

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Paul Sweet (Chair)
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Simon Bennett
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Ellis Turrell (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN
Cllr Louise Miles
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Senior Governance Manager)
Charlotte Johns (Director of Strategy)
Sarah Campbell (Customer Engagement Manager) (Via MS Teams)
Julia Cleary (Scrutiny and Systems Manager)
Kim Reynolds (Business Improvement Manager)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies for absence**

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Phil Bateman MBE.

2 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Quarter 3 Social Care, Public Health, Corporate Complaints & Compliments Report 2021-2022**

The Customer Engagement Manager gave a presentation on Quarter 3 Social Care, Public Health, Corporate Complaints and Compliments.

A Panel Member raised a matter regarding the issuing of Blue Badges and in particular the renewal of Blue Badges. A renewal request had recently been refused

because the Council wanted more detail from Medical Consultants letters about the individual concerned. Another person had been declined a Blue Badge as the Occupational Therapist had said they could use a mobile Chair. She objected to the way the letters had been written. She was aware of four cases where it had taken over 40 minutes for the Council to answer calls from member of the public. She believed this to be poor customer service, which required improvement. Another Panel Member spoke about the inconsistency, in her opinion, of how Blue Badges had been issued in the past. There was a further question regarding whether the Occupational Therapists the Council used were NHS or from a private company.

A Panel Member raised a concern that she was aware of a case where the Council had asked for payment details over the phone for a Blue Badge. She had thought this was a scam and expressed concern about the practice.

The Director of Strategy responded that they were in the process of completing a deep dive on the issue of Blue Badges and were gathering data. She suggested that Blue Badges could be added as a future item for Scrutiny Board or as an item for the Resources and Equalities Scrutiny Panel, where answers to all the questions raised would be included.

A Panel Member stated the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel had received a report on Blue Badges at his request in March 2019. A further briefing note update had been given in January 2020 on the outcomes of the review. He suggested that any report on Blue Badges in the future should consider the earlier reports to Scrutiny so any changes could be seen.

A Panel Member praised the ratio of compliments to complaints as detailed in the presentation slides. He asked for the average time it took for a member of the public to speak to someone from Customer Services. He was aware of residents who had tried to call the Council to complain but had hung up the call due to their call not being answered and so instead went to him directly. He asked how a complaint was defined by the Council. In addition, he asked if the figures in the report incorporated the issues which Councillors raised through the Portal.

The Customer Engagement Manager responded that there were various ways a Customer could log their complaint. The options were telephone, via letter, via an online form, via email or face-to-face. The Complaints team were within the Information Governance Department and had been since 2019, when they moved from the Customer Services Team. They met with the Waste Team regularly for Waste Liaison meetings to try and help reduce complaint numbers. Councillor enquiries raised were not included within the figures for the complaints report, that was a separate function. If a customer was receiving a service which they were unhappy with and especially if it was repeated, then it would be defined as a complaint. Using waste as an example if a member of the public was continually not having their bin emptied then it would be classed as a complaint. If it was a one-off incident, it would be classed as a service request and be resolved.

A Panel Member asked if there had been a significant increase in phone calls to the Council as a result of Covid and how the situation looked at the present time. The Director of Strategy responded that call data could be included as part of a performance report to Scrutiny in the future.

The Vice-Chair stated that there had been 334 informal complaints within a 3 month period according to the report. There had also been an increase in the stage two corporate complaints compared to the previous year, which was regrettable. He was particularly concerned about complaints relating to waste management, which was always the highest area for complaints. The average response time had gone up from 13 days to 15 days and consequently the Council had not reached its target of a 95% response rate within 21 calendar days. He stressed that some people did not complain or gave up due to waiting time on the phone.

The Customer Engagement Manager remarked that some of the informal complaints did not come under the jurisdiction of the Council, but they were logged and then the Customer was signposted. There had been 7 Stage two Corporate complaints in the period covered in the report in comparison to the 5 in the previous year timeframe. On the annual figures they had increased to 20 from 18. Waste complaints had always been historically high, but they were working with the waste service to try and reduce them. Waste complaints had decreased from the previous year. Due to the complexity of some complaints, sometimes Officers needed longer than 21 days to investigate and hence why sometimes the response to complaints target was sometimes missed.

