

Annual Scrutiny Review

2020 - 2021

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL



Contents

- 03 Introduction
- 10 Adding Value through the Pandemic: Partnership Working in Health Scrutiny
- 13 Equality and Diversity - Pushing Boundaries and Evidencing Impact
- 14 Place and Community - Critical Friend Challenge and feedback
- 16 Protecting our most vulnerable children and young people: Cross Panel Working and Member Led Enquiry
- 18 Relighting our City - Regeneration
- 24 Work Programme - Connected City Theme
- 44 Challenges and Future Direction for Scrutiny
- 49 Appendix 1

Introduction from the Chair



Cllr Paul Sweet
Chair of Scrutiny Board
2019-present

On 16 March 2020, the Health and Social Care Secretary told the House of Commons that unnecessary social contact should be avoided.

On 23 March 2020 the Prime Minister told the country that people must stay at home.

Life as we knew it changed, in more ways and for longer than we could have ever imagined.

Throughout these changes scrutiny has held and continues to hold a very privileged and unique position. This position has allowed scrutiny and those working with it to witness and document the journey of the council, working alongside partners and citizens through an unprecedented moment in time.

The work carried out by scrutiny through the pandemic sought to focus on where scrutiny could add value or impact and support our citizens and colleagues with the challenges facing them. Scrutiny has been about people, about partnerships, about seeking to understand the reality of a constantly changing landscape, about supporting those in need and about recognising those who have gone above and beyond what was ever thought necessary or

even possible. All of this whilst continuing to hold those responsible for making key decisions to account and keeping a close eye on the budget.

A key area this year was to consider what was working and what wasn't working in the communities to support citizens through the pandemic. A vital contribution to this work centred on the role of the local scrutiny councillor. The local intelligence that each member holds regarding their ward is crucial, scrutiny councillors are able to draw on the experience of their constituents as to the effectiveness of the processes that the Council and its partners are putting in place and communicate common messages and concerns back into the work planning and decision-making processes.

From the first meeting in June when hope was on the horizon and normality felt within reach, to the second wave in the new year and the renewed resilience and determination that colleagues, citizens and partners showed as they rose to what was a hugely challenging situation; scrutiny has been there. Scrutiny has sought to document the journey of our council, our city and our citizens, working together to make it through the pandemic, to come out the other side with hope, pride, trust, confidence, ambition and creativity still intact.



“Out of darkness cometh light.”

And there is light, a lot of light. New ways of working, the food hub, the stay safe be kind helpline, social prescribing, supporting the vulnerable, agile working, community and voluntary sector initiatives, food banks, lateral flow testing, vaccinations, equalities, homelessness, housing, 5G, full fibre broadband, digital infrastructure, the civic halls and art gallery refurbishments and the harnessing of smart technology to make our City safer. The pandemic has acted as a catalyst for so many initiatives and as an opportunity for us all to take a step back and really consider how and why we work and act in certain ways; it has shone a light on who the key workers really are and how much of a debt we owe to the public sector, voluntary and community sector and NHS workers who have shown themselves to be true heroes throughout this time. Our own colleagues have risen to previously unthinkable challenges and conquered them head on and scrutiny seeks to celebrate these monolithic achievements and the people who have helped to make them possible, this year has been a true example of a ‘one council’ approach that is so central to how we all seek to work in Wolverhampton.

As previously stated, Scrutiny has a unique vantage point in being able to work with such a vast number of colleagues and partners and by pulling a number of threads and themes together in this report, **scrutiny can impact on how we continue to emerge from the pandemic** and keep a watching brief over this emergence. Scrutiny can help to ensure that innovation, inspiration, pride and the desire to improve services continues and to make sure that solid foundations are being laid for a modern, futureproof city and council.

Scrutiny will also seek to ensure that there continues to be informed decision making based on accurate data and evidence so that money is spent well and in the right places, to help bridge all divides, both digital and other, to make Wolverhampton the best city it can be.

Introduction from the Vice Chair



Cllr Jonathan Crofts
Vice Chair of Scrutiny
Board 2019-2021

For obvious reasons 2020 will prove a memorable year for all. Like all at the Council the pandemic radically changed the nature of Scrutiny's work as we moved to a fully online process.

Earlier in the year it was decided for all scrutiny panels to give a specific focus to digital inclusion due to much of society moving online and the fact that unfortunately Wolverhampton faces a digital divide between those who do and those who do not have digital access. I hope you'll agree that our work in this area has laid the foundations in addressing this shortfall faced by many residents.

Together with the Chair of Scrutiny Board, Cllr Paul Sweet, Scrutiny gained real decision making powers through our roles on the Scrutiny Board in approving, or not, the Council's use of urgent decisions. I hope that our perspective as 'critical friends' ensured the Council made the right decisions in what was an incredibly challenging time.

I, too, would like to pay tribute to the many across the City, region and country that helped in so many different ways to keep our communities safe during these unprecedented times.

Statement from the Leader



Cllr Ian Brookfield
Leader, City of
Wolverhampton Council

Extreme measures had to be taken to ensure that, as a Council we were able to protect and support our citizens, especially those deemed to be vulnerable or at high risk.

I was pleased to see how the scrutiny function rose to the challenges posed and continued to provide constructive and intelligent challenge on the issues that really mattered throughout this critical period.

As we move forward, the Council is and will continue to be dedicated to protecting the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of the communities we serve. The long-term impacts of the crisis are still emerging, and as we move together towards a new normal, we remain dedicated to improving services and outcomes for local people.

Scrutiny will have a large part to play in this by continuing to act as a critical friend to the Executive and in holding us to account in relation the decisions being made. I am looking forward to hearing the outcomes from the new Select Committee Review into the Wolverhampton Pound and I hope that areas such as youth unemployment and digital inclusion will continue to feature on scrutiny workplans in the future. Following the work carried out by the Council in relation to digital connectivity and the ongoing input from scrutiny throughout the year, I decided this year to create a new portfolio for Digital City that will be able to pick up many of the recommendations made in this report.

I would like to thank the chairs, vice chairs and all scrutiny councillors for their hard work and support throughout what has been a very challenging year and I look forward to working with you all moving forward.

Statement from Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer)



Martin Stevens

There are two items which stand out for me in this last Municipal year, the Dentistry item, and Mental Health during Covid-19, which were both considered by the Health Scrutiny Panel. Research and preparation are key to effective Scrutiny and for both of these items there was substantial research and extensive planning meetings with a wide range of health partners. These informal planning meetings helped to shape the contents of the reports given and informed the questions which would be asked by Members at the Panel meeting. The Dentistry item led to a clear recommendation at the end of the meeting ***“That Health Partners give consideration to developing a local Wolverhampton campaign to raise awareness with parents and carers of young children of the need to take children to the Dentist and the key oral health messages for this age group. Clearly it would need to launch at an appropriate time because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.”***

The Mental Health during Covid-19 item was a real example of Scrutiny working with multiple Health Partners and the Youth Council to enhance accountability and improve the decision-making process. The results from the Mentimetre consultation, carried out with the Youth Council, were reported to the Health Scrutiny Panel meeting by their chosen representative. It was also an example of Scrutiny Panels working together in a matrix way, as the findings from the meeting were reported to the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel. Mental Health was a key subject because it affects every one of our Citizens and is especially important at a time of great national change, due to the pandemic.

The Scrutiny Function has adapted well to conducting the formal public meetings in the virtual environment due to the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Across the three Scrutiny Panels I support, the Digital Theme given to the Panels by Scrutiny Board has been a running thread throughout the meetings. This had led to some innovative and stimulating discussions throughout the year. I have enjoyed working with all the Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Panel Members and key council partners to help support the vital Scrutiny Function of the Council. Excellent Scrutiny leads to better decision making and better decisions benefit the Citizens of Wolverhampton.

Statement from Earl Piggott-Smith (Scrutiny Officer)



Earl Piggott-Smith

The issue of loneliness and social isolation has been a concern of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny panel since the start of the pandemic, particularly the effect on older people living alone. The lockdown rules and increased use of remote communication to meet this need has provided a solution and real benefits to many, but it has also highlighted the hidden issue of digital poverty.

The panel invited the Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council to talk about the impact of their Support to the Connect project. The panel also invited Sandra Ashton Jones, Head of service – Mental Health and Tom Denham, Head of Service - Adult Services, to talk about the range of changes made to Adult Social Care Services.

The speakers shared examples of different community and digital solutions introduced to tackle the issue of loneliness and isolation, particularly among vulnerable groups. It was really good to see the range of creative and innovative solutions developed to continue supporting people during the pandemic.

The opportunity to hear presentations from different approaches to the same issue on this topic gave panel members a much richer understanding and awareness about the good work being done, highlighted gaps in the service and the potential to use digital solutions in the future to meet needs of people who would not have previously contacted the service. There was a very positive press report to the presentations.

Adding Value through the Pandemic: Partnership Working in Health Scrutiny



The key principles of any partnership working are clarity, openness, trust, shared goals and values, and regular communication between partners, despite the pandemic this has grown between both of our organisations to the benefit of the local community and people we serve. During the formal Panel meetings in which we share updates and discuss changes to service provision for all sectors this has been most useful in adapting our service provision.

**Professor David Loughton CBE,
Chief Executive, Royal Wolverhampton
NHS Trust**

**With a shared vision and clearly
communicated objectives our
partnership has been a great success.**



The meetings have run very smoothly this year and the Scrutiny Team have done wonders with the new ways of working and digital technology. It has been a pleasure to work with John Denley and his team, they have done a fantastic job through this pandemic along with David Laughton and his team at the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust and all our other partners.

The last 12 months have been some of the most difficult that we have ever had to endure but the partnership working, and understanding has been of the highest level. There have been tragedies for many families, but we are now starting to emerge into a better position. I was very impressed by the presentation we received from the Ambulance Service and the work that they have done through the pandemic has been second to none. I would like to thank every partner who has joined us through the year and also a big thank you to the panel members for all their support.

