

Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Ian Angus
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Stephen Simkins (Chair)
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Philip Bateman
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Arun Photay
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr Louise Miles
Cllr Patricia Patten (Vice-Chair)

Employees

Kevin O'Keefe	Director of Governance
Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Colin Parr	Head of Governance
Martyn Sargeant	Head of Democratic Services
Rachel Ratcliffe	Policy Officer
Jayne Holloway	Electoral Registration Operations Manager

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
Apologies for absence were received from the following:

Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Keith Ireland – Managing Director
- 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 13 December 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

5 **Scrutiny Review - Update on the Review into Electoral Registration and Participation**

Martyn Sargeant, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the report and gave the panel an update on recommendations and actions arising from the electoral registration and participation scrutiny review. The review report was considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 8 June 2016.

The Head of Democratic Services advised the Board of the following progress since the report was submitted

Recommendations 1: The Council is working with colleges and school leavers to engage with young people in schools. The Council is planning a rolling programme of events during the next two weeks to support this aim.

Recommendation 14: Express Systems have been commissioned to develop voter information material and videos for residents whose first language is not English or who have reading or writing difficulties. The material will be available in a number of different languages. The scheme will initially be piloted in Blakenhall area in May 2016.

The Board suggested that information about the project could be published on Wolverhampton Information Network website. The Board discussed progress made to implement the recommendations and requested more detailed report be presented to a future meeting.

The Board discussed the planned feedback to the Electoral Commission on the lessons learnt from work done to target different groups and communities. The Board requested that a report of the Council's response to Electoral Commission should be presented to the meeting on 14 March 2017.

The Board expressed concern about the difficulties in appointing an Electoral Services Manager and the potential risks to the Council of not having an experienced person in post. The Board discussed the reasons for not being able to appoint. The Head of Democratic Services explained that a number of ideas had been tried to fill the vacancy, without success. However, there is provision for extra dedicated support to be brought in where needed, in addition to developing the skills of current staff. The Board commented on the potential risks to the Council with the upcoming mayoral elections and the need for the vacancy to be filled as a matter of urgency.

Kevin O'Keefe, Director of Governance, acknowledged the difficulties highlighted by the Board and the need to find a suitable candidate. The Director of Governance commented that a possible option could be to contact the Association of Electoral Administrators, whose members are retired elections managers, with the necessary experience that could provide an interim solution. The Head of Democratic Services added that the Managing Director has supported the use of extra employee resources from across the Council and training for deputy returning officers to ensure the service is robust.

The Board requested a more detailed report on progress against the review recommendations and also the opportunity to comment on the draft public engagement strategy.

The Board discussed the methods that will be used to consult with the public in the future and what further changes are needed. The Director of Governance commented that a new post has been created in the communications team to support the development of an effective engagement strategy. Furthermore, the learning from the public consultation work done as part of the library transformation proposals will support this development. The Director of Governance would welcome the contributions from the Board in this work.

Resolved:

1. The Head of Democratic Services to present a briefing report on the Council's feedback to the Electoral Commission on its engagement work at the meeting on 14 March 2017.
2. The Head of Democratic Services to present a draft of the public engagement strategy for discussion at the scheduled meeting on 4 July 2017.

6 **Update on the West Midlands Combined Authority**

Rachel Ratcliffe, Policy Officer - Combined Authority Programme Team, presented a report of the progress of the work of the West Midlands Combined Authority and the devolution agenda in the West Midlands. The Policy Officer gave an overview of the main highlights of the report.

The Board member commented that the issue of the governance arrangements for the Combined Authority was discussed at meeting they attended last year, and there was general agreement that the current scrutiny arrangements were not strong enough. The Policy Officer commented that this issue was discussed at a meeting of West Midlands Combined Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Board discussed opportunities to build working relationships between the work of the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Scrutiny Board, and to get a better understanding about the agenda, the frequency of meetings and attendance by members.

The Board suggested that it would be useful to invite the Councillor Peter Hughes Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Councillor Tersaim Singh, representative for City of Wolverhampton Council, to a meeting of the Board to brief members on the work being done to develop the scrutiny function and make it more robust. The Board suggested that a discussion about the role and responsibilities of Metropolitan Mayor and the role of scrutiny would be useful. The Board agreed to consider this item at future meeting.

The Director of Governance briefed the Board on the discussion at a workshop event to discuss the governance arrangements for Combined Authorities where similar concerns were expressed. The Director of Governance agreed to feed back the Board comments to Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Board suggested that it would be useful for members to be involved in reviewing and contributing to the development of the scrutiny and governance arrangements for the Combined Authority.

The Board suggested that learning from existing examples of good practice elsewhere should be reviewed first to see if there is model that could be used.

The Board were advised that meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee are open to the public to attend and also that minutes from previous meetings were available online to review progress and current issues being discussed.

Resolved:

1. The Board agreed to invite Councillor Peter Hughes, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Councillor Tersaim Singh, representative for City of Wolverhampton Council, to meeting on 14 March 2017 for a report on the work being done to strengthen links with local scrutiny functions and the development of effective governance arrangements.

7

Work programme

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, introduced the report and invited Board comments on the draft work programme 2016/17. There was concern expressed by members of the Board about the number agenda items and also the scheduling of meetings made it difficult for members to properly scrutinise the issues being discussed. The Board discussed the current employee resources and there was support for additional resources to help panels to carry out their responsibilities.

The Board discussed the recent announcement about the inspection by Ofsted of children's services and queried the role of scrutiny in the adding the findings as a future agenda item for detailed discussion. The Director of Governance outlined the timetable for the work of the inspection team and the publication of the findings. The Director of Finance suggested that final report from Ofsted could be presented to a future meeting for the Board to consider.

The Board suggested that the issue of panel agenda and work planning should be discussed at the next meeting of the chair and vice chairs group.

The Board discussed the relationship with Cabinet Members, and ideas for holding them to account.

Colin Parr, Head of Governance, advised that a new experienced scrutiny officer has been appointed and is due to start in February and that members will start to see the impact of the investment in extra resources. The increase in funding for staffing was agreed at a time when most other budgets are being reduced. The Head of Governance commented on work being to develop performance measures to focus on outcomes of scrutiny work and progress in developing a process to monitor the implementation of Board recommendations and the impact on service delivery.

The Head of Governance commented on the plans for the Council Wide Briefing Session.

The Board discussed the challenges facing the NHS and it was suggested this would be useful topic to consider the situation in Wolverhampton as a future agenda item.

The Board agreed to receive a paper on the issue with a summary of the key health issues facing Wolverhampton and the impact of changes in level of provision in neighbouring areas, for example, 'bed blocking'.

Resolved:

1. The Board agreed to receive a paper on the issue with a summary of the key health issues facing Wolverhampton.
2. The Scrutiny Officer to arrange a date for scrutiny chairs and vice chairs meeting to discuss agenda planning and the work of panels.