

SCRUTINY

Annual Report 2021 / 2022

A Year in Scrutiny May 2021–May 2022

I'm sure Members would join with me in welcoming a return to in person meetings in the Municipal Year 2021-2022. The Council Chamber was used for nearly all the Scrutiny meetings. All the Scrutiny Public meetings, held in the Chamber, were webcast. This has brought a greater deal of public awareness to the work of Scrutiny and the work of Scrutiny Panels has regularly featured in the media. What was particularly striking in this Municipal year was the vast range of items covered by the six Scrutiny Panels and Board. A total of 40 Scrutiny Public meetings were held during the Municipal Year. I would like to pay tribute to all the employees involved in facilitating every one of these meetings with particular thanks to the Officers in the Scrutiny Team.



Cllr Paul Sweet
Chair of Scrutiny Board, 2021/2022

Stronger City Economy

Chair: Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Vice-Chair: Cllr Christopher Haynes



The Municipal year started with a question and answer session with the Portfolio Holder for Inclusive City Economy, Cllr Stephen Simkins. Members asked a wide range of questions and received responses from the Cabinet Member. This session helped to shape the work programme for the year ahead.

The October 2021 meeting saw a focus on the Culture, Creative and Visitor Economy. The final meeting of the year focused on jobs, skills and learning opportunities.

Reflecting on the Municipal Year, the Chair, Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman said, *“For the 2021-2022, Municipal Year the Panel chose to look at particular subjects in depth and reduced the number of items on each agenda. It meant the Panel were really able to delve into the subject matter, all of which were vitally important to the City. A focus on strategy in all the areas*

considered was the key to unlocking how the Council can improve performance and consequently improve the lives of the residents of Wolverhampton and the people who work and visit the City. A great emphasis was placed on the importance of pre-decision scrutiny. This meant the Panel could have as much impact on policy as possible at an early stage and to act as a critical friend.”

Our Council

Chair: Cllr Zee Russell
Vice-Chair: Cllr Udey Singh



The issues of equality, diversity and inclusion and the Council’s role in championing them falls within the remit of the Panel and has been a regular agenda item during the year, reflecting the importance of the issue. The Panel wanted to see evidence of work being done to build on past achievements. The Panel discussed in detail the draft Council’s Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy which was presented by the Director of Governance and the Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion. It was very helpful to have the opportunity to hear directly from the Chairs of the different staff equality forums of their experiences, both good and bad. The Panel asked the representatives directly for their ideas of

the changes they would like to see in the strategy. The Panel supported their ideas for improvements that could be made to the draft policy.

The Panel valued the opportunity to listen directly to employees and were reassured about the importance given to improving equalities practice across the Council and the support given by senior managers to delivering the priorities in the strategy.

A highlight from the Panel's work programme was a presentation detailing the Council's approach to managing strategic risks around the issue of cyber security, such as ransomware, during the pandemic targeted at private and public sector organisations with the sudden switch to remote working. The Panel were reassured about the action being taken by the Council to make changes that would prevent or lessen the impact of the increased number of cyber-attacks on the network during this period.

The Panel discussed the future challenges to the security of the network and were given details about the cybersecurity framework which details further action planned to protect it. This work would be supported by annual external audit from the National Cyber Security Centre and the Public Services Network review the strength of the current measures.

The Panel highlighted the important role of employee's in helping to protect the network from potential cyber-attacks and welcomed the mandatory training and supporting guidance aimed at reducing the risks with the majority continuing to work remotely.

Chair, Cllr Zee Russell said, "I really welcome the changes being made, big and small, in promoting and implementing policies that support greater inclusion and equality of opportunities for underrepresented groups across the Council and the wider community. It is important to build on good work done so far. I really welcome the work done to promote the Council as being an attractive employer and planned consultation on plans for developing a Rainbow City, which I think will make a real positive difference to people's lives now and in the future."

Children, Young People & Families

Chair: Cllr Rita Potter

Vice-Chair: Cllr Adam Collinge



The outcomes and lessons learnt from the Yo! The Panel welcomed the commitment from the Head of Service to providing activities and opportunities for all children and young people in the future. The Panel also welcomed plans to encourage and support more local youth activity providers to bid for grant funding, particularly in areas with more limited leisure offer.

The Panel talked about the current community and leisure offer to parents of children with SEND and welcomed efforts to involve, Members of *Voice4Parents – Wolverhampton’s Parent Carer Forum*, in developing the programme of holiday activities.

The Executive Director of Families reassured the Panel of the Council’s commitment to the programme and highlighted plans to providing support activities, such as targeted and detached youth work in the future.