**Cllr Phil Page, Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel
(15/05/2019-20/05/2021)**

“

Black Country Healthcare NHS FT has worked in close partnership with the Health Scrutiny Panel in Wolverhampton throughout the year – we have welcomed the constructive and supportive approach of all partners around the Scrutiny table and this has helped inform not only our approach to managing the pandemic, but also to developing our newly formed Trust.

**Marsha Foster, Director of Partnerships,
Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**



“

I have found working with Health Scrutiny Panel has brought welcome challenge to the work we are undertaking in conjunction with Health partners, it has also allowed us the space to engage with partners to establish system wide plans. For example Health scrutiny allowed us a one agenda item meeting to share and answer questions on the Winter Plan 2020 which was crucial to keeping flow going through the Health and Care system during the winter period.

Questions and challenge from the panel has always being well informed and gives us scope to improve our work We really value the role of Health Scrutiny within Adult Services.

Becky Wilkinson, Deputy Director, Adult Services



Thank you for the opportunity to provide a reflection on the work of the Wolverhampton Health Scrutiny Panel over this last year.

The panel has, of course, directed its attention principally to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on local people and the response of Wolverhampton's health and care services. The council's scrutiny function is an essential mechanism by which our NHS organisations are accountable through elected councillors to the population that we serve. We have welcomed the opportunity that the scrutiny meetings have provided to talk about key local health issues; the actions that we have taken this year; and to answer the questions raised by Health Scrutiny Panel members on behalf of local people. As well as the immediate issues of managing the pandemic and treating patients with Covid-19 disease, you have also looked more widely at the implications for other services, health inequalities and the impact on people's mental health and mental health services.



I have found the panel members very professional in their approach and with the interests of the citizens of Wolverhampton always central to their thinking. They are well informed, respectful and ask appropriate questions to ensure that citizens receive appropriate care and also are committed to improving the health of people living in Wolverhampton by promoting healthy life styles, health prevention & promotion and cross agency working.

Professor Steve Field CBE, Chairman of the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust

In September we attended a meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel to discuss the proposed merger of the Black Country and West Birmingham CCGs. You raised points about the importance of a merged CCG continuing to have a strong and effective relationship with the City of Wolverhampton Council and other local partners and we have been pleased to provide you with those assurances and we look forward to continuing to develop those relationships in the future.

Whilst the Scrutiny Panel is, as it should be, thorough and challenging in its engagement with the CCG on areas of interest and concern, we appreciate the constructive approach that you take as a Health Scrutiny Panel to your engagement with us at formal meetings and the continuing and helpful dialogue that we have with yourself as Scrutiny Officer and with the Chair and Vice-Chair on an on-going basis.

We look forward to continuing our work with your during 2021/22.

Paul Maubach, Chief Executive Officer of the Black Country and West Birmingham CCGs

Paul Tulley, Managing Director of Wolverhampton CCG

Equality and Diversity - Pushing Boundaries and Evidencing Impact



I have been a Councillor for ten years and it is great to see the changes in the Council, such as the appointment of our BAME colleagues to Heads of Services positions – we definitely need to keep pushing forward and continue to make progress in this area.

The issue of promoting equalities and increasing opportunities for BAME employees to progress within the Council has been championed by me for many years. In response to my request earlier in the year The Our Council Scrutiny Panel received a progress report from David Pattison, Director of Governance, on range of work being done to tackle inequalities within the Council and the wider community.

The Director commented at the meeting about the renewed focus on equalities within the Council in response to events such as the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter campaign, and also the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 pandemic on particular communities.

The issue of employee progression and particularly into senior positions within the Council has also been a concern for a long time. However, I welcome the progress made to recruit three people from BME groups to senior positions within the Council and the range of other positive initiatives aimed at increasing opportunities for people to progress. I am confident that the Council is moving in the right direction.

I personally believe that there is so much talent within the Council and it is important to build on recent achievements and move forward to capitalise on the progress made and not to fall back. The panel will be getting a further report in the next few months from the Director of Governance on the inclusion of equalities in the assessment of employee performance and recruitment. I look forward to seeing more evidence of progress being made in this important area.

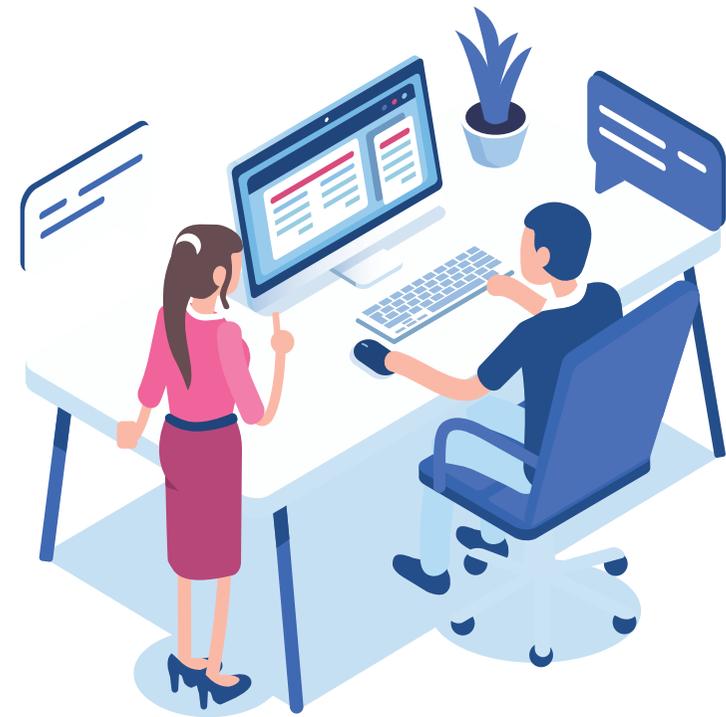
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal,
Chair of the Our Council Scrutiny Panel
 (06/07/2020-12/05/2021)

Place and Community - Critical Friend Challenge and feedback



Housing was part of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel Scrutiny panel in November 2020. Being asked to present to Scrutiny challenged us to draw together all of the information we had on how the Council's housing managing agents delivered contact services to customers, both pre lockdown and during lockdown. During lockdown, service delivery changed in ways we would never have predicted; more people were accessing services online as front line services closed. The Scrutiny panel gave us an opportunity to analyse the performance of these online services during this time and start the conversation with councillors about how services could be provided in the future. This opportunity was valuable, as it allowed us to get very early feedback and councillors posed questions which were useful for us to consider as part of our service planning.

Jenny Lewington,
Service Manager - Housing Strategy and Policy





2020 was a challenging year and a difficult one for all of us.

In our lifetime it has been a first, The Council as a whole has been put under a lot of pressure to make decisions for the safety of our citizens.

I have to applaud senior officers, cabinet members and all of the staff involved and we as a Panel continued to review all actions taken and sought to feedback from and to our residents.

Decisions had to be made as to whether certain services were to continue through the pandemic and national guidelines were carefully followed to keep all our residents and council employees safe and well.

We all had to adapt to new working challenges such as working online and becoming part of the digital platform which lined in well with the overarching scrutiny theme.

This new and growing digital way of working and living has brought many of the writers and filmmakers visions we have seen on cinema screens or on our televisions to life.

In scrutiny we understood how the bereavement team had dealt with demanding and difficult times and heart-breaking moments as residents watched loved ones' funerals online.

An extra hotline was introduced at the start of the pandemic, STAY SAFE BE KIND, food parcels were provided to vulnerable residents and within 72 hours, vulnerable homeless people were placed in a hotel or hostel.

All general waste and recycling continued throughout the pandemic with residents reporting that the key workers had done a great job in relation to this. Unfortunately, even with the lockdowns, fly tipping remained at the same level.

WV Active was affected by the pandemic but was able to adapt to allow members to take classes online, whilst Aldersley Sports Village was transformed into a food distribution hub.

Advancements continued to be made such as the replacement of street lighting with 27,000 LED bulbs and Highways used LED signage to display Covid-19 messages. Public transport was also used less and more people were encouraged to cycle and walk which was both good for the environment and for health and wellbeing.

Cllr Mak Singh,
Chair of Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel
 (16/05/2019-21/06/2021)

Protecting our most vulnerable children and young people: Cross Panel Working and Member Led Enquiry



It was a pleasure to attend a meeting of the Youth Council with my colleague Cllr Rita Potter where we heard first-hand about the challenges that young people had faced through the pandemic. One of the main issues that arose was in relation to mental health and we asked representatives of the Youth Council to attend a meeting of Health Scrutiny to discuss the matter, the meeting was very well attended with a number of partners including the following:

**Professor David Loughton CBE,
Chief Executive of the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust**

Paul Maubach, CEO of the Black Country and West Birmingham CCGs

Paul Tulley, Managing Director of Wolverhampton CCG

**Steven Marshall, Programme Director for Mental Health Integration
and Transformation - Black Country and West Birmingham CCGs**

**Chris Masikane, Chief Operating Officer - Black Country Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust**

**Marsha Foster, Director of Partnerships - Black Country Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust**

**Professor Sultan Mahmud, Chief Innovation, Integration and Research
Officer of the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust**

**Simon Evans, Chief Strategy Officer -
The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust**

**Andrew Moody, Black Country STP
Mental Health Commissioning**

**Mags Courts, Children's Commissioning
Manager - Wolverhampton CCG**

Syed Naqvi, Youth Council - Chair

Anna Tabner, Youth Council Representative

It was a very productive meeting and I have since written to the Children's Commissioning Manager on the matter of Mental Health Support Teams in Schools, the Government's intention to roll out these Teams to all Schools in the future and if there were any expected timescales for this rollout. A response has been received and will be followed up.

**Cllr Phil Page
Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel
(15/05/2019-20/05/2021)**



The Youth Council this year have continued to play a role in the City Council Scrutiny Process, they have attended the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel meetings and contributed to discussions.

During these meetings the issue of Education in Lockdown was discussed. The Youth Council carried out a survey with young people based on their experiences in Lock down One, the Youth Council then presented the findings and recommendations to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Health Scrutiny Panel attended a Youth Council meeting to discuss emotional wellbeing and mental health during Covid-19. As a result of this discussion the Youth Council presented a report based on the groups experiences of the topic to the Health Scrutiny Panel.

