

Scrutiny Board

Minutes - 16 June 2020

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 Rita Potter
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal

In Attendance

Cllr Ian Brookfield
Cllr Steve Evans
Cllr Michael Hardacre

Leader of the Council
Cabinet Member for City Environment
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Employees

Tim Johnson
Mark Taylor
John Denley
David Pattison
Claire Nye
Ross Cook
Ian Fegan
Charlotte Johns
Richard Lawrence
Denise Pearce
David Watts
Laura Phillips
Julia Cleary
Martin Stevens
Earl Piggott Smith

Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Public Health
Director of Governance
Director of Finance
Director of City Environment
Director of Communications
Director of Strategy
Director of Regeneration
Head of Human Resources
Director of Adult Services
Head of Democratic and Support Services
Scrutiny and Systems Manager
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny Officer

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 to the press and public. A recording of the meeting would be available for viewing on the Council's website at the end.

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

2 **Procedure to be followed**

Cllr Sweet advised that the planned agenda had been changed and other items listed would be deferred to a future date. The only item to be discussed will be the presentation on the Council's preparation and response to the Covid-19 crisis. Cllr Sweet explained the protocol to be followed during the meeting for asking questions and reminded everyone that microphones should be muted and cameras off, unless they have been invited to speak.

David Pattison, Director of Governance, invited all attendees to introduce themselves to confirm they were present at the meeting as required under regulations issued by Government on the management of council remote meetings.

3 **Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence received.

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Update on the Council's response to the Covid-19 Crisis**

Cllr Sweet invited Cllr Ian Brookfield, Leader of the Council, to make some introductory remarks to members of the Board.

Cllr Brookfield thanked all attendees for participating in the meeting and commented on the important role of scrutiny councillors. Cllr Brookfield expressed his sympathies for local resident affected by coronavirus and highlighted the important role of the Council in supporting families.

Cllr Brookfield praised the work of many thousands of local volunteers who have helped people during the crisis.

Cllr Brookfield commented on the work done by John Denley, Director of Public Health, in leading the response in preparing plans based on previous disaster emergency scenarios. Cllr Brookfield outlined the range of support offered to residents and businesses, while acknowledging the economic challenges facing the City.

Cllr Brookfield stated that the Council will be looking at lessons learnt from the preparation of emergency response plans and members of scrutiny will have an important role in reviewing this work in future meetings. Cllr Brookfield added that as

the City moves to a recovery phase there will be an important role for local councils in supporting residents in recognition of the long-term impact of coronavirus.

Cllr Sweet invited Tim Johnson, Chief Executive, to make a few introductory remarks to the Board.

The Chief Executive wanted to formally place on record his sympathies to residents across the City that have been affected by the pandemic. The Chief Executive also praised the response from local residents and businesses to requests for help and donations of PPE.

The Chief Executive presented a slide which set out the timetable of the Council's preparation for the pandemic to protect the most vulnerable considered to be at high risk and also the changes made at senior management level to deliver key services to support residents and businesses across the City.

Cllr Sweet invited attendees listed below to brief the Board on work done in their respective areas of responsibilities to respond to the crisis. A summary of a comments and or questions from members of the Board in response to individual PowerPoint presentations is included in the relevant sections.

Supporting vulnerable people

- John Denley, Director of Public Health
- Ross Cook, Director of City Environment
- David Watts, Director of Adult Services

The Board invited Director of Public Health, John Denley, to give his prognosis of how the impact of coronavirus might impact on the City in the future and plans for managing the disease.

The Director of Public Health advised that five months ago it would not have been able to predict the epidemiology of the disease. The response at the time was based on previous plans for managing a flu pandemic but over time knowledge about treatment options has increased the options for managing disease. In the future, as knowledge about the disease increases so will new and more effective treatments for managing the condition will be developed that will allow for the better management of cases locally. This work will also be informed by a range of other local health indicators, such as hospital admission rates and analysis of calls to NHS 111 and other sources of intelligence to inform the approach taken.

The Board made a reference to recent data on Covid deaths on ward level for Wolverhampton published by Office of National Statistics (ONS) and queried the reason for not including this data in the presentation. The Director of Public Health explained the reasons for presenting the data on regional level at rate per 1000 of the population and the difficulty in presenting data without a good understanding of local factors which may explain differences in death rates between wards.

The Board commented on the value of having data presented over three-month period at the local ward level and communicating this to the public so that they have a clear understanding of the impact and risks linked to pandemic. The Director of

Public Health commented on the number of confounding factors which could impact on different wards in terms of death rates and this could lead to a misunderstanding among the public about how such differences should be read.

The Director of Public Health commented on the work done to engage with different local faith groups and raise awareness about the risk of transmission in high risk settings, particular among people who are vulnerable. This will involve working on how people can celebrate their faith in safe way. The Director of Public Health added that a list of faith groups has been created, which includes findings from an individual setting-based risk assessment that would allow venues to be able to open safely. The Director of Public Health agreed to update the Board about progress on this issue to a future meeting.