Councillors were encouraged to get involved in developing the programme of holiday activities and refer local groups to contact the service about getting publicity about their projects and to apply for funding to help fill gaps in provision.

In preparation for a report to the Panel on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Wolverhampton members visited Green Park Special School in the October. The Panel met with the Headteacher and talked to pupils during the tour of school facilities and were very impressed with what they saw and heard. The visit was very helpful for the Panel in understanding the challenges experienced by the school in trying to meet the needs of children and families during the pandemic.

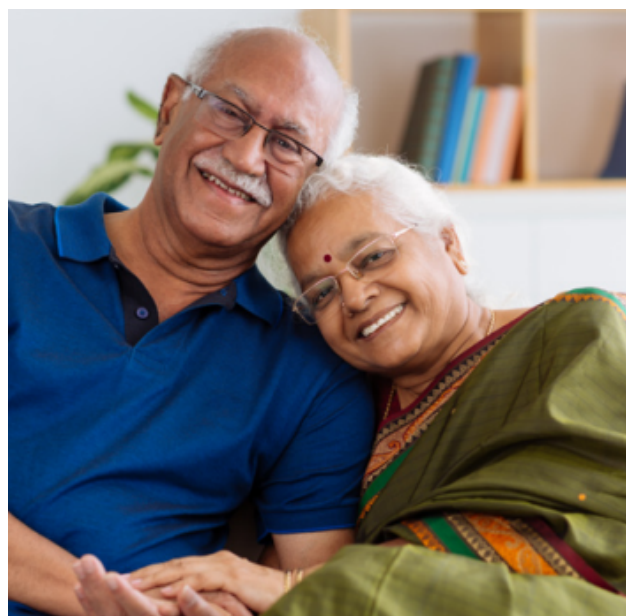
Chair, Cllr Rita Potter said, *“As Chair I think it is important for Panel Members to see for themselves sites delivering services to the children and young people of Wolverhampton, to reassure themselves about the standard of provision and also to speak directly to young people about the experiences. A*

visit was arranged to The Way in October 2021 to see the facilities on offer and the support given children and young people with special needs. The meeting also provided a good opportunity to speak the Chief Executive to encourage more children from across the City following the pandemic to take advantages of the fantastic range of learning and sports facilities on offer. The meeting was also an opportunity to raise concerns from parents about reports of poor behaviour at the facility and welcomed the plans in place to offer reassurance to parents and young people.

Adults and Safer City

Chair: Cllr Val Evans

Vice-Chair: Cllr Sohail Khan



The Panel considered and commented on the draft Safer Wolverhampton Partnership (SWP) Board annual report before it was presented to the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership Board meeting for approval. The discussion focused on the issue of increasing numbers of domestic violence cases

particularly throughout the pandemic at a meeting in October 2021. The Panel had a detailed presentation from the West Midlands Police about the factors which have contributed to the increase.

The Panel talked in detail about the actions being taken to address the issue and welcomed work being planned to improve the quality of the data, as there were concerns about the integrity of the data as some reported incidents of harassment and stalking had not been properly recorded in the Police's overall figures for recording domestic abuse incidents.

The Panel welcomed plans to refresh the Interpersonal Violence Strategy in March 2022 and priorities for action. The Panel supported the view of the importance of agencies intervening as early as possible if children see or are involved in domestic violence incidents. The Panel recommended the Board to consider and respond to the findings LGIU briefing paper -Violence against women and girls – report of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary.

The Chair, Cllr Valerie Evans stated, *“the most important thing to the Adults and Fulfilled Lives Scrutiny Panel was the Pandemic and what was happening with vaccine and our older people that lived in homes. It was important that we were kept up to date with the roll out of the vaccine for our older people and our staff. We also invited a Chief Inspector of West Midlands Police who talked about violence against women and children. We found out that due to the lockdown that domestic violence had risen during that time. During the lockdown it was hard to keep people in touch with each other. The Council had worked with older people keeping them*

in contact with each other and Doctors; and groups they could attend using technology.”

Vibrant & Sustainable City

Chair: Barbara McGarrity QN

Vice-Chair: Cllr Paul Appleby



The new Municipal year began with a focus on housing with three items on the agenda for the first meeting. The Wolverhampton Homes Delivery Plan / Performance, an update on the roll out of the new Housing Allocation Policy, and the Housing Strategy alongside housing priorities were all considered by the Panel.

