

# RESOURCES & DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

2<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY 2023

## MINUTES

Present Councillors: M Parker (Chairman), R Holt, J Tildesley, D Gibbin, Y Clements, N Moses, A Adeyemo, A Hodgson

Guests: Councillor I Courts: Leader of the Council and Lead Member for the Economy

Councillor K Grinsell: Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Partnerships and Wellbeing

Officers Paul Johnson: Acting Chief Executive  
Jenny Wood: Director, Adult Care & Support  
Ruth Tennant: Director, Public Health  
Sam Gilbert: Assistant Director of Finance & Property Services  
Sarah Barnes: Head of Business Intelligence & Improvement  
Perry Wardle: Assistant Director, Growth & Development  
Julie Cooper: Head of Financial Operations  
Lauren Beach: Economy and Infrastructure Finance Manager (V)  
Sean Castree: Senior Accountant (Economy and Infrastructure) (V)  
Mohammed Irfan: Adult Social Care and Finance Support Manager (V)  
Karen Cranley: Resources Finance Manager (V)  
Andrea Santer: Public Health Finance Manager (V)  
Sarah Cheale: Children's Services Finance Manager (V)  
Adam Patterson: Finance Manager (V)  
Anna Leggett: Senior Accountant (R&T) (V)  
Paul Rogers: Democratic Services

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor M Allen.

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

No declarations were received.

### 3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

### 4. MINUTES

Councillor Gibbin raised in relation to Page 7, first paragraph in regard to the Council's costs pertaining to Council Tax and Business Rates Court costs, the point queried was why was the Council seemingly subsidising the costs associated with these court actions.

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

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### RESOLVED:

Subject to the above, to agree the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Minutes arising from the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023 as a true record.

### 5. THE COUNCIL PLAN 2020-25: PROGRESS IN DELIVERING OUTCOMES AND PLAN REFRESH

The Scrutiny Board received an introduction to the report from the Head of Business Intelligence & Improvement, with additional comment received from the Leader of the Council and Director of Public Health.

Having received the report introduction, Members of the Scrutiny Board raised a number of questions pertinent to the report, which in summary included the following matters:

Councillor Parker noted that the Council Plan refresh was very good and queried whether the additional ring-fenced social care funding received from Government would support future interventions in Children's Services. Councillor Courts clarified that the arrangements were currently at consultation stage and that the proposals needed to be reviewed in further detail. The Children's Commissioners report was scheduled for submission to the Council meeting scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023. Councillor Courts further advised that Sir Alan Wood's report would explore the partnership responsibilities of the Police, NHS and Council and that a joint response to the report was planned that went further than the Government decreed.

Councillor Holt referenced the Multi-Agency Family Hub and the associated funding programme and sought further information as to what was planned for the physical hubs. The Director of Public Health confirmed that the hubs were being looked at in terms of their sustainability over the longer term. It was important to note that there was no new Capital spend available to place services under one roof, which clearly brings additional, longer-term costs. The service will use the MTFS process over future years to find a sustainable long term funding solution.

Councillor Adeyemo noted that 50% of the delivery ratings for the People and Communities Priority Areas were amber rated, with specific reference to Deliverable No. 16 (*'Accelerate action on the priority areas identified in the Health Inequalities Strategy and embed health inequality considerations across the Council so that we can improve the lives of people and places who are currently most disadvantaged'*) and Deliverable No. 20 (*'Continue to grow and strengthen our localities and ensure this is built into the development of the Integrated Care System (ICS). Further milestones to be developed to reflect the links to ICS development'*). Councillor Adeyemo stated that he was concerned these two deliverables were still rated amber. With regard to Deliverable No.

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20, Councillor Adeyemo noted that the document concerned was projected to be fit for purpose in 2 years' time and noted that improvements were required now, with the projected timescale not good enough.

The Head of Business Intelligence & Improvement responded that with regard to Deliverable No. 20, the RAG rating presented an honest reflection of where the Council was with taking the deliverable to fruition. Assessing the impact of investment via qualitative data was harder to define and was a complex task. However, the Council did have a first phase document in place which could be progressed. Councillor K Grinsell advised that the ICS needed to be reviewed further in its first year of operation. The ICS Partnership Strategy had recently been signed off, aligning priorities for Birmingham City Council and Solihull respectively, which would entail on-going alignment between the two authorities.

The Director of Public Health further noted that the Council was intentionally challenging itself through setting the RAG rating at amber. Members were informed that the Council had recently delivered a significant health check project in the north of the borough and that Family Hub services were targeted at those families in communities requiring services available through the Family Hubs. Furthermore, the current cost of living challenges was proving significant in addressing health inequalities. The RAG rating reflected the progress of significant work over the longer term in addressing these health inequalities in the borough.

