

# RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

26<sup>th</sup> MAY 2020

## REMOTE MEETING

### MINUTES

- Present: Councillors: K Wild, T Diccico, M Gough, M Parker, W Qais, M Allen, B Groom, P Davies and M Brain
- Members: Councillor I Courts: Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for the Economy  
Councillor B Sleigh: Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources
- Officers: Paul Johnson: Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Resources  
Sam Gilbert: Assistant Director of Finance & Property Services  
Sarah Barnes: Head of Business Intelligence and Improvement  
Sangeeta Leahy: Assistant Director Public Health  
Jo Robinson: Head of Income and Awards  
Lauren Beach: Managed Growth Finance Manager  
Julie Cooper: Head of Financial Operations  
Caroline Potter: Adult Social Care Finance Manager  
Stuart McHale: Childrens Services Finance Manger  
Paul Rogers: Democratic Services

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting commenced at 6:00 p.m.

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No declarations of pecuniary or conflicts of interest were submitted.

#### 3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

#### 4. PUBLIC MINUTES

##### RESOLVED:

The Public Minutes arising from the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

#### 5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

The report before the Scrutiny Board reported on the work being delivered to quantify the financial implications of the Covid-19 outbreak for the Council.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources presented the report to the Scrutiny Board.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources noted the robust response by the Council to the Covid - 19 pandemic and placed on record his thanks to Council staff and partner organisations for the work they had undertaken to date to ensure continued service delivery across the borough and provision of support to vulnerable people, local communities and businesses.

Member's attention was drawn to the principal sections of the report, which addressed:

- Government Grants
- Local Issues (Business Rates, Business Grants and Council Tax Hardship Fund Arrangements)
- Council Pressures (economic, currently being quantified)
- Covid-19 Emergency Funding
- Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund

To provide some context, the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources informed the Scrutiny Board that the Council's Revenue budget for 2020/21 equated to £159.077M.

In headline terms, the Scrutiny Board was informed that:

- Government Grant funding allocation for Business Grants amounted to £28.736M to date, with 'top up' Business Grants amounting to £1.2M.
- Council Tax Hardship funding received by the Council equated to £1.52M and the funding had been fully implemented and distributed across 8,108 claimants.
- Covid-19 Emergency Funding received equated to £11.534M.
- The Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund amounted to £2.563M.

Any funding remaining from the Small Business Grants allocation will have to be repaid and will not be available for any other Covid-19 pressures.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources further detailed that with regard to the £28.736M in Business Grant funding, access to the funding by small businesses stands at 1,932, who will receive either £25,000 or £10,000 depending on the rateable value of the business. As at 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020, 1,698 businesses had received a Business Grant, equating to £23.010M. The Government had also introduced a 'top up' to the Business Grant Scheme to accommodate small businesses which originally fell outside of the scope of the original scheme. The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources advised the Scrutiny Board that the Council expected to receive £1.2M-£1.5M for the fund (approximately 5% of the original Business Grant) and that this figure was unlikely to support all businesses in the borough.

Members were advised that the Council had a role in supporting residents who qualified for Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR). As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of claims received for LCTR increased from an average of 300 to 886 in March and 1,044 in April 2020.

The Council had received a first tranche of £5.573M of Covid -19 Emergency funding to support:

- Increased demand for social care.
- Meeting extra-demand for Children's social care.

- Provision of additional support for the homeless and rough sleepers.
- Those at higher risk of severe illness from Covid-19.
- Pressures on other service areas arising from reduced Council income, rising costs and demand.

The Council received a second tranche of funding of £5.961M on 18th April 2020 to address more general pressures and income loss. The second tranche of funding was also intended to provide fiscal support to Parish and Town Councils, which amounted to £106,827.

The Scrutiny Board was informed that the Council had received £2.563M from the Adult Social Care Infection Control and Sustainability Fund. Members were advised that Solihull Community Housing (SCH) was monitoring the impact of Covid-19 on rent arrears and housing specific Covid-19 costs. A report was scheduled for the consideration of Full Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020 addressing the full impact of Covid-19.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources further clarified for the Scrutiny Board that although the report detailed a balance of funding of £3.485M at the present time, it was expected that after taking into account all Covid-19 pressures and lost income arising, the total impact of Covid-19 would be significantly in excess of the £11.534M Covid-19 Emergency Funding received and this would be reflected in the report to Cabinet scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

The Chairman and Members of the Scrutiny Board unanimously agreed that the work undertaken by Council officers in such extenuating circumstances to support vulnerable people, local communities and businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic had been exemplary and congratulated officers and Council partners.

Having received presentations from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources, Members made a number of observations and submitted related questions, which in summary addressed the following issues:

- Would the Scrutiny Board be in a position to scrutinise the additional fiscal burdens arising from Covid-19 and the related Council recovery plans over the course of 2020/21?
- Regarding LCTR claims being legitimately submitted through either the Council's online application form or directly from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), how were any duplicate claims identified?
- Owing to the financial pressures the Council was now facing due to the Covid-19 pandemic, was there any prospect of employee redundancies or reduced Council service delivery?
- Following Government statements detailing potential arrangements to support JLR and the national automotive manufacturing industry, did the Council intend to work in collaboration with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to further support calls for such assistance for the automotive industry in Solihull and the West Midlands region?

