

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 Anwen Muston
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Zee Russell (Substituting)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Scrutiny Team Leader)
David Pattison (Chief Operating Officer)
Laura Noonan (Electoral Services and Scrutiny Manager)
Ian Culley (Lead Planning Manager – Regional Strategy)
Earl Piggott-Smith (Scrutiny Officer)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for absence and Notification of Substitutions**
An apology for absence was received from Cllr John Reynolds.

Cllr Zee Russell was substituting for Cllr John Reynolds.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 **Scrutiny Annual Report May 2022 - May 2023**
The Chief Operating Officer introduced the Scrutiny Annual Report May 2022 – May 2023. He remarked that a mark of good governance was to have good and effective Scrutiny as a Council. The report was cross-party, with quotes from the Chairs and Vice-Chairs. The report set out an extensive number of really important issues that had been considered by Scrutiny. He cited the work on the Wolverhampton Pound as having achieved good outcomes. A report was in fact due to be received by

Scrutiny Board shortly again on the very latest progress from the recommendations made by the Select Committee.

The Chief Operating Officer stated that originally 31 Scrutiny meetings had been scheduled in the Municipal calendar and by the end of the Municipal year May 2022 – May 2023, 43 meetings had taken place. Ultimately no matter how challenging some of the meetings may have been, they had taken place to improve the lives of the City's residents. He was personally very pleased to see that Scrutiny regularly reviewed performance, budget and risk.

The Chief Operating Officer remarked that it was his professional view that the Council was complying well with the Statutory Scrutiny Guidance. He felt Scrutiny was working well within the authority, which was of utmost importance. When Scrutiny did not work well in other authorities, that was when problems arose. Scrutiny and Audit were two critical functions within any Council for good Governance to ensue. Important and wide-ranging issues were scrutinised at the Council which directly impacted on people's lives. He commended the report to Scrutiny Board and paid a personal tribute to the Scrutiny Team, describing the team as a real strength for the authority.

The Chair of Scrutiny Board gave a statement on the Scrutiny Annual Report May 2022 – May 2023. He said that looking forward and looking back was what the excellent Annual Scrutiny Report May 2022 – May 2023 was successful in achieving, which mirrored his vision for Scrutiny Board going forward. It was always important to bring fresh new items to Scrutiny. It was equally important that the Council did not lose sight of the impact Scrutiny had made through recommendations. There could be great value in evaluating recommendations and reviewing the status of important services, policy and strategy. This was why in the last Municipal year Scrutiny Board had continued to monitor the recommendations from the Wolverhampton Pound Select Committee. Another great example was the work on evaluating the Blue Badge Service.

The Chair of Scrutiny Board commented that he was very pleased that there would be two Scrutiny Task and Finish groups in the current Municipal year. There would be one on flooding and one on the night-time economy, as agreed at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Board. The Scrutiny Work Programme came to almost every meeting of Scrutiny Board and he was always keen to have Members comments on the agenda for the forthcoming meetings. Member led Scrutiny was always best practice. Asking pertinent questions and making strong recommendations could make a real difference to the lives of Wolverhampton residents. He was aware that the Leader of the Council, Cllr Simkins, who was once a Chair of Scrutiny Board himself, fully supported the work of the Board and the Panels and could see its incalculable precious value to the Council.

The Chair of Scrutiny Board commented that when you looked back on the 43 official public meetings of Scrutiny held last Municipal year the breadth of topics was wide ranging. He added that Members, Officers and the Council's external partners who had contributed to Scrutiny should be proud of the work which had taken place. He gave a particular thanks to Cllr Paul Sweet, the Chair of Scrutiny Board last Municipal year. In addition, he gave a special thank you to all the Chairs and Vice-Chairs who had worked tirelessly to help steer Scrutiny. Every Member of Scrutiny had also played their part and he thanked them for their contributions.

The Chair of Scrutiny Board stated that the Scrutiny function was the best example of a One Council approach in action, working in a matrix style across multiple departments and sectors. He was certain that the work of Scrutiny last year had led to better decisions and policy making. All the meetings of the Panels and Board were webcast and could be viewed up to 12 months afterwards, which he believed had enhanced the profile of Scrutiny within the City.