The Board asked what action was being taken to reassure people who are reluctant to attend hospital appointments due to fears about coronavirus. The Director of Public Health acknowledged the public concerns and that it would take time to build capacity and reintroduce health diagnostic services and other checks. The Director of Public Health outlined the different messages that will inform the strategies used to build public confidence that they could attend hospital safely, for example, by asking providers of services if they done a risk assessment and what will be done to respond to any future outbreak.

The Board queried the approach of Wolverhampton Homes to supporting victims of domestic violence and the support offered by Public Health when people need rehousing. The Director of Public Health offered reassurance that the service is working with Wolverhampton Homes to make services safe and to protect vulnerable people in need of rehousing.

The Board queried the effectiveness of the testing arrangements in a situation where people are reluctant to attend hospital. The Director of Public Health commented on the work done to develop and inform key public health messages, and also highlighting the significant reduction in the death rate since April. The Director of Public Health gave examples such as the number of Covid 19 cases, the preventative measures being taken and also how the disease develops over time.

Cllr Phil Page, Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel – Partnership Working Acknowledgement

Cllr Page advised the Board that members of Health Scrutiny Panel will be meeting on 23.7.2020.

Supporting our businesses

Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration

Dr Cllr Michael Hardacre, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills commented on the range of support offered to local businesses and specifically the help offered by Wolves at Work and the Adult Education Service as the City responds to expected changes in a post-Covid job market.

The Cabinet Member wanted to formally record his thanks for the work done by the Director of Regeneration to support local people and businesses during the pandemic.

The Board queried the likelihood of job losses as a result of the pandemic. The Director of Regeneration advised the Board that is an expectation of job losses as number of people have been furloughed. The Council is monitoring the situation and working with the LEP to support people affected.

Supporting our children and young people

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services

No comments from the Board

Delivering frontline services

Ross Cook, Director of City Environment

Cllr Steve Evans, Cabinet Member, Cabinet Member for City Environment, praised the work of employees who continued to provide a near normal service to the public during the lockdown, in comparison to other local authorities whose services, such as bin collection, were suspended. The Cabinet Member outlined the changes made to ensure services could continue to be done safely and meet social distance guidelines. The Cabinet Member commented on how the service managed the increased number of calls and emails from the public and the national recognition of the speed in setting up the food distribution hub. The Cabinet Member expressed his thanks to Ross Cook for the work done to support residents and businesses during the pandemic.

The Board queried the impact on residents who are not digitally connected and their ability to access Council services during the lockdown.

The Cabinet Member advised that the Council continue to receive a high number of calls and many emails daily but accepted it was important to find out if other groups had problems in contacting the Council during the lockdown and to look at how services can be transformed going forward to meet this need.

Communications and engagement

Ian Fegan, Director of Communications

The Board commented on the quality of the work done to keep the public informed during the lockdown and the good use of social media to reach new groups. The Director of Communication commented on the increased use of social media platforms and the success of Wolverhampton Today Facebook page which has reached 17,000 subscribers. There is potential opportunity to do targeted campaigns in the future as a result and also to work more closely with young people. The Director acknowledged the digital skills gap and highlighted the aim to increase the reach of the Council to different groups and to look at ideas at how to engage them as part of future campaign work. The Board commented on the need to capitalise and build on the progress made. Cllr Steve Evans, Cabinet Member, Cabinet Member for City Environment, commented on the how successful the Council has been in promoting the good work being done. Wolverhampton Today had 500,000

hits in response to articles in local and national media which has been picked up internationally and presents a good image of what the City can offer.

The financial impact of Covid-19

Claire Nye, Director of Finance

Supporting our workforce

Denise Pearce, Head of Human Resources

The Board welcomed the wellbeing support offered by HR and wanted to formally record their thanks for all the work done.

Supporting decision-making

David Pattison, Director of Governance

Moving to recovery

Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy

Reimagining our city and council

Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy

The Board discussed if the expectations of what the Council could achieve in the future should be less demanding as the City recovers from the challenges detailed in the presentation. The Director of Strategy advised the Board that the City should continue to be aspirational and build on our strengths.

The Leader of the Council supported this view and added the pandemic gives us the opportunity to look at how services can be reshaped and delivered differently in the future and help employees to have a better work life balance. The Chief Executive endorsed this view and added while efforts focus on managing the pandemic it was also important to consider the issues facing the City before the pandemic still but was confident about the plans for the future.

The meeting ended at 8.30pm

- 6 **Scrutiny - helping to shape the future and create new realities**
- 7 **Scrutiny work planning**
- 8 **Next Steps**
- 9 **Date of next meeting**