



# Scrutiny Board

## Minutes - 31 July 2014

### Attendance

#### Members of the Board

Cllr Peter O'Neill (Chair)  
Cllr Barry Findlay (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Philip Bateman  
Cllr Alan Bolshaw  
Cllr Ian Brookfield  
Cllr Paula Brookfield  
Cllr Claire Darke  
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss  
Cllr Arun Photay  
Cllr Rita Potter  
Cllr Stephen Simkins  
Cllr Wendy Thompson

#### Employees

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

*Item No.*    *Title*

- 1        **Apologies for absence**  
Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Angus and Rowley, for whom substitutes attended (Cllrs Bateman and Ian Brookfield).
- 2        **Declarations of interest**  
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3        **Minutes of the previous meeting (17 June 2014)**  
Resolved:  
          That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4        **Matters arising**  
Cllr O'Neill encouraged members of the Panel to ensure they had submitted their preferences in respect of the scrutiny review programme for the year.
- 5        **Local Council Tax reduction scheme**  
Cllr Thompson expressed her concern that the result of the proposed changes to the Council Tax reduction scheme would have a significant impact on the most vulnerable. She expressed the view that there were alternative ways of achieving the

necessary savings (e.g. improving business rate collection rates or supporting the business sector to eradicate derelict areas).

Cllr Johnson explained that the mechanism for distributing business rates was changed in 2012/13, such that the Council retains 50% of the monies collected. He confirmed it was an incentive to improve collection but argued that the previous arrangement (of it being absorbed into the Council's settlement from central government) would not have yielded a financial benefit to the Council. He further assured the Board that the Council had a policy of pursuing all unpaid business rates.

Cllr Johnson confirmed the potential savings contained in the consultation were part of the Council's wider efforts to secure savings of £123 million, and that this had been contained in the budget approved by Council earlier in the year. He affirmed the value of the consultation in helping identify how the most vulnerable groups could be protected and pointed out that a final decision would not be made until the consultation process was complete and the final proposals considered and determined by Cabinet and Council.

Cllr Simkins queried the focus of the call-in, given that no decision had yet been made.

Cllr Findlay queried why the consultation proposals had not been considered by the scrutiny function, as had been the case in previous years. He argued that scrutiny could have made a helpful contribution to shaping the consultation exercise.

Cllr Johnson reminded the Board that there had been a cut of 10% in the funding for Council Tax benefits, which councils had to cover through subsidy or reducing the amount of benefit paid. He explained the Council had taken the decision to phase the reductions in over three years. He acknowledged it had not been possible to involve scrutiny in reviewing the proposals but explained it was because the consultation had been brought forward.

Cllr Thompson pointed out that Wolverhampton has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the country. She argued that the Council should be working to reduce unemployment by investing in business.

Cllr Bateman queried why the opposition group had not offered an alternative budget when the 2014/15 budget was set for the year. He pointed out that, since 2010, Wolverhampton had become increasingly deprived, with many businesses struggling to survive during that period but the number of self-employed people increasing. He argued the Council should be making every effort to support such people to make the next steps to becoming employers themselves.

Resolved:

To note the decision.