

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Philip Bateman MBE (Chair)
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Simon Bennett
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Cllr Ellis Turrell (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Anwen Muston
Cllr Gillian Wildman (Substitute)
Cllr Zee Russell (Substitute)
Cllr Sally Green (Substitute)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Scrutiny Team Leader)
Claire Nye (Director of Finance)
Charlotte Johns (Director of Strategy)
Ian Fegan (Director of Vibrant City)
Richard Wyatt (Head of Communications)
Louise West (Strategic Lead Wolverhampton Pound)
Parvinder Uppal (Head of Commercial)
John Thompson (Head of Procurement)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies for absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman, Cllr John Reynolds, Cllr Rita Potter, Cllr Barbara McGarrity and Cllr Jas Dehar.

Cllr Zee Russell substituted for Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman.

Cllr Sally Green substituted for Cllr John Reynolds.

Cllr Gillian Wildman substituted for Cllr Jas Dehar.

2 **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Susan Roberts MBE declared a non-pecuniary interest on the Wolverhampton Pound item as she was on the Board for Wolverhampton Homes.

Cllr Zee Russell declared a non-pecuniary interest on the Wolverhampton Pound item as she was on the Board for Wolverhampton Homes.

3 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 September 2023**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 October 2023**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair stated that he had received a response to his question on housing supply in Wolverhampton, which he had raised at the October meeting of the Board. As of 2022, the breakdown of housing supply in Wolverhampton for the period 2022-41 as of 2022 was as follows:-

	Total net homes	Number of sites
Sites under construction	1,242	14
Sites with planning permission (not started)	2,902	309
Sites allocated in Local Plan / other	2,804	37
Windfalls – anticipated new homes likely to come forward on currently unidentified sites in the future, based on a continuation of past trends	2,628	NA
Total	9,576	360

5 **Wolverhampton Pound**

The Director of Strategy introduced a presentation on the Wolverhampton Pound. A copy of the presentation is attached to the signed minutes.

The Vice-Chair commented that he was keen to know where the Council had awarded contracts to local businesses. He was still seeing incidences where he questioned why a contract had not been awarded to a local company. He cited transport to Aldersley Leisure Village for the Grand Slam of Darts event. He believed the company being used was one based in Warwickshire. He questioned why this was the case. The Director of Vibrant City said he would look into the matter and respond to the Member with the answer.

The Director of Finance stated that they had made a number of changes to the procurement process. They had introduced new rules about obtain obtaining the number of quotes that had to be obtained and locally wherever possible. They had moved away from frameworks wherever possible and had moved to open tender

processes. Officers were happy to provide examples back to Board Members on where they had done things differently resulting in more local spend.

The Chair asked if the process mapping which had been completed had alerted them to any issues. The Head of Procurement referred to the new Procurement Act and the fact that this may require some changes in processes, more would be known over the coming months.

A Member stated that a tremendous amount of work had taken place, she realised there was further work to do in the future. Her main concern was about smaller businesses and whether they were receiving the support to bid for contracts. The Director of Strategy referred to the Business Support Offer, which would be received by the Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel in the future.

The Chair referred to the exciting potential of the Wolverhampton Pound work at an interesting time for the City.

6 **Our Approach to Communications**

The Director of Vibrant City introduced a presentation on the Council's approach to Communications. The Head of Communications presented the slides. A copy of the presentation is attached to the signed minutes.

A Panel Member commented that they felt the Council needed to do more to promote partners such as The Grand and the events taking place at the Civic Halls. Thousands of people subscribed to the Wolverhampton Today Facebook page. They also felt promoting voluntary sector events was important.

The Head of Communications commented that the Council did promote the work of the Halls. He cited other examples of promotion such as the Arts Festival and Food Market. He agreed that where appropriate the Council should work to promote the voluntary sector more.

The Vice-Chair did not like the use of the word influence as part of the Communications Team's role. He felt to inform was more the purpose rather than influencing. He did feel that sometimes the full story was not relayed such as what the Opposition had stated at Full Council on important topics. He sought clarity on the Communications Budget. He asked for a Departmental Chart for the 12 people in the Communications Team including the role each person had allocated. He asked whether the Council needed a Head of Communications and a Director of Communications.

The Vice-Chair felt the Council promoted partners too much and did not see it as the Council's role to promote others. He stressed the need for the Communications Team to promote the work of the Scrutiny function in accordance with the Statutory Scrutiny Guidance. Meetings were not being advertised and therefore residents did not know of the work taking place.