Wolverhampton Youth Council



2020/2021 has been an unprecedented year. The Health Scrutiny Panel has worked extremely hard with all our partners to ensure that the health and social care needs of our residents have been met. It has been a great honour to serve as the Vice-Chair with so many passionate and hardworking individuals. I would like to express my gratitude to all of those that have helped with the testing for Covid-19 and the vaccination programme, including volunteers from places of worship across the city.

The outbreak of Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of better mental health support, and how important it is to ensure that our whole community is included in planning health services. We were pleased to meet with young people so that we could ensure that their needs and concerns were also taken on board. The key is challenging and addressing what is not working and our community engagement work has helped us to effectively do this. Being a member of the Health Scrutiny Panel has vastly added to my knowledge and helped me in my role as a local councillor. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who has helped us fulfil our duties. Covid-19 has brought our sector closer together and strengthened how we work. We will only benefit from what we have learned in the years ahead of us.

Cllr Paul Singh, Vice Chair of Health Scrutiny
(17/05/2018-present)

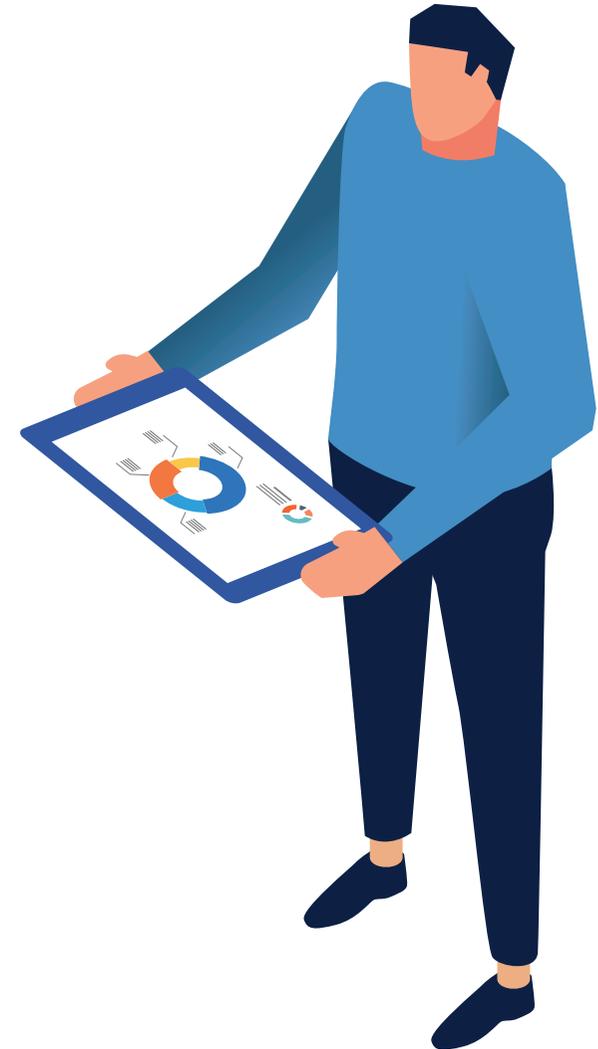
Relighting our City - Regeneration

Scrutiny was pleased to welcome the Director for Regeneration and the Head of City Development to a number of Stronger City Economy meetings to receive updates on the Council's key regeneration projects in the City. This included Lower Horseley Fields which would provide 370 residential units incorporating the historic Union Mill buildings.

Scrutiny was supportive in relation to the Interchange project which was a partnership delivery between the Council, Network Rail and Transport for West Midlands and would provide a fully integrated multi-modal transport hub. Scrutiny was pleased to hear that Phase 1 of the new station facility had now been completed and was open to the public and that Phase 2 was well underway and was scheduled for completion in Spring 2021. At a later meeting, Scrutiny was also pleased to hear that the Interchange Project had been awarded the RTPi West Midlands Award for Planning Excellence and had won Regeneration Project of the Year at the Insider Property Awards having been shortlisted and nominated for three awards.

Scrutiny was pleased to hear that the i9 Project (a 50,000 square foot office floorspace), was now an award winning Glenn Howells designed building. Scrutiny understood that the building had been designed to achieve BREEAM 'Excellent' rating and WiredScore 'Gold' Standard.

Scrutiny was pleased to hear that the i54, was a continuing success. The i54 Western Extension (South) was a joint venture between City of Wolverhampton Council and Staffordshire County Council. The scheme would provide up to 100,000 m² of B1 and B2 end uses and generate up to 1,700 new jobs. The Southern 60-acre site was under development and was controlled by City of Wolverhampton Council. The project was currently scheduled to deliver on time and very much on budget.



Relighting our City - Growing our Vital Businesses

Scrutiny heard from the Director of Communications and External Relations and the Head of Enterprise about how we were hoping to “Grow Our Vital Businesses.” **Areas covered in the presentation included:**

1. Impact of Covid-19 on businesses
2. Brexit update
3. Current business support offer
4. Developing the business support offer

Scrutiny understood that there were three key principles relating to the “Grow Our Vital Local Businesses” theme in the Council’s Relighting Our City strategy. **The three principles were:**

- Being climate focused,
- Being driven by digital, and
- Being fair and inclusive.

Scrutiny noted that 97% of the City’s businesses were small enterprises (employing less than 50 staff) and that the highest employment sector in the City was health, followed by retail. Employment levels in Wolverhampton were at 67.2% which was approximately 10% below the national average. Due to

Covid-19, some key sectors had been severely affected including hospitality, retail and leisure. There were however some sectors which had experienced unprecedented growth including food, distribution, digital and communication. The main issues faced by businesses included **Crisis Management and Response, Workforce, Finance and Long-Term Challenges.**

Scrutiny understood that moving businesses online and accelerating digital transformation had been more challenging for some of the City’s businesses. Managing disruption to operation and supply chains and complying with the latest government guidance and mandatory closure of non-essential businesses were all issues businesses had faced during the pandemic.

Managing the health and wellbeing of employees had been made ever more difficult due to the added pressure of home schooling. Businesses also had to support extremely vulnerable staff and those that were shielding. As business activity slowed, there was less cash flow and therefore liquidity issues were arising. The uncertainty of the future was having a big impact on businesses being able to plan effectively.

Relighting our City - Wolves in Business

Scrutiny welcomed the launch of the brand “Wolves in Business” which had been launched in the Summer and provided support and guidance to businesses. It was also connecting businesses with partners and was having a strong impact. During the last 12 months over 2000 job vacancies had been identified in the City by the Council. Over the Summer, the Council had delivered £45 million in grants to 4,500 businesses in the first national Covid-19 national lockdown. They were currently delivering £2 million in grant support to 1,600 businesses across the City. They were supporting businesses who had vacancies through Wolves at Work. The Council’s business support line had received over 10,000 calls since April. The Council would be receiving a share of a national £595 million discretionary fund to support other impacted businesses.

Business Relight Programme

Scrutiny welcomed the programme which would seek to run 5 cohorts of 40 businesses over the next 12 months, each cohort would reflect a cross section of business sectors and sizes. The programme was supported by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and the Chamber of Commerce, and it was predicted that there would be a potential return on investment of £1.4 million.

Scrutiny expressed support for the business grants but sought reassurance as what safeguarding measures were in place to prevent fraudulent claims. Scrutiny was satisfied that there were a number of rigorous checks which took place including on the bank account and business status. Scrutiny considered that the process was working well and noted the important distinction between fraud and an error.

Holding the Executive to Account - Portfolio Holder Question Time

Scrutiny invited the Portfolio Holder for City Economy to attend the meeting on 18 March 2021. The Portfolio holder remarked that the team of officers had performed exceptionally well in unprecedented times and that he was immensely proud of the work that had taken place in regenerating the City and the economy.

The following areas were listed as priorities for the Directorate and the Portfolio Holder for City Economy as follows:

- Relighting our City
- Completion of Interchange and i9, over the next few months
- Attracting end users to i54
- Delivery of Future High Streets and Town Fund project
- Bringing forward major regeneration projects such as Brewers Yard, City Learning Quarter and Westside
- Providing continued business support post the Covid-19 pandemic
- Events

Scrutiny referred to the different employment sectors within Wolverhampton and was pleased that there was now a broader employment sector base as it gave more future resilience for the City, not to be heavily reliant on one sector. Scrutiny understood that the Health sector in Wolverhampton had benefited from the growth of the education sector in Wolverhampton including the University and considered that it was important to maintain the manufacturing sector whilst accepting a broad employment sector base was beneficial.

The Portfolio Holder for City Economy commented on the resilience of the general population of Wolverhampton and their ability to move with changes. The global change and transition meant that Green technology was the way forward. He referred to the different sectors where this applied such as transport, housing and components. He believed the new Green Deal moving forward should be the key driver. One of the next tasks was to see what opportunities there were for the Council moving forwards.

The Portfolio Holder for City Economy referred to the importance of entertainment in the City such as the Arts and leisure facilities. He believed education would be key to what he described as the Green Revolution. He believed elected Members and Officers had a key role in suggesting innovating ideas. He commented on the importance of working with the WMCA (West Midlands Combined Authority) and with the Councils in the Black Country Area. He spoke highly of the new train station and the new transport Hub.

