

Minutes Extract – Performance, Budget Monitoring and MTF5 Item Health Scrutiny Panel 14 December 2023

The Finance Business Partner set out the draft budget statement in the presentation (a copy of the presentation is attached in the signed minutes). The Council had a forecasted budget deficit of £16.4 million in 2024-2025 rising to £23.1 million across 2025-2026 announced in March 2023. Work had been undertaken by the Council to reduce the deficit, with the budget deficit updated in October, projected to be £2.6 million across 2024-2025. Work was still being undertaken to further reduce the deficit and create a balanced budget for the future. Economic uncertainties were: future funding, inflationary pressures, demand for services and future pay awards. Public Health Services were fully funded by a grant, the Public Health grant for 2023–2024 was £22.5 million.

The Director of Public Health stated that their performance was updated annually and results were published on the Public Health Outcomes Framework for viewing. Since the previous publication the Council had improved and demonstrated strong performance in the areas of NHS health checks for 40 to 74 year olds and alcohol mortality levels. He stated that recent data released showed that the Wolverhampton City population had moved from being one of the least physically active groups in the country to 61st most active in the country. He said he felt this was a result of the targeted work they had done. Data on domestic abuse was West Midlands wide and not Wolverhampton specific. The data showed that domestic abuse in the West Midlands had increased, although this may not have been because of a change in the amount of domestic abuse levels and may have reflected higher levels of reporting by victims. The City of Wolverhampton had some of the lowest suicide rates in the country. Notification had been received in December 2023 of an indicative allocation of the Public Health Grant 2024-2025, totalling at £22,758,935, an increase of 1.3%. Indicative funding of only one year impacted upon long term planning. The Strategic Risk Register relevant to the Panel listed: Asylum seekers and refugees, impact of future pandemics, climate change, financial wellbeing and resilience.

The Vice Chair thanked the Director of Public Health for the report, he was pleased suicide rates were lower in the area and hoped for further improvements to prevent loss of life. He was hoping to see domestic abuse decrease. He asked for clarification around the listing of asylum seekers and refugees in the risks area.

The Director of Public Health stated that the demography of the City had massively changed and that when listing asylum seekers and refugees, it meant the challenge of knowing who was living in the area and what their needs were. He said it was important to capture the City's changing demography to allow them to ensure they met the needs of those living in the area.

A Councillor asked the Director of Public Health to note that some services were statutory and none-statutory. With public funding pressures and tackling the deficit being an area of priority, he stated it would be prudent to take note of those functions

which were statutory and had to be carried out, as the ones that were not always had a level of risk of being cut depending on decisions made at full Council.

A Member of the Panel cited a recent event she had been to, which raised awareness of domestic abuse and the services available for different communities and genders. She stated that one of the services was a Sikh Women's Aid service based in Birmingham, but a report showed the majority of people who were Punjabi speaking that used the service were from Wolverhampton. A representative from the organisation had spoken to the Panel member to express interest in wanting to work with the City of Wolverhampton Council to locate services in the local area; the Councillor stated she would like to sign post that representative to the Director of Public Health.

The Director of Public Health said he would welcome the report. A Councillor added that when he last checked data for Wolverhampton, it had the 2nd largest Sikh population in the country.

A Councillor asked what could be achieved if the Council had a grant indicator of 5 years, rather than a year, for planning.

The Director of Public Health said it would allow for greater certainty and in areas like the charity and voluntary sector when they worked in partnership with Public Health, it allowed them to know their contracts were longer and more secure, thus providing job stability, benefitting mental well being and the local economy.

A Member of the Panel stated that the need for services was so high in the City and yet the resources available to fund services so few. She said she would not like to see none-statutory services cut and they were beneficial to the people of the City.