Some Panel Members expressed their dissatisfaction that Councillor enquiries, particularly where the Councillor had said it should be treated as a complaint, were not included in the overall figures in the quarterly Social Care, Public Health, Corporate Complaints report. The Director of Strategy responded that feedback would be given to the CEU (Councillor Enquiries Unit).

5 **Select Committee Report: The Wolverhampton Pound**

Cllr Susan Roberts, the Chair of the Select Committee on the Wolverhampton Pound gave an opening statement on the report produced by the Select Committee. She stated that times had changed in Local Government and new approaches were needed more than ever before to help Level-Up the most deprived communities and support the City's vulnerable citizens. The local economy needed to be rejuvenated and local businesses supported. The City needed a thriving voluntary and community sector. The Wolverhampton Pound was a new approach which would help the Council achieve its aims. With the Council working with large partner institutions to share resources and knowledge, they hoped to deliver an additional £21.8 million per year and create 430 jobs per year.

The Chair of the Select Committee stated that working with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) and other major stakeholders in the City, the City of Wolverhampton Council had developed an approach which would reorganise and support the local economy. The aim of the strategy was to ensure that wealth was not taken out of the City but kept within. They wanted to see local roots, where income was recirculated, communities were put first, and where the people of Wolverhampton were provided with opportunities, dignity and well-being.

The Chair of the Select Committee remarked that the Wolverhampton Pound and in particular the move of the procurement function to a more strategic level with a renewed focus on social value, would enable better identification of priority areas in Wolverhampton communities. By embracing the Wolverhampton Pound, the Council

could enable not only economic recovery but also support the health and wellbeing of Wolverhampton's most in need communities and sectors.

The Chair of the Select Committee thanked all the organisations and groups who gave up their time to provide the Committee with the information contained within the report. They had heard evidence from CLES, partner organisations, Voluntary and Community sector representatives, local businesses, service providers and internal Council departments. The report provided a summary of the evidence sessions and a set of recommendations which the Committee considered important for the implementation and success of the Wolverhampton Pound.

The Scrutiny and Systems Manager and Business Improvement Manager displayed a slide which showed the 20 recommendations from the Select Committee report. There were a number of recommendations relating to: -

- Skills, Training and Resource Management
- Recruitment
- Communication and Collaboration
- Procurement and Contract Management
- Ongoing Monitoring of Processes

Panel Members thanked the Officers and Members who were involved in the Select Committee. A Panel Member asked for timings against the recommendations. She thought a definitive time link would be very valuable and this would help with determining priorities.

The Vice-Chair commented on the importance of small businesses having the same opportunities as larger businesses in the procurement process. As per the recommendations there were steps which could be taken to improve communication with small businesses in the City. He wanted to ensure that everything the Council did was value for money. Sometimes contracts could go very wrong, he cited the market relocation, the Civic Halls and potentially West Side as examples. He highlighted recommendation number 15 within the report, which he believed to be of high importance. He thought it was important that the Wolverhampton Pound work was regularly scrutinised. He thanked the Chair of the Select Committee and all the Members for their efforts.

A Panel Member agreed with the intent of the Wolverhampton Pound strategy, which was to keep money in the local economy. He thought achieving success would be harder. There wasn't a large amount of big businesses in Wolverhampton with infrastructure and resources to succeed in procurement processes. He raised the idea of asking larger national businesses to engage with local smaller businesses for their services as part of the contract conditions.

A Panel Member referred to recommendation 17 within the Select Committee report. Smaller business did not have the resources to complete the bureaucratic tender documentation, whereas larger businesses did.

A Panel Member requested that when the recommendations were evaluated in the future, that the businesses which were engaged with as part of the process were also included.

The Chair of Scrutiny Board congratulated the Members and Officers who had produced the Select Committee report on the Wolverhampton Pound.

The Scrutiny and Systems Manager advised the report had to be received by Cabinet next and Cabinet could suggest timescales for the recommendations.

RESOLVED: That Scrutiny Board endorse the recommendations in the action plan attached at Appendix 2 to the main report, prior to consideration by Cabinet on 6 July 2022.

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Date of next meeting

The date of the next scheduled meeting was reported as Tuesday, 6 September 2022 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 7:16pm.

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