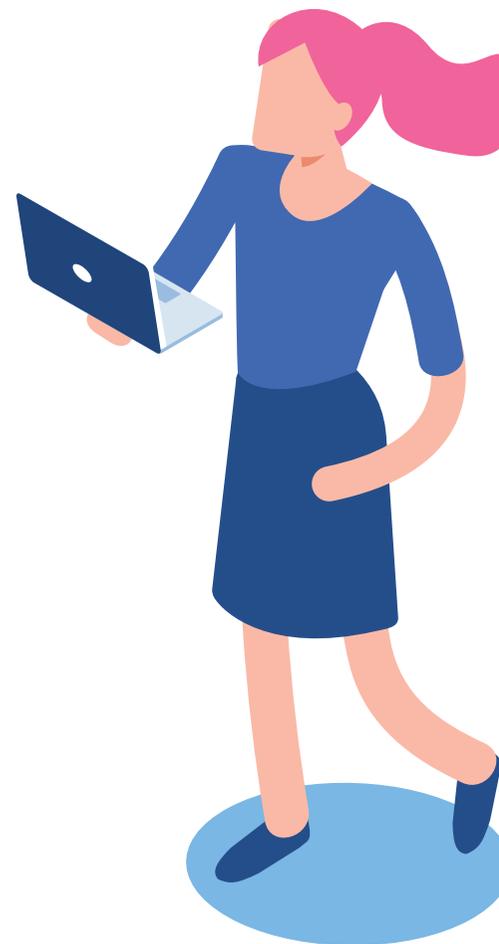
Scrutiny spoke highly of the relight scheme and supporting small businesses but considered that there was some further work required internally to support small businesses. Scrutiny considered that the City needed to do more to promote Wolverhampton as a Learning and that the importance of the partnership with Wolverhampton University need to be highlighted. Scrutiny welcomed all of the work that had taken place in the last twelve months to help bridge the digital divide and felt this should be celebrated.

The Portfolio Holder stated that it was important to see how the City would be in the future. Not only did new houses need to be built, but the economy also had to be built up as well. The question of the future for City Centres and shopping centres was important to answer. Covid-19 had accelerated a changing retail landscape, with online shopping becoming more prevalent. Building resilience back into the marketplace and the centres of the City was key, along with seeking the opportunities from the new green agenda.

Scrutiny asked the Portfolio Holder for City Economy what he wanted Wolverhampton to look like in twelve months' time and what was the biggest challenge for the year. He responded that the biggest challenge was competing for funding streams. He wanted Wolverhampton to be the shining light for the whole of the West Midlands. He thought it was essential to have good discussions with the Police, to ensure the safety of the citizens in the City and its assets. The area around the Civic Centre and the Art gallery was an important part in enhancing the City. He thought the use of the accelerator fund in Wednesfield and Bilston was a good example of using funds for the benefit of the City. International companies investing in the City had offered to help the community. He spoke highly of the principle of openness and transparency in working relationships with partners. He wanted the youth of the City to have a bigger input into the future of the City.

The feedback and updates from the Director and Portfolio holder were considered extremely valuable and were built into the scrutiny work programme for future consideration:

- a). Working at a local electoral Ward level to help develop Economic Strategy.
- b). Exploring how, hotels, tourism, leisure, and the culture offer, can help enhance the City economy and in particular the night time economy.
- c). Exploring how partnership working with key partners can be enhanced for the benefit of the City economy.
- d). How the City is marketed in the future.



Work Programme - Connected City Theme

Scrutiny Board agreed a Connected City Theme at its meeting on 14 July 2020 for the following reasons:

Digital Revolution in Wolverhampton underway:

- Increasing productivity, sparking innovation and driving economic growth by creating new jobs, attracting start-ups and enticing further inward investment.
- Enabling those in education, health and social care sectors to adopt the latest technologies.
- Enabling e-learning techniques in schools, colleges and universities.
- Providing the foundation for crucial health and social care solutions such as remote monitoring and remote consultations.

Digital Inclusion:

- The Digital divide: Covid-19 has highlighted more issues than previously realised and if not addressed the identified gap will grow - it's not just older people who are being left behind:
- 59,000 citizens do not have access to basic digital skills & 35,000 citizens have not been online in the last three months
- Many of those who have not been online are under 60 and often the more vulnerable citizens concentrated in areas of deprivation.
- Only 52% of the workforce have the necessary digital skills for work
- Change is happening faster than we think - it continues to evolve and adapt as the needs of the end user evolve and change. How do we keep up with this to support our citizens?

All scrutiny panels and Scrutiny Board sought to incorporate digital considerations into all items that were considered.



Overarching Theme - Connected City

The outbreak of the pandemic exposed the true scale of digital exclusion throughout the City and the country as a whole. Digital exclusion affects all areas of life from the ability to access remote learning and work and earn an income to a person's quality of life, quality of education, access to healthcare and even their ability to connect with friends, family and dependants. Those who are digitally excluded may also experience a number of other social and economic disadvantages which are compounded by the inability to access digital means.

One key source of information that was presented to scrutiny and taken into consideration when drafting the attached recommendations was the Council's [Digital Infrastructure Strategy](#). Scrutiny also considered all of the presentations and reports received at the panel meetings throughout the year and publications such as '[Learning from Lockdown, 12 steps to eliminate digital exclusion](#)' (The Carnegie UK Trust October 2020) and information available on the [#DigitalWolves](#) website.

Scrutiny are aware that a revised [Wolverhampton Digital Strategy](#) is currently under development.

This revised strategy will set the framework for and update the Wolverhampton Digital Infrastructure Strategy resulting in a more action orientated partnership approach to delivering the following overarching aims:

- Making Wolverhampton a Gigabit and Smart City enabled through futureproofed digital infrastructure
- Ensuring a 100% digitally included Wolverhampton
- Supporting a growing Digital Economy

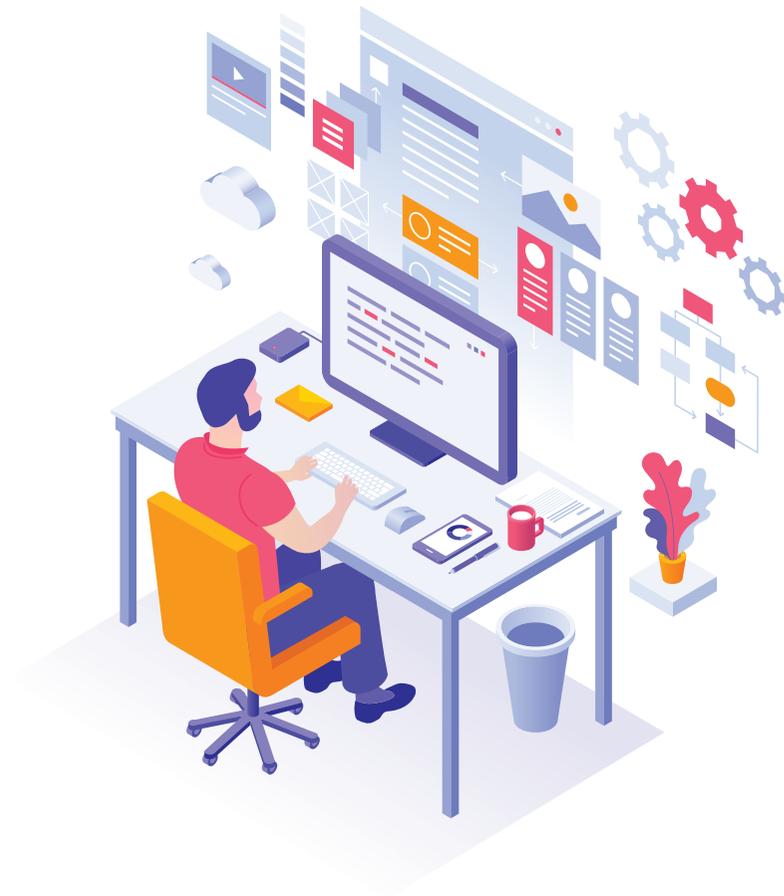
The Digital Wolverhampton Strategy centres around four themes:

- Digital Infrastructure
- Digital Innovation
- Digital Inclusion
- Digital Economy

Overarching Theme - Connected City

Digital infrastructure comprises the physical resources that are necessary to enable the use of data, computerised devices, methods, systems and processes. Futureproofed Digital infrastructure is the backbone of a modern thriving economy driving productivity and spreading growth to deliver effective and efficient public services. It is thought that Covid-19 may have accelerated the adoption of digital services by 2-5 years with digital now being considered as critical to economic growth and social recovery.

Scrutiny has made a number of recommendations (Appendix 1) that it considers are necessary to help diminish and resolve the digital divide in the city, and to ensure that digital is given the status it needs as an essential utility, in line with gas and electricity.





OUR PRINCIPLES

We will underpin our work with the following key principles;



CLIMATE FOCUSED

This recovery commitment is aligned to our climate change strategy 'Future Generations' and our target to make the City of Wolverhampton Council carbon – neutral by 2028. We are committed to delivering on the recommendations of our Climate Citizen Assembly and to upholding the promises we made when the Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019.



DRIVEN BY DIGITAL

The city is at the forefront of digital infrastructure and innovation, Wolverhampton will be one of the first cities in the world to host a 5G accelerator hub making us truly a world leader in emerging technology. Now more than ever digital skills and connectivity are vital to ensure our residents can access services, interact with friends and family, and enter the job market.



FAIR AND INCLUSIVE

We will continue to tackle the inequalities in our communities which impact on the opportunities of local people. The Council's 'Excellent' rated equalities framework is at the heart of our recovery commitment. No community will be left behind as we transform our city together.

Driven by Digital

'Driven by digital' forms a cross cutting theme throughout the Council's **Relighting Our City** strategy, with digital transformation underpinning work on assets, agile working and service redesign and delivery.

A **digital strategy** is currently being drawn up and scrutiny supports the Council in continuing to develop the **Digital Wolves** website <https://www.digitalwolves.co.uk> and in using **#Digital Wolves** to raise the profile of this vital agenda.

Scrutiny supports the identification of a Digital Champion, Digital Co-ordinator and Councillor Digital Innovation Champion to drive forward the digital agenda. Scrutiny is pleased to note that a Cabinet Member for Digital Cities was created in 2021-2022.

Scrutiny welcomes the establishment of the **Digital Wolverhampton Partnership** which comprises the City of Wolverhampton Council, the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, the City of Wolverhampton College, CCG, Wolverhampton Homes and the University of Wolverhampton. Scrutiny will request updates from this partnership as its work progresses. All services within the Council and all partners working with the Council must seek to build digital into their work, with a refreshed focus on tackling digital exclusion to support individuals and communities, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.