He thanked the Scrutiny Team for their support in the last Municipal year, namely Laura Noonan, Martin Stevens, Earl Piggott-Smith and Lee Booker. He also thanked David Pattison, the responsible Director for Scrutiny, who's guidance he described as invaluable. He was pleased that this year the report included quotes from both the Chair and Vice-Chairs, which he was very pleased to read. He commended the report, and said he was very happy for it to come before Full Council on the 8 November 2023.

The Vice-Chair remarked that the Scrutiny Annual Report May 2022 – May 2023 was a good report. He was pleased to see the photographs contained within the report. The Scrutiny system in his opinion had worked very well last Municipal year and had been very productive. There had been a considerable number of additional meetings, with a considerable amount of topics covered. Scrutiny Board had considered the Civic Halls project and there had been an important meeting about the Relaunch grant for the Victoria Street Traders. These two examples proved that the Scrutiny function was looking at issues of huge importance. He paid a personal tribute to the Scrutiny Team who he described as doing a very good job for the Council. He thanked fellow colleagues for their contributions and in particular Adam Collinge, a former Councillor for Oxley who had been the Vice-Chair of the Stronger Families, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel, during the Municipal year the annual report covered. He had contributed to the Annual Report.

The Vice-Chair stated that there was always room for improvement in the Scrutiny function, with no local authority's Scrutiny function being perfect. He personally wanted to see more scrutiny recommendations coming from Scrutiny meetings. He was of the view that the Chairs of the Panels and the Board should not be appointed by the Leader of the Council. Scrutiny was an independent function of the Executive and therefore he hoped this would be considered in the future. He was pleased that there would be two Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups in the current Municipal year, Flooding and the Night-time economy were both important issues for the City. He looked forward to their progression and an even better Scrutiny Annual report next year.

A Member described the good working relationship she had with the Scrutiny Officer Team and thanked them for their efforts across the year. She asked who scrutinised the scrutineers. In response the Chief Operating Officer stated that the Democratic Process through elections meant the public could determine who they wished to be represented on the Council. Officers were scrutinised by elected Members. Peer reviews could also take place, and this had been done in the past and would be considered again for the future. The Member responded that there had been improvement in the Scrutiny in almost every area in the last ten years and since the last peer review.

A Member commented that the function of Scrutiny was very important in the democratic process of the Council. Many reports had been to Scrutiny that later went on to Cabinet and Full Council. He was pleased to see that the Scrutiny procedure rules were being developed.

A Member praised the Scrutiny Annual Report and raised the importance of reviewing the implementation of recommendations.

The Chair asked for a hard copy of the Scrutiny Annual Report to be placed in Libraries across the City. When he looked back over the last Municipal year, he had no doubt that there were crucial pieces of work completed by Scrutiny, which had an impact. The Members of Scrutiny Board and the Panels were delivering a very important service for the citizens of Wolverhampton. He had a strong appetite for continuous improvement of the function.

4 **Wolverhampton Local Plan**

The Lead Planning Manager (Regional Strategy) gave a presentation on the Wolverhampton Local Plan, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

Members debated the information contained within the presentation and asked questions to the Lead Planning Manager.

The Vice-Chair commented that it had been a useful update presentation and that the Local Plan was something which the Board should continue to monitor progression. He asked about the process for “call for sites” and how housing need was calculated. The Lead Planning Manager responded that there was a permanently open “call for sites”. This information was available on the planning section on the website. This was unlike some authorities which had clear cut off dates. Government informed the authority on the formula that should be used to calculate housing need for the City. The first stage was based on population projections produced by the Office for National Statistics. Government, for the 30 largest cities in England, then increased that number by 30%.

A Member stated that the green belt amount of land in Wolverhampton administrative area was less than 11% of the total area, which she understood to be the smallest percentage amount out of all the other Black Country authorities. Many residents appreciated the green belt in Wolverhampton and in South Staffordshire. The Lead Planning Manager confirmed that the Member was correct in her figure of 11%. The Leader’s statement in January confirmed how serious the Council took the green belt land in Wolverhampton and the importance to local communities.

A Member asked if the statistics on housing need could be challenged. The Lead Planning Manager responded if it was clear there were issues with the Office for National Statistic figures, then there would be justification to challenge the target. There was however no evidence of an issue in Wolverhampton. Coventry had some issues as there had been errors in the census date.

