

Scrutiny Board

Minutes - 6 February 2024

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 Barbara McGarrity QN
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Sally Green

In Attendance

Cllr Louise Miles (Cabinet Member for Resources)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Scrutiny Team Leader)
Tim Johnson (Chief Executive)
David Pattison (Chief Operating Officer)
James Howse (Director of Finance)
Alison Shannon (Deputy Director of Finance)
Laura Collings (Head of Policy and Strategy)
James Amphlett (Head of Data and Analytics)
Earl Piggott-Smith (Scrutiny Officer)
Lee Booker (Scrutiny Officer)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence and Substitutions**
An apology for absence was received from Cllr Anwen Muston.

Cllr Sally Green substituted for Cllr Anwen Muston.
- 2 Declarations of interest**
The Chair, Cllr Phil Bateman MBE declared a non-pecuniary interest on item 4 - Our City: Our Plan Refresh 2024-2025, and Performance, Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy, as a Member of the Birmingham International Airport Board. He also

declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chair of Governors at Ashmore Park and Phoenix Nursery School.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (12 December 2023)**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Our City: Our Plan Refresh 2024-2025, and Budget, Performance and Medium Term Financial Strategy**

The Head of Policy and Strategy and the Head of Data and Analytics presented on the Our City: Our Plan Refresh 2024-2025. The Director of Finance and the Deputy Director of Finance presented on the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. A copy of the presentation is attached to the signed minutes.

The Head of Policy and Strategy commented that the item was before Board Members as Pre—decision Scrutiny ahead of Cabinet on 21 February 2024.

The Vice-Chair commented that it was hard to disagree with the contents of the Our City: Our Plan Refresh 2024-2025. It was evident that there was much work left to do in Wolverhampton with many people being out of work and the need to ensure people had the right skills to obtain good jobs. He commented that as part of the Government's Local Government settlement, Wolverhampton had received a £21.6 million increase to the core spending power. This equated to a 7.2% increase which was above inflation and therefore the increase should be welcomed. He looked forward to this being factored into the final budget. He asked about the plan for the earmarked reserves over the next financial year.

A Member of the Board ask how much the Council was exposed to risk as a use of derivative instruments. His second question was on how the Council calculated bank counterparty risk. His final question was how exposed in pound terms was the Council to a further 1% rise in bank rate.

The Director of Resources responded that in the Full Council budget report, there would be an assurance given on the adequacy of the reserves. On the questions relating to derivatives and bank counterparty risk, he promised to respond to Board Members in writing so a full technical response could be given.

A Board Member commented that the plan referred to a priority of Wulfriens living longer healthy lives, she asked what this was being compared to. The Head of Policy and Strategy responded that they compared it to benchmark data and hoped to see improvement in the performance indicators.

A Board Member referred to the Public Health Annual Report, she felt the most current report did not have all the ward level data that it used to contain. She emphasised the importance of data on unemployment, skill levels and health statistics. The Chief Operating responded that he agreed with the importance of data. The Health Scrutiny Panel received a report at their December meeting with the Public Health Annual report which did contain some important Ward data. He

said he would circulate the document to Board Members. The Board Member commented that the Public Health Annual report did not contain the information it had in the past such as on housing and skills. The Chief Operating Officer referred to WV Insight which was available to Councillors and the Public, which contained substantial information including a Ward Data Dashboard. He said he would circulate the link to the Dashboard again to Scrutiny Board Members. The Board Member commented that data comparisons with similar areas such as Sheffield would be beneficial. The Chief Operating Officer stated that an, All Councillor Briefing could be arranged to help Councillors know where all the data could be found and making the best use out of the WV Insight system.

A Member of the Board raised a concern about GP Appointments being difficult to obtain and Ambulance response times. Cllr Roberts responded that Primary Care had been an item at the Health Scrutiny Panel recently including a survey completed by Healthwatch. She asked for the relevant reports be sent to Board Members. The Scrutiny Team Leader added that he would circulate to Board Members the presentation the Health Scrutiny Panel had received on the West Midlands Ambulance Service at their last meeting.

A Member of the Board raised the importance of investment in the City. She expressed the importance of data on this point. The Head of Policy and Strategy responded that the Good Growth Strategy was going to be considered by the Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel on 7 February 2024. A large part of that strategy was about Inward Investment. She was also happy to reinforce in the plan how the Council was working at a system level, in helping to address issues regarding access to healthcare.

A Board Member commented that the Ward boundaries had changed in May 2023 and so it was important to take this into account when comparing data from previous years at Ward level.

The Vice-Chair expressed disappointment that the Strategic Risk Register was not in the agenda pack and asked for any future report on the subject to include it in full. The Chief Operating Officer responded that it had not been included in the pack because the Board had considered it in detail at their last meeting in December. It was currently being updated and would be received by the Audit and Risk Committee in March 2024. The Committee regularly considered the Strategic Risk Register alongside Cabinet. Cabinet received the register on a quarterly basis, as it did for Scrutiny Board. There were currently 32 risks listed, listed by Portfolio.

The Chair gave praise to the Our City: Our Plan. He believed it was making a difference and was now one of the most important documents within the Council. He gave praise to WV Insight site which meant all the data was in one place. He referred to the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence and how this would bring change in the future.

Resolved: That the Our City: Our Plan Refresh 2024-2025, and Budget, Performance and Medium Term Financial Strategy be accepted by the Scrutiny Board.

5 **Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

The Vice-Chair made reference to the Heath Towns Bath item which was coming before Cabinet Resources Panel on the 21 February 2024. The issue was of huge interest to many Members and residents of the City. The Forward Plan document referred to the item being, fully exempt. He expected as much information as possible to be publicly available at the meeting. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed that he expected to publish a public version and a second version with any exempt material.

Resolved: That the Forward Plan of Key Decisions be noted.

6 **Scrutiny Work Programme**

A Member of the Board stated that he looked forward to an item on Yoo Recruit being received.

The Vice-Chair gave praise to the Scrutiny Work Programme and commented that it was comprehensive and continuing to improve each year.

A Member of the Board asked for the terms of reference for the Climate Change, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel to be updated over the coming months to include its prescribed remit for the scrutiny of climate change matters.

The Chief Operating Officer commented that the Climate Change, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel had considered an item on Council 2028 Net Zero. In March 2024 the Panel would be receiving a report on the more wider Climate Change Programme which included the Net Zero target for 2041 for the City. He would also make sure there were items on Climate Change in the new Municipal year for the Panel.

The Chair gave praise to the Scrutiny Work Programme, he looked forward to the new items coming forward for the remainder of the Municipal year.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Work Programme be agreed.

The meeting closed at 7:01pm.