In terms of funding arrangements, the Director of Public Health advised the meeting that there was a significant allocation of funding to be distributed equitably for voluntary and community groups in the borough to drive change. Some of the Council's partners would also have access to service funding. The Health and Wellbeing Board had established local outcomes to be delivered. It was recognised that the funding process had to be fair and accessible to all groups and partners involved.

Councillor Gibbins raised Children's Services, noting that he had raised questions at the Scrutiny Board 9 months ago concerning how the Council held its partners to account. Specifically, Councillor Gibbins noted that the Nursing Team service dedicated to Looked After Children's health assessments was in serious difficulty and questioned how arrangements holding partners and services to account were being delivered.

Councillor Courts clarified that the national, private report assessing Solihull's Children's Services had held Council partners to account, as did the OFSTED report and Children's Services Improvement Board. Councillor Courts further advised that a Forum had been established to drive the necessary improvements across all the organisations concerned. It had been made very clear that significant changes were required, which had been accepted by the Council and its partners. The challenge ahead was a difficult one, but ultimately it concerned taking forward and delivering the necessary

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improvements to Children's Services in co-operation with the leaders of the Councils partner organisations. The Children's Commissioner was reported to be content with the progress being made to date.

Councillor Adeyemo highlighted Deliverable No. 31 (*'Unlock the development opportunity at Arden Cross and High Speed 2 (HS2)'*), noting that the deliverable was RAG rated as amber. Councillor Adeyemo expressed concern regarding the length of time involved for the unlocking of the potential development of the site and queried what was happening and how long would it take to progress development of the site.

Secondly, Councillor Adeyemo drew attention to Deliverable No. 47 (*'Develop and implement the air quality strategy incl. identification of gaps in resources / capacity, opportunities to address these gaps and improved real time surveillance'*), stating that he was disappointed with the deliverable having not been progressed. Councillor Courts advised the Scrutiny Board that the HS2 Act gave the right for HS2 to acquire land at the Arden Cross site. Significant progress had been made towards a commitment to release early a portion of the land concerned. Overall, the process involved was both very complex and expensive, which in effect was leading to the construction of railway infrastructure at the site. Significant progress was being made, but HS2 had yet to release the land.

With regard to progress and delivery of the Air Quality Strategy, the Director of Public Health advised that since this report was produced the Council had received positive feedback from DEFRA on the Air Quality Annual Status Report (ASR) and that this would be published on the Council's website in due course.

Councillor Parker highlighted the current challenging economic climate in the context of delivering the Councils priorities, such as the Levelling Up agenda. Councillor Parker noted that the Council was unsuccessful in securing £12M of funding for the Kingshurst Village redevelopment and was mindful that the successful redevelopment of Kingshurst Village would act as a spur to future redevelopment of the Chelmsley Wood shopping district. Councillor Parker further observed that the WMCA's input towards helping the Council achieve and deliver its priorities was sometimes overlooked.

Councillor Courts advised that town centre redevelopment projects frequently took 5 – 10 years in to deliver. Additional complications included the relocation of existing businesses to facilitate the redevelopment. Progress had been made in the Kingshurst Village development, with a report scheduled to Cabinet in March detailing the fiscal aspirations of the Kingshurst project. Councillor Courts stated that the WMCA had proven to be of great fiscal support to the Council and that great levels of investment had been provided across the West Midlands region courtesy of the WMCA.

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Councillor Moses queried why Deliverable No. 60 (*‘Complete the migration to Oracle Cloud of the finance, procurement and Human Resources systems underpinning Council operations’*) was RAG rated amber. The Assistant Director of Finance & Property Services clarified that the amber RAG rating reflected the status of the project at that specific point in time. Payroll services would commence in February 2023 via Oracle Cloud. A further Oracle Cloud progress report was scheduled for the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting in March 2023.

Councillor Tildesley referenced the Solihull Council Plan 2020-25 (Plan on a Page), noting that there was no reference to Safer Communities and stated that he would like to see reference to the Councils work to make residents feel safer in their neighbourhoods and reducing re-offending in the community. Councillor Tildesley stated that 95% of criminality was committed by less than 10% of offenders and that this should be acknowledged. In terms of a number of the ‘enabling communities to thrive’ objectives, Councillor Tildesley observed that some updating of the Council Plan was required to reflect the current safer community arrangements in place.