A Member asked if social housing waiting lists was taken into consideration for housing need and adult children who were unable to leave the parental home due to a lack of housing provision. The last time they had checked Wolverhampton Homes had over 10,000 people on the waiting list for a home. The Lead Planning Manager

responded that adult children living with parents was taken into account in the modelling. There was not a direct connection on waiting lists for social housing, but the modelling was based on strategic housing needs for the City.

A Member asked what would happen when there was no longer any land left to build homes in Wolverhampton. The Lead Planning Manager responded that it would lead to higher house prices, multiple households effectively living in the same household and an impact on the local economy.

A Member asked if high rise apartment blocks would be built, when land became in short supply. She also raised the importance of local infrastructure where new homes were built. The Lead Planning Manager responded that increasing density of new development was something which would occur. This however was finite because of the existing character of the City and the impact of people living already in the City. There was clearly a limit on how far increasing density could ultimately go within the City. They did assess infrastructure and sometimes would require new developers to pay for new infrastructure based on population needs.

A Member asked if the housing needs of the City could be met within the City boundaries or if neighbouring areas needed to contribute to the plans. The Lead Planning Manager responded he felt the housing needs could be accommodated within the City's boundaries. In the event there was a shortfall there was the duty to cooperate with other local authorities in the area, to see if they could assist with the shortfall. Some success in this area had already been achieved working with Shropshire and South Staffordshire.

A Member referred to the Land Hero App he had been using which enabled people to identify derelict sites. Payment was provided from the providers of the app for new sites identified. He encouraged Members to consider using the app.

The Vice-Chair asked for confirmation of the status of the South Staffordshire Local Plan. As in the draft plan he believed there were a number of sites which were effectively extending the Wolverhampton urban area. The Lead Planning Manager responded that a couple of months ago they had issued a statement saying they were unpauing work on the Local Plan review. He anticipated that as soon as the National Planning Policy framework was released, they would review the allocations in the plan they had consulted the Council on and then move forward with an updated plan as necessary.

The Chair asked about the Neighbourhood plans of which Wolverhampton currently had two, Tettenhall and Heathfield. He asked if others in the City were being developed. The Lead Planning Manger responded that neighbourhood plans were led by the community through neighbourhood forums. The Council couldn't instruct communities to prepare neighbourhood plans. They were however happy for communities to approach them and support them in the construction of any plan.

The Chair asked how many housing permissions had been granted which had not yet been built and the same for neighbouring authorities. The Lead Planning Manager responded that he did not have the figure at the meeting but could provide this after the meeting.

The Chair complemented the Lead Planning Manager on his presentation and in his answers to Board Member questions. There was clearly a lot of work ahead on the Local Plan, which was critical to the development of the City.

5 **Scrutiny Work programme**

The Vice-Chair commented that he had one item he would like seen added to the Scrutiny Work Programme. It was the last night of the Wolves Speedway on 23 October 2023, following the decision of the stadium owners not to allow any more Speedway Racing events. He knew the Council had been involved in detailed discussions with the club and other interested parties about how Speedway could be kept in the City. It had been confirmed that there would not be a Wolverhampton Speedway Team for next season. He asked if there could be an item on the Scrutiny Work Programme on the Council's involvement in the discussions. He wanted it to cover the current situation and any potential future plans.

The Chair supported the Vice-Chair's proposal for Speedway to feature as an item on the Scrutiny Work Programme and he suggested the most appropriate Panel was the Enterprise and Growth Scrutiny Panel, Chaired by Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman.

A Member raised the importance of mental health and particular children's mental health. The Scrutiny Team Leader remarked that the last Health Scrutiny Panel had considered acute adult mental health services following the downgrading of the Trust by the CQC in the service area. The Health Scrutiny Panel would also be having a further meeting on the Trust's Action Plan relating to adult acute Services. Children's mental health services was scheduled to be considered by the Panel in March 2024. Scrutiny Board had also agreed to consider mental health from a strategic Council approach. This item was to be scheduled but was likely to take place next calendar year.

A Member stated that she had personally asked the issue of waiting lists for children's mental health services to be considered by Corporate Parenting Board. The item would be considered by the Board in the next few weeks.

6 **Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

The Scrutiny Team Leader introduced the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

Members received the Forward Plan without further comment.

The meeting concluded at 7:29pm.