Scrutiny considers that it is vital for ownership of the digital inclusion agenda to be shared right across the council, with council partners, voluntary organisations and at the community level. Scrutiny considered that this can be achieved in part through the work of the Digital Wolverhampton Partnership. The Partnership seeks to develop Wolverhampton's approach to digital by providing strategic leadership for digital across the City and overseeing the planned revision of the Digital Wolverhampton Strategy. Scrutiny is supportive of the following objectives being included in the revised Digital Wolverhampton Strategy:

- Supporting the rollout of future proofed digital infrastructure
- Building on relationships with strategic companies
- Developing digital Health and Innovation
- Developing a 5G plan for the City including potential use cases
- Driving the ambition for Wolverhampton to become a 100% digital included city linked to place-based approaches to tackling health inequalities
- Capturing other elements of digital including the University of Wolverhampton's vision around a Centre of Excellence for Digital Innovation for Smart Cities (DISC), digital skills including Digital Training Academy and supporting the growth of the digital economy

Scrutiny also welcomes the formation of the Digital Inclusion sub-group which has been set up to include community and voluntary sector partners to drive Wolves Online and the wider digital inclusion agenda. This will link to initiatives underway such as the Wolverhampton Learning City regional work around digital skills, the Black Country and West Birmingham Sustainable Transformation Partnership work around digital inclusion and the West Midlands Coalition for Digital Inclusion.

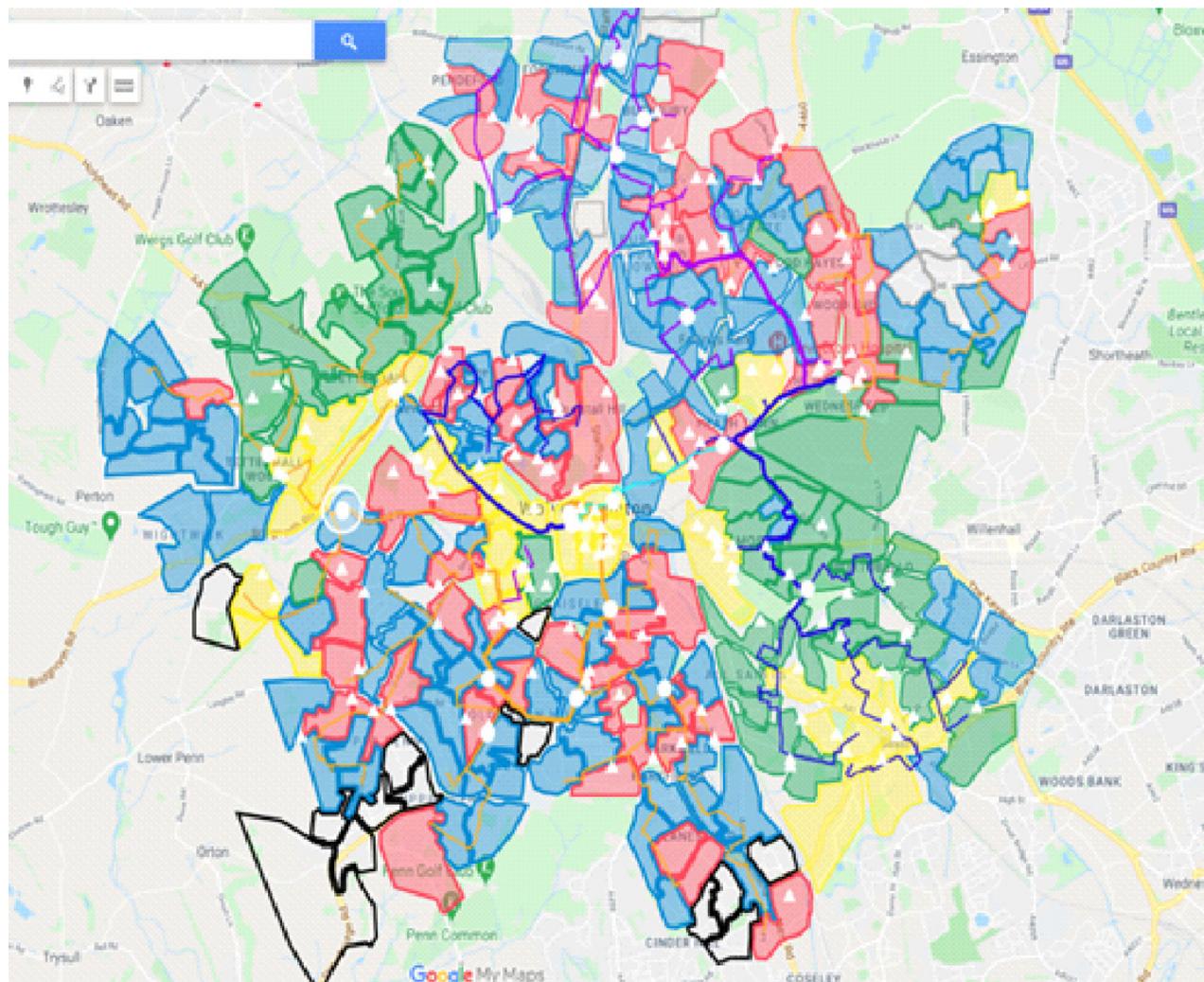


Figure 1

Digital by Design or Face to Face

Scrutiny were keen that where appropriate, more services across the public sector be made available digitally and that the innovative work that has been carried out during the pandemic continue to be built on and improved.

Wolverhampton's 'Digital by design' enables those who can, to access services online and encourages multiple channel shifts which will ultimately lead to better customer experiences and financial savings. However, this approach needs to take into account the needs of those who are digitally excluded and to consider and make available alternative options if digital is not appropriate.

5G and Wireless Technology

Scrutiny were keen to support the Council in working with partners in relation to the rollout of wireless technology including 5G via masts on places such as on rooftops, masts, small cell technology and Wi-Fi meshes.

Small cell technology is a radio access point with low radio frequency (RF) power output, footprint and range and is used to complement the macro network to improve coverage, add targeted capacity, and support new services and user experiences.

A wi-fi mesh is a network that relies on additional units to propagate signals. Although the wireless signal may start at a base station (access point) attached to a wired network, a wireless mesh network extends the transmission distance by relaying the signal from one computer to another.

In 2018, Wolverhampton secured £4.9 million from the LocalFull Fibre Network to connect 170 public buildings in Wolverhampton. Progress is set out on the previous page (Figure 1) with green showing completed, blue to use existing ducting and red to be programmed.

Scrutiny understands that all 4 Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) announced rolling out 5G in Wolverhampton in 2020 and that the West Midlands now has the best 5G coverage of all the regions, with Wolverhampton's proactive approach accelerating deployment of 5G by 6 months including the UK's first 5G mast.

Scrutiny welcomes the use of transparent processes being introduced for planning applications for masts, these include pre-application discussions with Planning in relation to siting and appearance. Scrutiny recommends that the Council continues to identify and mitigate any barriers to the use of smart infrastructure and 5G wireless technology, including the development of non-exclusive wayleave agreements covering residential estates, the standardisation of procedures and guidance, and principles for commercial providers. This should also include the continued development of relationships with providers and mobile network operators. Scrutiny notes the work that has been undertaken with WM5G and that Wolverhampton have introduced new systems to support the rollout of 5G including the identification of suitable assets viable for telecoms use.

A Wayleave is a legally binding agreement between a land or property owner and Telecoms, Utilities or Fibre providers that grants access for the installation and subsequent maintenance or management of network cabling and equipment over or under land.

Scrutiny welcomes the preparation of a Wolverhampton Digital toolkit to facilitate the rollout in partnership with WM5G.

Scrutiny were supportive of the Council making available street furniture on a non-exclusive basis to facilitate the rollout of Small Cell technology. An expression of interest was released before Christmas and the Council received three responses from Operators. Scrutiny was pleased to hear that three expressions of interest had since been received and three leases signed. Scrutiny recommend that an update report be provided in relation to the Wolverhampton Digital toolkit and the use of street furniture for small cell technology will continue to monitor the implementation of this initiative.

Digital Technology in Transportation

Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel received a presentation from the Head of City Transport in January 2021 in relation to digital technology in transportation. Scrutiny were pleased to hear that the Council had been successful in securing European Regional Development Funding to replace all of the City's 27,750 street lights to low energy light emitting diode (LED) lanterns, with smart enabled technology and a central management system. The programme is due to be completed in around 18 months and the energy saving will contribute to the Council's climate change agenda.

Scrutiny understands that the funding will also provide the infrastructure for the future deployment of smart city sensors and opportunities to remote control further council operations, thus unlocking urban data to provide unique insights to improve efficiencies, sustainability and citizen interaction.

An interactive map showing the progress of the LED replacement programme can be found here: <http://35.177.157.9/LED.aspx>

Scrutiny will continue to monitor how the roll out of full fibre and 5G improves the use of CCTV, the traffic management system and parking management systems. Scrutiny understands that CCTV, traffic management and parking management are part of phase 2 of the Public Services Network, whereby full fibre will connect our council assets and open up further opportunities for innovation.



Full Fibre Broadband as a Basic and Essential Utility

Scrutiny are keen to ensure that having access to good quality broadband is a given and that during development, full fibre to all new premises is treated in the same way as the installation of gas or electricity. Scrutiny understands that guidance to Planning to encourage the installation of full fibre broadband has been produced to encourage discussions with developers at the planning stage. Scrutiny welcomes this and recommends that unless there are extenuating circumstances, all new developments should have access to full fibre broadband.

By adopting this approach, the need for expensive fibre retrofitting programmes in the future can be avoided (this often results in attaching fibre to existing copper networks resulting in a less than optimum solution when compared to new fibre networks being delivered). The cost of installing full fibre in new developments is considered to be relatively small during the build phase of the development. Any costs can be balanced with increased sales values that are likely to be achieved on account of fast and reliable broadband speeds being available. Developers are not required to deliver full fibre solutions themselves, but they should conduct early dialogue with providers

in order to best understand what their infrastructure specifications are and how these can be accommodated as part of the new development. The majority of the broadband infrastructure providers will install fibre into developments of a certain size at no or minimal costs during construction.

