

RESOURCES & DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD - 17 April 2023

MINUTES

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

Officers Samantha Gilbert: Assistant Director Finance & Property Services
Paul Langham: Assistant Director, Business Systems
Peter Carroll: Head of Strategic Land & Property
Paul Rogers: Democratic Services

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No declarations were received.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

4. MINUTES

The Minutes should show that Councillor Allen was present at the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th March 2023.

Councillor Gibbin requested that an update note be provided to Members of the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board regarding the status of a recommendation arising from the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th March 2023 concerning the Solihull Town Centre Low Carbon Energy Network, specifically the recommendation:

'To RECOMMEND to Full Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for 9th March 2023 that consideration be given to appointing a Member of the Council to the Energy Services Company (ESCo) Board with full voting rights via the Annual Council meeting appointments process'.

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

To agree the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Minutes arising from the meeting held on 2nd February 2023 as a true record.

5. SMARTER WAYS OF WORKING

The Scrutiny Board received an introduction to the report from the Assistant Director, Business Systems. Members were advised that the report before the Scrutiny Board provided a twelve - month update since the last Smarter Ways of Working (SWoW) report had been received.

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

Councillor Allen sought clarification as to whether the SWoW focus group and survey findings currently being analysed would be made available to the Scrutiny Board. Members were informed that survey findings and recommendations arising could be reported to a future Scrutiny Board meeting if requested by Board Members.

Councillor Gibbin queried whether any special attention had been given to the SWoW arrangements in Childrens Services social care and whether any children's social care cases were being managed by social workers at home, if so, were they contactable when working from home and how were face-to-face interactions being facilitated between social workers and families. Councillor Gibbin sought detail as to how these matters were being addressed.

The Assistant Director (Business Systems) drew Member's attention to paragraph 3.10 of the report, which stated staff attendance on the workplace varied across directorates and services. The Children's Services staff had been treated as special cases, however, with the provision of 100% desk capacity available in the Council House for all Children's Services social workers to access as they preferred/required i.e. desk provision was above the 40% capacity as applied to all other service areas.

In respect of the Focus Group and survey findings, Councillor Moses queried whether the survey addressed mental health and well-being matters arising from the Councils hybrid working arrangements.

The Assistant Director (Business Systems) confirmed that staff well-being matters had been addressed and that clarification would be provided to the Scrutiny Board concerning the mental health component of the survey. Members were reminded that any staff member could elect to work from the office as frequently as they wished to do so, especially if doing so supported their mental health.

Councillor Moses sought further clarity as to how new employee probationary arrangements were working in practise via SWoW. Members were advised that new employees were located in the office with colleagues for two to three weeks until they had been introduced to all their peers. They were then introduced to hybrid working arrangements and would seamlessly transfer across to hybrid working arrangements in line with their team/service area

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working arrangements. Councillor Moses requested that a further SWoW update report detailing the focus group and survey findings be provided to a future meeting of the Board.

Councillor Adeyemo noted that the report detailed 34% of employees were experiencing working from home challenges and queried what allowances were made for staff to actively work full-time from the office and what accommodation was in place for such employees with no dedicated desks available to employees. The Assistant Director (Business Systems) confirmed that staff were free to work from the office as frequently as they wished, including five days per week. Desks were available via the Council desk booking facility. Working arrangements from the office were largely driven by the individuals' line manager and how the team was managed as well as the individual needs.

Councillor Holt questioned what was the customers experience of SWoW and what customer feedback had been received. The Assistant Director (Business Systems) confirmed that questions had not been asked of the Council's customers concerning SWoW. Necessary site visits continued to be undertaken uninterrupted and customers could continue to contact the Council via telephone and via the Contact Centre allowing Council services to continue to be delivered to customers with no interruption. Furthermore, the Council undertook a Residents Survey, which provided customer and residents the opportunity to feedback on the Councils services and performance.

Councillor Holt raised concerns regarding the potential remoteness of some services, particularly for the elderly, and staff being potentially isolated when working from home. Councillor Holt questioned whether there should be some minimum standards of attendance in office for staff. Members were advised that each directorate determined its staff attendance requirements. All teams and services were using MS Teams to facilitate regular contact between staff, which provided instant video calls with colleagues across the Council.

The Assistant Director Finance & Property Services advised Members that the workplace had changed in terms of working arrangements. Hybrid working brought greater flexibility and available technology such as MS Team provided the means to engage with colleagues at will. Members were further advised that there was an Employee Assistance Programme in place as well as Human Resources and managers contact details for all staff to access as needed.

Councillor Clements questioned whether flexitime remained in place for staff and whether there should be a minimum number of days per week introduced on which staff were expected to be present in the office. Members were informed that flexi-time arrangements continue to be in place, which proved to be advantageous for recruitment and retention purposes, as was SWoW. How the SWOW and hybrid working arrangements were applied was attributable to respective line managers and Heads of Service.

Councillor Gibbin questioned whether any staff performance issues had arisen through working from home arrangements. The Assistant Director Finance &

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Property Services clarified that there had been no detrimental reports arising from working from home arrangements. Some services continued to operate from the office environment due to the nature of the work involved. The Income and Awards service being cited as one example where permanent home working was well established before the COVID pandemic. Members were advised that performance management procedures would be used should any staffing performance issues be identified.

Councillor Parker noted that a return rate of 64% for the staff survey appeared to be quite low and stated that all employees perspectives needed to be captured; for example, those employees with disabilities. Councillor Parker noted the risk register detail for the SWOW project provided within the report and stated that he was supportive of a further SWoW Update Report being submitted to a future meeting of the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board as part of the 2023/24 Work Programme.

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

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the progress made to date with the Smarter Ways of Working Programme; and,
- (ii) To receive a further Smarter Ways of Working Programme Update Report as part of the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2023/24.

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

7. TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

8. ORACLE CLOUD PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

9. MINUTES