Councillor Tildesley referenced Appendix D - *The Solihull Council Plan 2020-25 – Scrutiny Position Statement for 2022/23*, with specific reference to the Youth Offending Update – Stronger Communities & Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Board (29/11/22). In relation to the Decision / Action ‘*All elected Members assist in identifying role models from their local communities who could become engaged in initiatives to support reductions in youth offending’*, Councillor Tildesley stated that great caution should be exercised when identifying individuals to undertake such work, requiring close supervision and appropriate vetting prior to undertaking any such role.

The Head of Business Intelligence & Improvement advised that the Council Plan was in effect a ‘Plan of Plans’, reflecting the top 15% - 20% of plans in place. Councillor Tyldesley’s suggestion of including clear outcomes in the Council Plan for Safer Communities would be followed up, as would the need for a Safer Communities vision.

In terms of the Council Plan Look Forward section, Councillor Courts clarified that the draft before the Scrutiny Board was a refresh, rather a complete re-write of the Council Plan, which required some updating. Childrens Services and the accompanying budget would be very prominent as a priority within the refreshed Council Plan. Furthermore, the on-going implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, cost of living pressures and the impact of cost pressures on the Councils deliverables would also be reflected.

Furthermore, the Council was pushing at a national level for recognition of the need for joined up approaches to public service delivery and cross boundary partnership working across agencies. Examples included the provision of Family Hubs and the need for a partnership approach in their delivery.

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Councillor Clements highlighted Deliverable No. 26 (*‘Continue to deliver Solihull Town Centre Masterplan, including progress on Mell Square and plans for a new Police Station’*), querying why the RAG rating was amber and what was the cause of the delay for the invitation to tender. Councillor Courts advised that constructive dialogue had been had regarding the future provision of a Police Station in the town centre. However, there was a potential requirement to upgrade the future project specification.

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

### RESOLVED:

- i. To note the progress to date in delivering the Council Plan in 2022/23; and,
- ii. To request that the Head of Business Intelligence & Improvement notes the Scrutiny Boards comments and requests detailed above in respect of the content of the updated Council Plan 2023/24.

## 6. BUDGET AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/24 TO 2025/26

The report provided the Scrutiny Board with an update on the budget position for 2023/24 and subsequent years and requested feedback on the budget proposals for Full Cabinet. The report also included an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Strategy, which Members of the Scrutiny Board were asked to consider.

Having received an introduction to the report from the Acting Chief Executive, Members of the Scrutiny Board were invited to raise any questions pertinent to the report.

Councillor Moses highlighted the proposed fees and charges scheduled for 2023/24, noting that some fees and charges were proposed to increase in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) at 6% and questioned whether the Council would exercise its discretion in raising the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) in line with the CPI.

The Director, Adult Care & Support, informed the Scrutiny Board that the MIG was established by the Department of Health and Social Care and historically the Council followed the national policy. If this were to change, there would be costs associated with this. The Adult Social Care Finance Manager further advised that the Council budget assumed the MIG would rise with the rate of inflation, but the MIG for 2023/24 had yet to be confirmed.

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Councillor Moses questioned whether the Council had any contingency plans in place should the need arise to review the MIG in order to avoid any potential real term cuts. The Adult Social Care Finance Manager advised Members that any such review could have a financial impact requiring revisions to the Council budget and further options identified to present a balanced Council budget.

Councillor Parker sought clarification as to whether any rental increases were proposed for SCH tenants. The Assistant Director of Finance & Property Services informed the Scrutiny Board that a Housing Rents report was scheduled for consideration at Cabinet and was currently proposing a 5% increase, where a maximum raise of 7% was permissible.

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

### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) To review and note the budget position as outlined in the report, the pressures and mitigations detailed at Appendix A and the savings proposals detailed in Appendix B;
- (ii) To note the budget comments arising from the Scrutiny Boards detailed in Appendix C;
- (iii) To note the structural and strategic options as detailed in Appendix D;
- (iv) To consider and note the draft updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Capital Strategy, as detailed in Appendices E and F;
- (v) To note the fees and charges proposed within each portfolio and detailed in Appendix H (available on-line);
- (vi) To note the recommendation to roll forward the management agreement with Solihull Community Housing (SCH) as outlined in paragraph 3.34 of the report;
- (vii) To note the recommendations to Full Council in respect of the Council's carbon budget, as outlined at paragraph 3.35 to the report and detailed in the report to the Members' Budget Seminar attached at Appendix I;
- (viii) To consider and note the Strategic Fair Treatment Assessment detailed in Appendix J; and,
- (ix) To agree to the Scrutiny Board's feedback detailed above to be presented to Full Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023.