To futureproof our estates, scrutiny understands that the Council have sought to include a policy for fibre to the premise (FTTP) in the draft **Black Country Core Strategy**. This policy expects that all major residential and employment developments should be able to deliver FTTP. To facilitate this, any application for a qualifying development should be supported by an “FTTP Statement” which provides details of dialogue with the telecom operators, explains how FTTP will be provided and confirms that this process will be completed upon first occupation. By implementing this policy approach, the Black Country authorities are seeking to ensure that future developments remain at the forefront of advances in broadband technology, allowing the Black Country to be a market leader and remain an attractive location for businesses and residents alike. **Scrutiny is fully supportive of this approach.**

Digital Inclusion

Scrutiny are keen that the Council continue to support access to computers and digital connectivity (MiFis and Sims) and to ensure that support is available to improve confidence and skills to get online. Scrutiny consider that this can be partly achieved by working closely with community and voluntary groups in the City.

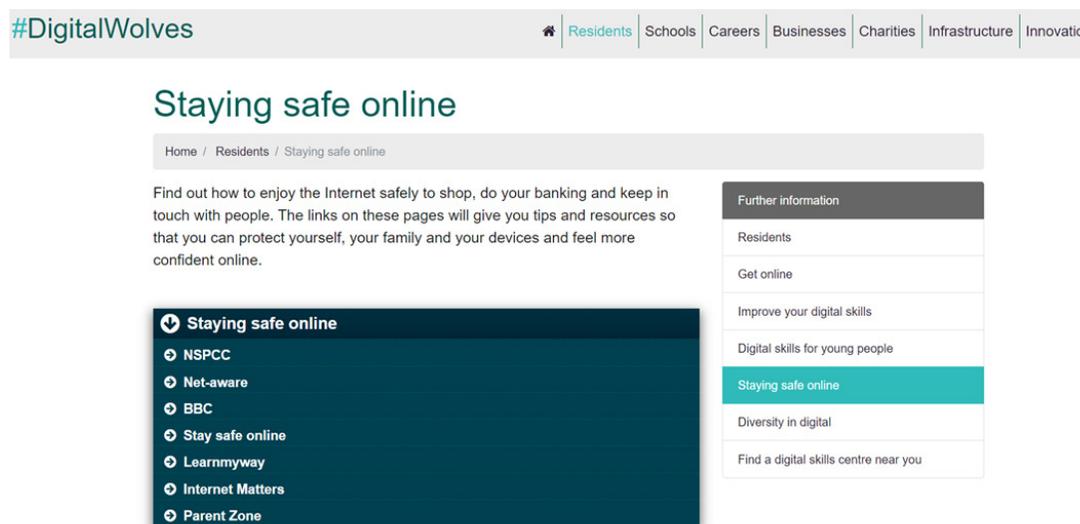
Scrutiny understand that nationally, 9 million people are struggling to use the internet. Prior to the pandemic, 35,000 residents had not been online in the last 3 months. Although age was considered to be the biggest indicator, 44% of those offline were under the age of 60, the pandemic highlighted the extent of the digital exclusion issue with many residents unable to access online learning, employment support and access to services including health, with low take up of online support for vulnerable groups.

Schools reported lack or unsuitability of devices for pupils to access remote learning and challenges around connectivity.

Scrutiny were informed that as part of the Council's approach to supporting Wolverhampton to be 100% digitally included, the following activities had been carried out:

- **Wolves Online:** A new device and connectivity lending scheme launched to target residents to access online learning, employment support, access services and reduce isolation. Funding secured from European Social Fund for additional devices.
- **Wolves Tech Aid:** driven by Learnplay to seek donated devices that are recycled and distributed to school children to get online.
- **Community Online centres** have bid for devices from DevicesDotNow to distribute to residents to enable them to access learning and support and reduce isolation. The latest funding available is to provide devices to people with learning disabilities.
- **Schools proactively bid for DfE resources**, with additional devices available for schools to borrow for access for pupils who are remote learning. Connectivity and additional devices have been funded by ward funds and donated BT Hotspot vouchers.
- **Digital exclusion mapped** to inform a place-based approach going forward

Scrutiny understands that the Council is working closely with community and voluntary groups to support the distribution of devices through encouraging them to become **Online Centres** and trusted partners in the **Wolves Online scheme**. In addition, the Council is supporting the development of a **Digital Buddies** network, upskilling trusted partners and volunteers to help people get online and funding some capacity building with the intention of a larger bid to the **Community Renewal Fund** and subsequently the **Shared Prosperity Fund**. The Digital Buddies network will also signpost information on online harms and how to avoid scams etc. Scrutiny welcome the inclusion of staying safe online information on the **#DigitalWolves** website.



Baseline for a Minimum Digital Living Standard - Device, Connectivity, Motivation and Skills

Scrutiny are keen that a baseline be established for a minimum digital living standard based on an agreed definition of what it means to be digitally included. Scrutiny understand that the definition currently being considered is **access to a device and connectivity, motivation and skills to use the device**. The nature of the device and connectivity should reflect the specific needs of the individual or particular group. In particular, the city has good connectivity infrastructure in the form of broadband and 4G, however data poverty has been identified as a particular issue during the pandemic e.g. remote learning consumes a lot of data so mobile connectivity may not be sufficient.

Scrutiny understand that a **Connectivity Working Group** is being developed as part of the **West Midlands Coalition for Digital Inclusion** to explore different means of connectivity and the exploration of innovative solutions such as redistributing unused data.

Data has indicated that 11,659 households in Wolverhampton are without broadband and that these households are often concentrated in the most deprived areas of the City as shown in figure 2 below. However, the **Good Things Foundation** estimates there are 118,000 limited and non-users of the internet in Wolverhampton, including those who may only have access to a smart phone, use their devices only when help is available or use a device for limited reasons such as social media.

Scrutiny are also minded that in agreeing such a baseline, that consultation should take place with our citizens and in particular those with lived experience of digital exclusion.

Scrutiny welcomed feedback from participants and understands that **Wolves Online** has used trusted partners and services to distribute and support residents to get online and improve their digital skills. As part of this, case studies will be part of the evaluation and feed into the future design of schemes.

The **Housing Assistance Policy** has been adopted which enables the use of disabled facilities grants to fund assisted technology. Personal budgets have also been used to buy devices and connectivity to get people online to address a range of issues e.g. isolation but also enable access to services. Scrutiny requests that the Council continue to explore the use of personal budgets, disabled facilities grants and other options for access to devices and connectivity.

Scrutiny understands that a Wolverhampton Assisted Technology Strategy is currently under development to explore the potential of technology enabled living aimed at supporting people to keep their independence through preventative measures, however there was scope to look broader to maximise the potential of technology to address a series of outcomes across partners. This strategy will be brought to a future meeting of Scrutiny for consideration.

Accessibility of Information

Scrutiny recommends that any guidance developed be available in different formats that reflect the rich make up of our City. Scrutiny understands that amongst the Council's trusted partners for **Wolves Online**, the **Refugee Migrant Centre** and The **Learning College (TLC)** are supporting people where English is not their first language. Scrutiny welcomes the continuation of this work to develop the network of trusted partners and the link to the **Digital Buddies network** to ensure support is available in different languages/formats to meet the needs of our diverse communities.

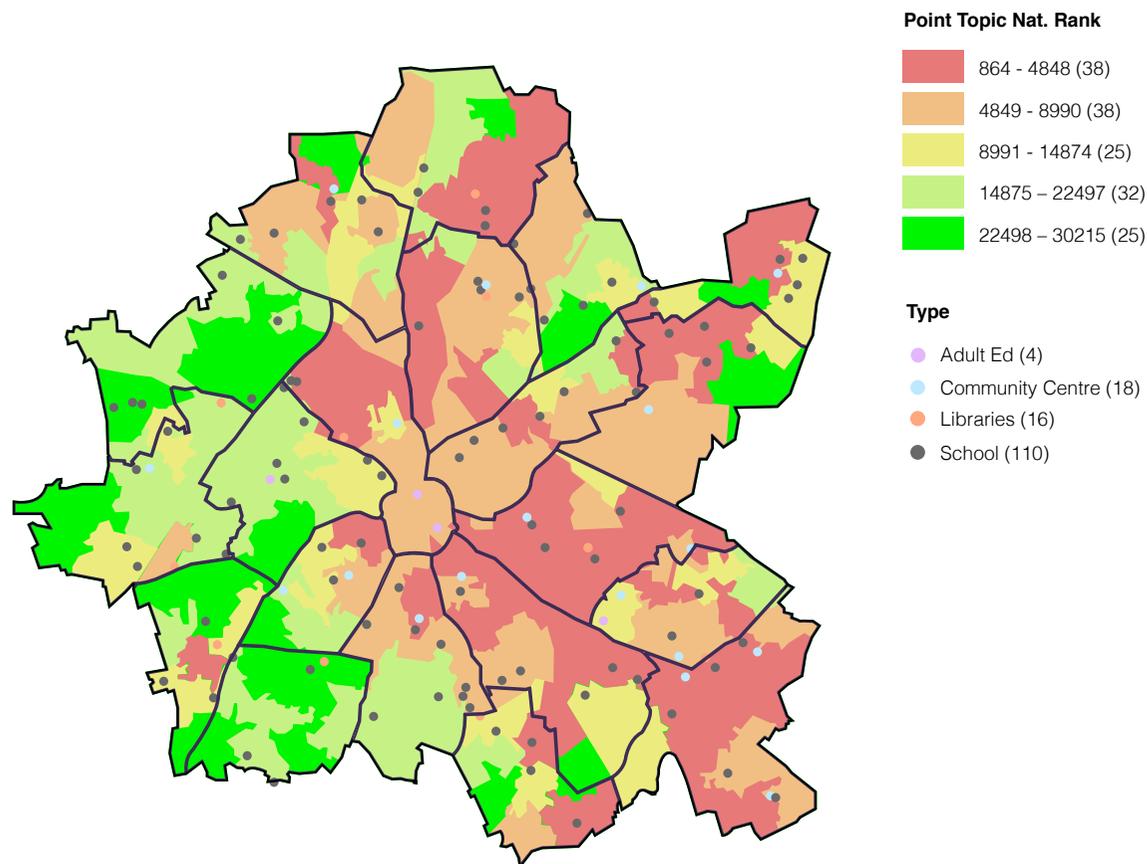


Figure 2 oncentrations of geographic digital exclusion

Role of Business

Scrutiny considers that it is important to highlight the role that businesses can play in closing the digital divide, including the donation of devices for recycling for digital inclusion initiatives. Scrutiny understood that some work was already being undertaken in this field through Learnplay, a local tech company who are leading the recycling scheme **Wolves Tech Aid** which launched in March 2021. The scheme invites donations from local businesses and residents of devices that can be recycled and redistributed initially to schools then to other digitally excluded residents of funding to cover the cost of recycling and connectivity.



