The Board also noted that it was vital to ensure that any security measures did not impede evacuation or emergency planning procedures.

The Board considered the changes made to date a big improvement and thanked the Head of Customer Services for her work and requested that councillors be kept informed of progress.

The Board also considered the issues that had arisen when members of the public phoned Customer Services and were being kept on hold for a long time. The Head of Customer Services confirmed that she had stopped the call back process as you could not plan when the call back was going to be which meant that Customer Services officers could often not get back in touch with the customer. The Team were currently analysing data and this step appeared to be having a positive impact immediately. It was also stated that job satisfaction appeared to be improving. The Head of Customer Services confirmed that she would be monitoring the situation and would provide feedback once she had access to the full statistics.

The Board thanked the Head of Customer Services.

The Board noted that a working group had been set up by the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel to consider the issues around Customer Services and that the Head of Customer Services would provide specific feedback to that Panel.

**5 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-2020**

The Panel welcomed the Director of Finance Claire Nye and the Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Louise Miles to the meeting.

It was noted that the budget scrutiny feedback from the scrutiny panels was included in the supplementary agenda pack. All of the panels had been given the opportunity to review the outcomes of the consultation process and the draft budget proposals and the final recommendations from scrutiny would be fed back to Cabinet in January 2019. All panels and the Board had also been requested to feedback on the process that the budget consultation took and the way in which scrutiny was engaged.

Some members considered that the report would have been easier to scrutinise if each separate report had focused on the items specific to that scrutiny panel as it was considered that some descriptions in the report were brief and councillors had to drill down into the report to get to the salient information. It was considered that having some additional, contextual detail in the report might have been beneficial.

The Cabinet Member stated that consultation had not just been with the panels but also the public and specific groups who had also requested more context in the report, so this would be taken on board for the future.

The Chair of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel agreed that it had been easier to deal with the budget in her previous role as Chair of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel as this had looked at one specific section of the budget. To make sense of the whole budget required much clearer guidelines as it seemed that there was very little that they could recommend without endangering the whole process.

The Cabinet Member stated that she wanted to see earlier engagement in the budget setting process in the future which would hopefully enable councillors to put it in more context.

It was stated that the process appeared opaque, the budget and various reports were seen in lots of different places in lots of different contexts but that it was still not clear to members of the public what the Council was actually doing and it was thought that the Council and councillors could be more helpful in aiding this understanding. It was agreed that scrutiny did need to have an earlier input into the budget setting process.

The Cabinet Member agreed that she would take on board recommendations regarding having specific papers for specific scrutiny panels and that she was currently investigating how prescriptive budget consultation rules were in order to open up the process in the future.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Board stated that the presentation of the budget had been clearer this year than any other year, but that scrutiny did need to be involved in the process earlier.

The Board queried what the timetable was for budget setting as it was too late at this stage to make any meaningful recommendations.

The Cabinet Member agreed and stated that she was looking at bringing the whole process sooner starting straight away in the municipal year and holding an ongoing dialogue with scrutiny throughout the process.

An example was put forward regarding the WV Active Bert Williams Café and the need to look at opening times and the fact that there had been no consultation with ward councillors. It was agreed that consultation with ward councillors was vital before any cuts or changes were made to local services as they were best placed to identify alternative courses of action.

Resolved: 1) That all of the comments from Scrutiny Board and the Panels be fed back to Cabinet.

2) That scrutiny be involved in the budget setting process at a much earlier stage than was presently the case.

3) That there be much greater consultation with ward councillors before any decisions are taken in their wards.

## 6 **Work programme**

The Board raised some concern as to what the Council was doing to prepare for Brexit. Councillors were aware that there was a lot of work being carried out but queried what the contingency was in the case of a no deal Brexit and when they would have access to the proposals.

The Director of Finance stated that there was a piece of work being pulled together and that key officers were looking at business continuity. It was confirmed that the Service Director for Strategy and Change was the lead office regarding this and that a key area of the work was to build up key relationships with partners so that they could act as soon as the actual situation became known.

The Board considered that there could be a council wide briefing in the Council Chamber to all members regarding the plans for Brexit and the emergency plan including what role councillors would have in such a situation.

It was stated that a joint panel was being set up to consider the role of public transport in the city.

It was also confirmed that there would be a meeting of the Fire Safety Scrutiny Review Group in January 2019.

The Board also discussed the Combined Authority scrutiny function which was felt to be constrained in what it could do and the requirement to have at least 13 members present for a meeting to be quorate meant that most meetings were not. The Chair considered that it was important to have a dedicated councillor position to just focus on the Combined Authority and areas such as the future fire service proposals as these issues were too big to tag on to something else.

The Board did express some serious concerns about any future joining of the fire and police services and the loss of local accountability including ring fenced budgets for the fire service for equipment and fire engines.

Resolved: 1) That a full council briefing be requested in relation to the plan for Brexit and any related contingency plans.

2) That consideration be given to creating a new councillor post to have responsibility for representing the Council at the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other similar or associated roles including taking a lead on any matters out for consultation regarding the Combined Authority.

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**Forward Plan**

No items were identified for pre decision scrutiny.