In reply, Members were advised that:

- The additional fiscal burdens placed on the Council (and related recovery plans) arising from the Covid-19 pandemic would be addressed through the Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for the 2020/21 municipal year.
- Each LCTR claim was assigned a unique property reference number and was cross-referenced with Council Tax records, which were impossible to duplicate. Furthermore, every applicant was required to provide details of their date of birth and national insurance number.
- The Council had established a critical services impact tracker to monitor the Council's resources and capacity during the pandemic. No Council service had been assigned a red status (i.e. critical) at this point in time.
- The significance of the automotive sector in the West Midlands and the role of JLR specifically for the borough was fully recognised by the Council. The Leader of the Council had co-signed a letter with the Mayor of the West Midlands addressed to Government seeking additional support for the automotive sector at this time.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

**RESOLVED:**

- To note the Covid-19 funding streams and the significant pressure that is being placed on the Council's finances.

**6. PROGRESS IN RESETTING THE COUNCIL PLAN FOR 2020-25**

The report was provided for the Scrutiny Board to outline the progress in resetting the Council Plan for 2020-2025 and to seek the Scrutiny Board's input into its development. The Head of Business Intelligence and Improvement presented the report to the Scrutiny Board.

Members were informed that the Council Plan sets out vision and strategic direction for the Council.

Members were advised that the Council Plan was last reviewed in 2018 in its entirety and had last been scrutinised at the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020. This reset of the Council Plan is programmed for consideration at the Annual Council meeting scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Appendix A to the report detailed the Council's nine 'key things to do' which were:

- Increase and enhance Solihull's natural environment
- Improve Solihull's air quality
- Reduce Solihull's net carbon emissions
- Enable communities to thrive
- Facilitate sustainable, quality provision for adults and children with complex needs
- Continuing to take the right actions to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities
- Revitalising our towns and local centres
- Increase the supply of housing, especially affordable housing

- Maximise the opportunities of HS2

Everything in the Council Plan is intended to contribute to one or more of the 5 building blocks of inclusive growth’:

- Building a vibrant economy, including the social economy
- Promoting and delivering social value
- Supporting communities to thrive
- Implementing the Climate change declaration
- Improving skills and access to good work

Under the heading of ‘*Enablers of Council efficiency and value for money*’, the Council Plan detailed:

- Engagement e.g. with communities, parish councils and businesses
- Use of digital
- The employee journey
- Robust finance
- Use of our physical assets

Appendix B to the report provided further detail for the Council Plans key themes and objectives, as detailed above.

The Leader of the Council advised Members that the Council Plan reflected longer term objectives as well as reflecting the Council’s Economic Recovery Plan in response to the current Covid-19 pandemic. Some issues within the Council Plan had been retained as constant themes and priorities, such as inclusive growth and climate change.

Having received the presentation, Members of the Scrutiny Board made a number of observations and submitted the following questions, which in summary included:

- A Member of the Scrutiny Board welcomed the fact that the Council Plan had been re-worked and produced in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, which demonstrated the Council’s ambition. It was welcomed that the Council Plan was attempting to provide community anchor points. Regarding Appendix A ‘Plan on a Page’, the following recommendations were proposed:
  - Amend the housing ‘key thing’ to read ‘*increase the supply of housing, especially affordable **and social** housing*’.
  - Delete ‘Continuing to’ from the start of the life chances ‘key thing’ to read ‘**Take the right actions to improve life chances in our disadvantaged communities**’.
- A Member of the Scrutiny Board welcomed that a number of the Scrutiny Board’s comments made at the Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020 were reflected in the re-worked Council Plan. It was also welcomed that the key priorities of addressing air quality and climate change had continued in the Council Plan and that a focus on addressing health inequalities and life expectancy had also been included.

The Head of Business Intelligence and Improvement noted that the Council had recognised the requirement for a flexible response to the Covid-19 pandemic and this

was reflected in the re-worked Council Plan. Whilst the high level issues addressed through the Council Plan had largely remained unchanged, such as climate change action, Members were advised the Council's everyday service delivery and operating patterns had currently changed in response to the pandemic.

The Leader highlighted that the new Council Plan struck a balance between delivering priorities supporting economic growth, whilst also addressing challenges in relation to health and well-being and the environment.

The Scrutiny Board welcomed the re-worked Council Plan and supported the scope and objectives detailed within it. Members congratulated Officers for the work they had undertaken to produce it.

Having considered the report, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

**RESOLVED:**

- i. To note the resetting of the Council Plan for 2020/25; and,
- ii. To recommend that the following amendments be made to the re-worked Council plan:
  - (a) Amend the housing 'key thing' to read *'increase the supply of housing, especially affordable **and social** housing'*.
  - (b) Delete 'Continuing to' from the start of the life chances 'key thing' to read **'Take the right actions to improve life chances in our disadvantaged communities'**.

**7. PRIVATE MINUTES**

The meeting was not open to the public during discussion of the following item because the report contains exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

Having reviewed the Private Minutes the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

**RESOLVED:**

- i. To agree the Private Minutes arising from the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020 as a true record.

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board  
meeting closed at 7:03 p.m.