The Director of Vibrant City stated the word influence was taken from CIPR (Chartered Institute of Public Relations) definition, it could be quite easily changed to change behaviour which was a fundamental part of communications. He was keen to promote the City. The overall budget of £2.4 million for the Directorate included

Communications, Arts and Culture and City Events. The Communications Team in terms of numbers was very comparable with other Local Authorities in the area, such as Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Solihull. He stressed the importance of Communications Teams in the public sector, and this was highlighted during the Covid pandemic, where it had been essential. He was happy to look into what more the Council could do to promote the Scrutiny function.

A Panel Member asked whether residents would feel £600,000 was good value for the service they received from the Communications Team, particularly those who did not use digital media. He asked about the brands the Council used and any costs for trademark and copyright. He asked about the relationships the Council had with media outlets such as the Express and Star and how they managed the relationships.

The Director of Vibrant City commented that the Council did not incur massive costs on trademark or branding. The relationship with the Express and Star was a professional relationship. They worked closely with the journalists and sometimes robust conversations were had when there was disagreement. They worked hard each day to promote the work of the Council.

A Panel Member asked about the colour scheme that had been used for the Voter ID campaign. She stated that purple background was not very good for people with a visual impairment. The Director responded that the Council had chosen the national artwork from the Government which had been provided and this was due to the short timescales.

A Panel Member asked if Councillors social media was monitored by Council Officers. In response it was confirmed by the Head of Communications that Councillors social media was not monitored by the Communications Team.

A Panel Member asked how often the Council complained to the Express and Star about articles. She believed that the Council challenged the Express and Star frequently, citing almost every day. The Head of Communications responded that when information was unfair or not accurate, then it would be challenged, but this was not on a frequent basis. The Council tried to encourage a balanced story.

The Panel Member felt the Council had a very close relationship with the BBC, with members of the Communication Team being on first name terms and frequent interaction. The Head of Communications commented that the relationship was professional, they did aspire to TV coverage as it was great for promoting the City at a regional level. They had a positive relationship with the BBC.

The Vice-Chair asked for the cost of a “wrap around piece” in the Express and Star Newspaper. The Chair asked for it to be for the last two occasions, including the date and the nature of the piece.

The Chair gave praise to the Communication Team in their efforts to ensure the Council was seen in a positive way and that the relationship was defended. He liked the work the team were doing on digital communications. He praised the work completed on the Voter ID campaign, as only 55 people had been unable to vote in the May 2023 Local Government elections in Wolverhampton. Members of the Council on their own social media had also stressed the need for Voter ID using the

material provided by the Communications Team. He gave praise to the Better Health Rewards scheme promotion which had a substantial impact on people's lives in the City. The figures for digital campaigns were impressive but he added they could be bettered. He did align himself with the Vice-Chair on the point of promoting Scrutiny more and how residents could understand more about the function. He knew digital communications worked. Working in partnership he saw as an important role for the Communications Team.

The Chair asked what was the weakest area of the organisation and what was it that stopped them being able to deliver everything they wanted. The Director of Vibrant City responded the growth in digital communications had been exponential in the last decade. Opportunities were probably being missed on other channels such as TikTok, What's App and Snap Chat. Social media was a 24/7 domain. They did not have the resources to be able to utilise all social media effectively.

The Vice-Chair asked how often over the last five years has the Council sought external advice on communication matters and the cost involved. The Director of Vibrant City promised to check and provide a written response to Board Members.

The Chair asked if an Annual Report on the work of the Communications Team could come before the Board in the future. This report could incorporate some of the answers to points that had been raised during the meeting and any data could be compared in future years with the previous Annual Report.

A Panel Member asked for raw data of communication campaigns showing how successful they had been. He asked for this to be last year's and to clearly show the outputs. They also asked whether the Council paid for any advertising and its' nature, including any on Facebook. The Director responded that they did spend some money on advertising such as statutory notices and campaigns such as fostering. He was happy to bring some more information to the Board on outputs for campaigns in the future.

7 **Scrutiny Work programme**

The Scrutiny Team Leader reported that the Quarter 2, Budget and Performance report would be received by Scrutiny Board in December 2023 rather than in the new Calendar year.

Wolverhampton Speedway had been added to the agenda for the Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel at the meeting scheduled for 7 February 2024, since the document had been despatched.

The Virtual School Head Annual Report had been added to the agenda for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel meeting on 31 January 2024 since the document had been despatched.

For the Scrutiny Board meeting on 12 December 2023, there would be two reports from the WMCA. The Chief Executive of the WMCA intended to be present for the items. One of the reports would be the Annual Scrutiny Report, the other would be a report on the WMCA's work in Wolverhampton.

8 **Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

There were no comments on the Forward Plan of Key Decisions from Members.

The meeting closed at 8:04pm.