The October meeting of the Panel saw a review of the Climate Change Action Plan. The second item was on the abandoned vehicle process. These items helped to demonstrate the diversity of the Panel's remit and with reference to the Climate Change item, how it sometimes considers important matters at a local, regional, national and international level.

The final meeting of the Municipal year saw items on the West Midlands Local Transport Plan Core Engagement and the future plans for Arbour Services at the Council. The Transport Plan item was a good example of the West

Midlands Combined Authority engaging directly with a Scrutiny Panel to obtain their views. Trees is often at the top of Members constituent enquiries and so the item was well received.

Reflecting on the Municipal Year, the Chair, Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN remarked, *“I Chair, the Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel which has such a diverse remit. Throughout the year, the Panel considered some really important areas, which impact on our residents directly, such as Housing, Transport and Trees. I like to think that the Panel have significantly impacted on policy formulation at a local and regional level.”*

Health Scrutiny Panel

Chair: Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Vice-Chair: Cllr Paul Singh



The first meeting of the Municipal year started out with the Panel scrutinising the Wolverhampton Covid 19 Outbreak Control Plan refresh, the Public Health Annual Report 2020-2021 and the Healthwatch Pre-Tender Engagement Activity. A Special meeting was called in July 2021 to consider the proposal to merge Urology Services at the Royal

Wolverhampton NHS Trust with the Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust. The Panel made a number of recommendations regarding the proposal, all of which are recorded in the minutes for the item.

In October 2021, the Panel gave in depth consideration to the Healthwatch Annual Report 2020-2021 and the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust Quality Accounts. A report on Primary Care was received which was followed by a question and answer session on this very important area for Wolverhampton residents. The Panel concluded that a special dedicated meeting on Primary Care needed to be held, which was subsequently scheduled for the December. The Panel commissioned Healthwatch to carry out a telephone survey with each of the GP Practices in Wolverhampton. This data was reviewed at the Special meeting in December leading to further recommendations from the Panel on the matter of Primary Care.

In February 2022, the Panel received a monitoring report on the merger of Urology Services, a report from the Alzheimer’s Society on Dementia, and a report from RWT on Digitally Enabled Primary Care.

Reflecting on the Municipal Year, the Chair, Cllr Susan Roberts MBE said, *“The Municipal Year 2021-2022 had a particular focus on Primary Care for the Health Scrutiny Panel. This is such an important area for the residents of Wolverhampton. I was especially pleased to shine a light on this topic and that the Panel made productive and important recommendations to health partners, in a time of great change in how the health system operates.”*

Scrutiny Board

Chair: Cllr Paul Sweet

Vice-Chair: Cllr Simon Bennett



Throughout the Municipal year, the Scrutiny Board considered the Corporate Complaints reports. At the meeting in September the Board looked at the important matter of Private Sector Housing Standards with a particular emphasis on Category One Hazards. Items on Customer Contact, Rainbow City and British Art Show 9 featured at the December meeting. The February 2022 meeting considered the Financial Inclusion Strategy – Engagement and Consultation, and the Council Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Performance Framework.

In March two meetings were held. The first one was a one item agenda on the Financial Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2025. The second meeting in March featured a fascinating item on the Economics of the Black Country and Wolverhampton, where Sarah Middleton, Chief Executive, Black Country Consortium Ltd and Professor Delma Dwight, Director of Black Country Economic Intelligence Unit, Black Country Consortium Ltd and Director of Midlands Engine Observatory presented to Board.

The meeting also had an item on Social Housing Consumer Standards.

Select Committee: Wolverhampton Pound

Chair: Cllr Susan Roberts MBE

Vice-Chair, Cllr Paul Appleby

Eight Select Committee style meetings on the subject of the Wolverhampton Pound took place between November 2021 and February 2022. They had been tasked with considering two questions,

‘How do we engage with local businesses and the community and voluntary sector in relation to procurement, contract management and commissioning and how do we ensure inclusivity, equality and value for money in these approaches?’

‘How do we engage with partners, local businesses and the community and voluntary sector to make the City a catalyst for change by ensuring that all contracts reflect our values in areas such as climate change, equality, diversity and inclusion, retaining and growing local wealth and having a real presence in the City?’

The Select Committee made a total of 20 recommendations, which will be monitored by Scrutiny Board and the Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel.

Useful links and documents:

- [City of Wolverhampton Council Website](#)
- [Forward Plan](#)
- [Centre for Public Scrutiny](#)
- [Statutory Guidance for Overview and Scrutiny](#)
- [City of Wolverhampton Constitution](#)
- [Minutes and Agendas](#)
- [Petitions](#)
- [Consultations](#)
- [Code of Conduct](#)