Digital for businesses

Home / Digital for businesses

Further information
Digitalise your business
Digital skills for the workforce
Social media for business
Higher level / Specialist digital skills
Keep your business safe online
Support for entrepreneurs / Growth

Digital is seen as the backbone of a modern thriving economy driving productivity and enabling growth.

Our ambition is to make Wolverhampton a fully connected city where businesses will be equipped with a network that meets the future demand for digital connectivity from online business applications and internet connected devices, cloud data storage, voice and video conferencing and flexible working.

The UK has a digital skills productivity gap in the workplace (estimated at £83 billion a year) with too few people having the necessary digital skills to fill vacant roles. In addition, [Lloyds Bank consumer digital index 2020](#) indicates that only 52% of the workforce have the necessary digital skills for work.

Scrutiny understands that **Wolves in Business** offers a comprehensive support package to businesses in Wolverhampton and advice on how to digitalise a business, increase productivity and upskill the workforce with the latest digital skills to improve communications, sell online, and develop employees in specialist roles. Scrutiny recommends that all businesses should be encouraged to invest in the digital capabilities of their employees to develop a more skilled and confident workforce through the **Wolves in Business Brand**

Becoming a Community of Providers

Scrutiny would like to see the City of Wolverhampton become a Community of Providers by continuing to encourage and support public provision of digital access in public and community spaces and through doing this to provide a safety net to those who need it.

This would include encouraging more community organisations to sign up to the **Online Centres Network** and promoting the take up of the **device recycling scheme** **Wolves Online** to help form a network of digital hubs. This would also include continuing to build on the relationships that have been made during the pandemic with community, voluntary and faith-based groups and to strengthen community capacity and resilience.

Feedback provided to scrutiny stated that in order to become 100% digitally included, the Council will continue to work with a range of organisations; public, private and in the voluntary community sector to address the issues linked to digital exclusion. A range of trusted partners are part of the **Wolves Online** lending scheme and play a critical role in supporting residents to get online and improve digital skills to access services, learning and employment opportunities. As part of this approach, Scrutiny supports the Council in ensuring that there are physical digital hubs in communities, including libraries, online centres and community venues which have access to free Wi-Fi and support to enable citizens to get online and improve their digital skills.

In recognition of the role of community organisations and charities in supporting their communities to get online and become

more digitally included, scrutiny supports the move to invite these organisations to become trusted partners under **Wolves Online** and to become **Online Centres**. Benefits of joining the network include an e-learning platform **Learn My Way**, access to free training and tutor support resources, marketing materials and opportunities to apply for funding.

The emerging **Digital Buddies Network** will also bring together trusted partners and digital and non-digital volunteers, to build their capacity to support residents to get online and improve their digital skills. As part of 100% digitally included Wolverhampton, scrutiny understands that it is proposed to commission intensive support to residents to get online whilst building the capacity of other trusted partners and volunteers who are supporting residents through the **Digital Buddies Network**. Scrutiny is fully supportive of this approach.

Education

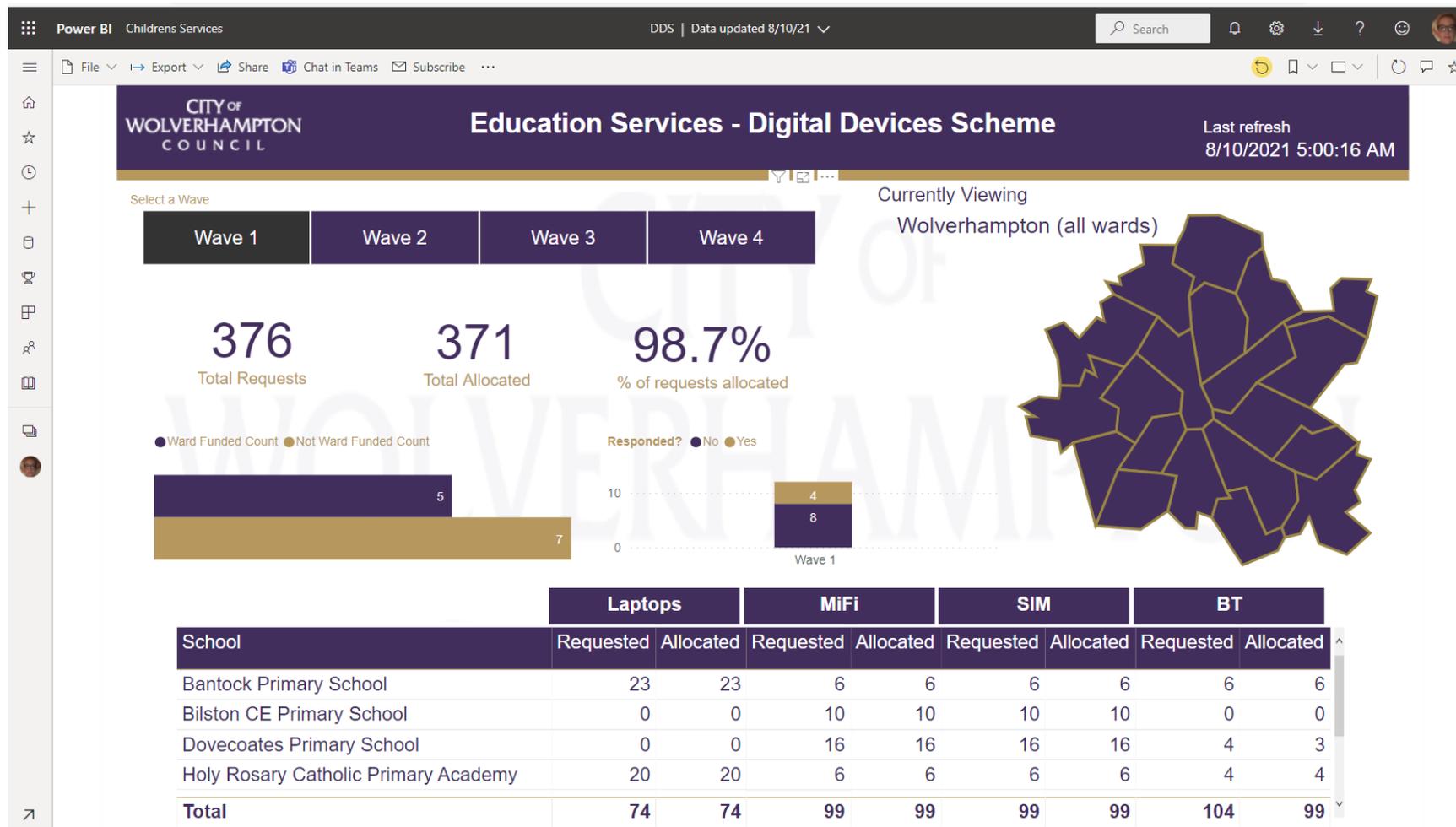
Scrutiny propose that any citizen of any age who is learning (school, FE, HE, apprentice, other) be guaranteed access to a suitable, connected device and the skills to use the device. Scrutiny understands that there are a number of national and local schemes to help learners get online.



The Schools team have been supporting schools to apply for nationally available **Department for Education** devices and connectivity as well as filling the gaps through a local device and connectivity lending scheme part funded by ward funds. To date, the local scheme has received 259 laptop requests and 214 MiFi requests.

However, findings based on early responses to a school survey show that a third of schools responding are identifying more device access as a priority. Out of 12 schools, 2 reported that only 50-74% of pupils have access to a device at home, 2 different schools are citing mobile phones as the most prominent device for learning and that device sharing continues to be a barrier. To complement the other schemes aimed at schools, **Learnplay**, a local tech company, are leading the recycling scheme for launch in March 2021. The Council will facilitate this scheme through comms and promotion, offering drop off points at libraries and the Civic Centre and helping to distribute to schools. Feedback from schools is that some parents have been reluctant to take up the loan scheme as they were worried about breakages. To complement the device and connectivity lending schemes, the Schools team and Adult Education have organised digital literacy training for parents to increase their digital skills to help them support remote learning.

Digital Inclusion Dashboard



Scrutiny Board received a presentation and report from the **Head of Adult Education** at its meeting in March. Scrutiny understood that in relation to the digital divide:

Issues facing residents included:

- Large numbers not going online at all; lacking basic digital skills; lacking devices and connectivity; not being able to take advantage of offers and information online; not being able to apply for jobs online and not having digital skills for work

Issues facing employers included:

- Accelerated digitalisation of businesses during Covid-19; businesses needing more digitalisation to survive; difficulty upskilling and recruiting people with the skills needed for now and the future

A survey showed that 25% of learners didn't have a laptop or a PC and 35% didn't have Wi-Fi at home. Learners responded that a laptop or PC would help them (26%), a Wi-Fi connection (24%) and more digital skills (12%).

Scrutiny are supportive of the measures taken by the **Head of Adult Education** and her team in response to the survey results, and the on-going disruption from the pandemic, scrutiny support the implementation of the following:

- Intensive digital skills development frontloaded at the beginning of learning
- An enhanced loan service with over 100 laptops available to loan to students
- A 'dongle/MiFi' service providing internet cards to students with enough connectivity at home.
- 64 laptops have been loaned and 6 MiFi 30GB 'dongles' have been provided to students.

Scrutiny understands that the Service has devised a digital transformation plan to implement changes that will enhance its service to staff and students that will enable the Service to continue to make rapid progress in this area and position it well for the future. Scrutiny will seek to monitor the implementation of this plan.

Workforce Planning, Organisational Development and Digital Inclusion

Scrutiny have sought assurance that future workforce planning includes detailed plans that are clearly aligned with the Council's digital transformation plans in order to ensure there is capacity to meet digital aims. A presentation to the **Our Council Scrutiny Panel** updated councillors on the **Our People Strategy 2019-2024**.

The presentation included the following points in relation to digital and future opportunities for the **Our People Strategy**:

- Move to Provance (Customer Relationship Management system, with improved forms for raising HR queries)
- Agresso/Talentlink integration for an improved service to new entrants to the Council
- Review of all HR forms - move to electronic
- Improved dashboards for HR information including equalities
- Digital inclusion - including ability to engage with employees who do not have corporate access to the network (e.g. HR app)
- Consider use of 'chatbots' for frequently asked HR questions
- External HR website - aimed at candidates who want to work for the Council (including videos/testimonials of our employees, information on staff equality forums etc)

Scrutiny understands that the **Our People Strategy** is due to be refreshed and requests to be involved in this process. It was understood that significant changes in the context the Council was operating in needed to be referenced, including:

- Implications of Covid-19
- Relight Our City
- Equalities
- Apprenticeships including Kick Start
- Health and wellbeing
- Climate change
- Digital
- Refreshed narrative, action plans and performance framework planned – proposal to include on forward plan for future pre-decision scrutiny

Workforce Planning, Organisational Development and Digital Inclusion

As the use of digital increases so does the amount of digital data that the Council and its partners collect and store. Concerns as to how we manage, share and protect this data were considered across many of the panel meetings. Scrutiny recommends that if one is not already in place, that an appropriate data sharing and use policy be developed to detail exactly what data is being collected, where it is collected from, what it will be used for and how or if it will be shared with partners. Scrutiny suggested that consideration be given as to whether an open data sharing arrangement with partners was a viable way forward.

Scrutiny were keen that such a policy should also seek to monitor and record the implementation of Smart technology as it is introduced across the City, and where possible evidence the impact that this technology has had (an example may be where smart street lighting has helped to reduce crime).

Scrutiny considers that any policy relating to data should also be able to show how the data collected is being used to make evidence-based decisions and to help inform future planning. It is recommended that where appropriate, dashboards continue to be developed to enable easy visualisation of the data collected, making it more accessible and able to demonstrate where it has impacted decision making and future planning. Where possible this data should be used to build common solutions that can be reused and shared to create better value for money.

Scrutiny recommend that where data is held on many different legacy systems, work should be undertaken to connect these systems or move to a new more integrated system such as has happened with the move to **ECLIPSE** in **Children's Services**.

Digital and City Environment

Scrutiny was pleased to see and supported the use and continued role out of digital in relation to the following areas **Environmental Maintenance, Waste & Recycling Services, Parks and Open Spaces, Public Protection and Environmental Crime and Bereavement Services.**

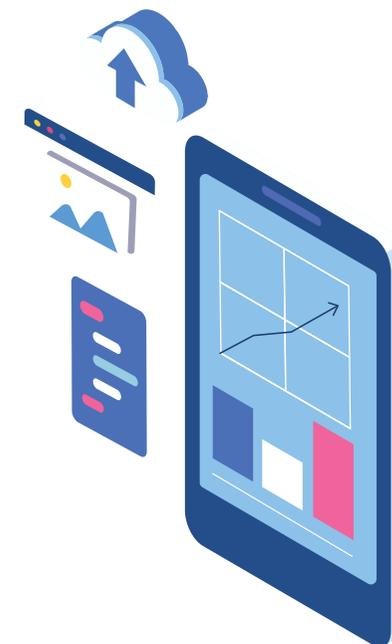
In particular, scrutiny was very impressed with the **Digital Autopsy** programme in Partnership with 'iGene' who provide **Digital Autopsy** facilities in Sandwell on behalf of the **HM Coroner** for the **Black Country** four authority jurisdiction.

Scrutiny understood that a **Digital Autopsy** is a non-invasive post-mortem in which digital imaging technology, with Computerised Tomography (CT) images, are used to develop cross-sectional images for a virtual exploration of a human body. Through Digital Autopsy the need for invasive procedures can be reduced which can help to minimise the pain for bereaved families. Digital Autopsy can establish cause of death in around 75% of all post-mortems ordered by the Coroner. The procedure is conducted by an iGene radiographer and reported by a UK based GMC

registered radiologist on the post-processed CT images of the deceased to produce a radiological interpretation in the form of a Digital Autopsy report that is then sent to the Coroner and their pathologists.

The use of a Digital Autopsy facility is still in its infancy within the UK, but the City of Wolverhampton Council with scrutiny's backing is keen to support the use of the system and save the need for invasive Post Mortems, which are obviously upsetting for families and can ultimately cause delays to funeral services being arranged.

All recommendations in relation to the Connected City theme are attached at Appendix 1



Challenges and Future Direction for Scrutiny

One of the main challenges faced by scrutiny is how to evidence that work carried out has actually had a positive impact or added value to a process under consideration and that items being considered are the right items.

Improvements were made this year which included introducing an overarching theme of **'Connected City'** for all the scrutiny panels. This did help to provide some additional structure and cohesion to scrutiny, but feedback has also suggested that it was too constrictive when considering what items should be brought to scrutiny and did lead to duplication of information across the different panels. One possible option going forward may be to agree on one substantive issue for each panel to consider and to receive updates and to monitor this issue across the year, with informal meetings held in between panel meetings to gather evidence and carry out discussions with relevant officers and partners. Other, appropriate items could also be added to the agendas for panel meetings alongside the substantive items under consideration.

Feedback received from officers and partners has suggested that before an issue is added to a scrutiny agenda, the objectives of the scrutiny should be explicitly agreed and more consideration given as to why a certain issue should come before a scrutiny panel and what answers or solutions scrutiny is seeking that cannot be achieved through a briefing note or informal meeting with a relevant officer or partner.

There should be a focus on establishing scrutiny as a place to which critical local issues can be escalated. These may be complex matters of developing policy, poor performance in a certain area, or worries about future priorities driven by changes in national policy in a given area. Understanding which are the "right" things to escalate depends on a clear understanding of scrutiny's role. Briefing meetings with the Chair, Vice Chair, SEB Lead and Scrutiny Officer should focus on agreeing and designing topics to maximise effect, add clear value and show impact.

**The following should be agreed and documented:**

- The objectives for undertaking the work
- The basics on method - how evidence will be gathered
- The likely, or hoped for, outcomes - what impact will it have or how will it add value?

Reasons for not carrying out a specific piece of work may include:

- It relates to similar review being carried out by the Executive
- It is not happening at the right time. The timescale may be too tight to influence a decision
- It does not relate to an issue on which scrutiny can influence a decision maker. The main issues involved may lie within the purview of central Government, or another partners, to resolve

Once scrutiny has considered an issue (and recommendations have been submitted) the chair, along with other members, and support officers should meet to consider how the work went and how the recommendations or outcomes should be monitored and followed up.

Statement from Julia Cleary (Scrutiny and Systems Manager)



Julia Cleary

I have been immensely proud this year with how the Team have adapted to remote working and have managed to live stream all scrutiny meetings successfully by harnessing all the digital tools available. Since legislation was passed allowing **Virtual Local Government** meetings, we have held a total of **35 Live Public Scrutiny meetings**, with the first one being Scrutiny Board on 16 June 2020 and the rest as follows:

- Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel - five meetings
- Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel - five meetings
- Health Scrutiny Panel - seven meetings
- Our Council Scrutiny Panel - four meetings
- Scrutiny Board - six meetings
- Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel - four meetings
- Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel - four meetings
- Specific Reserves Working Group - one meeting

As we continue to improve and enhance the scrutiny function, it will also be important to consider how we better engage with our citizens, I was especially encouraged to receive the below feedback from a member of the public following a meeting of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel:

“ I’ve just been watching tonight’s scrutiny panel meeting.

I was blown away by the wonderful video that was presented. As a citizen of Wolverhampton, it made me really proud to see the work that you and your colleagues are doing under very difficult circumstances. So good to see the joy on some many faces.

Well done to you all. ”

I would like to thank the Scrutiny and Systems Team for all their extremely hard work during the year, all our colleagues who we have constantly chased for reports, the SEB leads who have provided advice and guidance throughout and of course our Chairs, Vice Chairs and scrutiny councillors.

Appendix 1

1. To continue to communicate a clear digital vision and ambition and to create an innovative and collaborative culture that drives change.
2. To continue to champion and advance an understanding of the potential of people and digital technologies to transform services for citizens.
3. To commit to ensuring that all council members and employees have the right level of digital awareness, expertise and skills to enable the implementation of a successful digital strategy.
4. To continue to identify and mitigate any barriers to the use of smart infrastructure and 5G wireless technology, including the development of non-exclusive wayleave agreements covering residential estates, the standardisation of procedures and guidance, and principles for commercial providers.
5. To ensure that unless there are extenuating circumstances, all new developments should have access to full fibre broadband.
6. To establish a baseline for a minimum digital living standard based on an agreed definition of what it means to be digitally included and that all devices and connectivity provided should reflect the specific needs of the individual or particular group. In agreeing a base line consultation should take place with our citizens and in particular those with lived experience of digital exclusion.
7. To continue to explore the use of personal budgets, disabled facilities grants and other options for access to devices and connectivity and that the Wolverhampton Assisted Technology Strategy be brought to a future meeting of Scrutiny for consideration.
8. To ensure that any guidance developed be available in different formats that reflect the rich make up of our City.
9. To see the City of Wolverhampton become a Community of Providers by continuing to encourage and support public provision of digital access in public and community spaces and through doing this to provide a safety net to those who need it.
10. To ensure that any citizen of any age who is learning (school, FE, HE, apprentice, other) be guaranteed access to a suitable, connected device and the skills to use the device.
11. To put in place an appropriate data sharing and use policy, detailing exactly what data is being collected, where it is collected from, what it will be used for and how or if it will be shared with partners.
12. To ensure that where data is held on many different legacy systems, work is being undertaken to connect these systems or to move to a new more integrated system.
13. To support the further use of the Digital Autopsy system and save the need for invasive Post Mortems, which are obviously upsetting for families and can ultimately cause delays to funeral services being arranged.

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