

RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

11 JULY 2022

MINUTES

- Present Councillors: M Parker (Chairman), R Holt, J Tildesley, D Gibbin, Y Clements, M Allen, N Moses, A Adeyemo, A Hodgson,
- Guest: Councillor R Sleigh OBE: Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources
- Officers Paul Johnson: Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive
Sam Gilbert: Assistant Director, Finance & Property Services
Jenny Wood: Director Adult Social Care
Mark Wills: Health, Safety and Risk Manager
Ruth Tennant: Director for Public Health
Tim Browne: Acting Director for Children's Services
Perry Wardle: Assistant Director Economy and Infrastructure
Annabel Dolphin: Strategic Lead, Bereavement Services
Paul Rogers: Democratic Services

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

4. PUBLIC MINUTES

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) To agree the Minutes arising from the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th June 2022 as an accurate record.

5. CPH RESOURCES PRIORITIES FOR THE 2022/23 MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources detailed his Cabinet Member Priorities for 2022-23, with specific reference to the following areas:

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy

The June meeting of Full Cabinet approved the continuation of the Budget Strategy Group to work on a new budget for 2023/24 and an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023/24 to 2025/26. This will need to take account of the significant cost pressures in Children's Services and the impact of the current high inflation levels on Council Services and major contracts. The Budget process this year is expected to be one of the most challenging the Council has ever faced.

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The Cost of Living

An additional section in future budget-monitoring reports to Cabinet is to be included to capture the overall impact of the increase in the cost of living on Council services and finances to facilitate the Council looking at how it can manage the demands it and the borough's residents are facing.

Town Centre Projects and Property Investments

Scrutiny Members were informed that the CPH Resources is also Chair of the Property Investment Board, which has been established by Cabinet to make recommendations on property investments and acquisitions. During the current financial year, the Property Investment Board (PIB) will be recommending a development partner for the phased redevelopment of Mell Square. Details of the preferred development partner will be brought to this Scrutiny Board before a recommendation is made to Cabinet. The Council will also be moving forward with plans for the Eastgate project, which includes the Council House site. The Council will set a programme that follows on from the redevelopment of Mell Square. The proposed Westgate building at the end of Homer Road remains under review whilst attempts continue to secure a significant pre-let prior to any construction contract being entered into.

Chair of the Remuneration Committee

The CPH Resources advised Members that he was Chairman of the Council's Remuneration Committee. In this role, he aimed to ensure that all Council employment policies and practices were fair, comprehensive and up to date. Sickness levels and the measures that the Council takes to manage sickness were included as part of the remit of the Remuneration Committee.

Employee Wellbeing

The Scrutiny Board was advised that the CPH Resources was in regular dialogue with the Deputy Chief Executive and other senior members of the Resources Directorate on progress with hybrid working and on the steps being taken to ensure the wellbeing of Council employees.

Health & Safety

The CPH Resources has Cabinet Member responsibility for Health and Safety and worked with officers to track progress against the annual Health and Safety Action Plan. The Trade Unions, schools and all Directorates of the Council are members of a Corporate Health and Safety Board that has oversight of all health and safety matters.

Income Collection

Given the current cost of living challenges, the Council aims to take a sympathetic approach to debt recovery and help residents through a number of discretionary support schemes. The CPH resources will receive quarterly reports on income collection and make sure that the Council continues to have support mechanisms in place for those that find it difficult to pay their bills.

Discretionary Rate Relief

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Throughout the year, applications for discretionary rate relief from small organisations within the borough are considered. As in previous years, decisions will be based on the extent to which the relief would make a significant difference to the organisation's finances.

Digital Strategy

The Council has a comprehensive Digital Strategy in place, which aims to expand the range of digital channels for providing services. Officers provide the CPH Resources with updates against the Strategy. A priority includes the Council's arrangements for Cyber Security to ensure that we have the technical protection required but also have strong business continuity plans.

Oracle Cloud

The implementation of Oracle Cloud affects the majority of the services in the Resources Directorate. It affects how we pay our suppliers, it affects how we pay our staff (and Councillors) and is the backbone of corporate systems. Oracle Cloud has now gone live with phase one of the implementation, with phase two being planned for November 2022.

Other ICT Projects

The previous arrangements for approving IT projects will continue into 2022/23 in that no spend on a major ICT project can be incurred without first presenting a report to one of the CPH Resources decision sessions for approval.

Corporate Asset Management

The Council will adopt a Corporate Landlord model for all our property assets. Property will now be managed corporately, rather than by individual directorates, leaving directorates to get on with providing services. The CPH Resources will continue to receive regular updates on the implementation of this corporate model.

The West Midlands Combined Authority

As well as his role at Solihull, the CPH Resources is also Deputy Mayor and the Resources Portfolio Holder for the West Midlands Combined Authority. Since the Combined Authority was established, Solihull has received well over £100 million of additional funding (from the CA) towards our major infrastructure and town centre projects. The CPH Resources will continue to make sure that Solihull knows how to access all the funding streams held by the Combined Authority. A major milestone for this year is to secure the funding approval for the Multi-Storey Car Park at the UK Central Hub Site, which will then unlock the Arden Cross Triangle Site for development. This is an objective the Council has been working towards for many years.

New Cabinet Member Responsibilities

This year the CPH Resources has been given new responsibilities relating to regulatory services and enforcement, Bereavement Services and Licensing.

Following the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources' presentation, Members of the Scrutiny Board asked several related questions, which in summary included the following:

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Councillor Holt referenced the funding received for the Arden Cross development and questioned whether in light of the funding secured any other barriers were present to obstruct the construction of the car park.

Councillor Sleigh advised that with receipt from the Chancellor of £50M towards the multi-storey car park works and an additional £45M approved by the WMCA, the scheme was well positioned. However, criteria had to be established to understand delivery implications for all partners involved on the site before going live could be established. The 'go, no go' date had been established as June 2023.

Councillor Tildesley raised the growing costs for procured goods, workforce pay awards and the potential for HS2 not progressing as an array of pressures on the Council finances and questioned whether a fallback position was in place to mitigate these pressures. Councillor Tildesley also queried whether there was an update for the Westgate development.

Councillor Sleigh advised the Scrutiny Board that with regard to the Westgate development, the Council's preference was to have a pre-let in place which supported funding of the building and this continued to be pursued.

It was clear that HS2/Government was committed to the Curzon Street interchange and wider implementation of the HS2 programme, which brought extensive employment opportunities.

The cost of inflation brought difficulties in terms of raw material costs, project and wage costs. To help with the cost of living pressures, schemes had been introduced to help residents, such as the Energy Bills Relief scheme.

Having received the presentation from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources priorities for the 2022/23 municipal year.

6. RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

Members of the Scrutiny Board reviewed the updated version of the Resources and Delivering Value Work Programme 2022/23.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To agree the Resources and Delivering Value Work Programme 2022/23; and,
- (ii) To consider whether a Corporate Opportunity Register (funding opportunities) should be looked at by the Scrutiny Board at a future date.

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7. RISK MANAGEMENT INFORMATION REPORT

The report before the Scrutiny Board provided an update on the Council's corporate risk register.

The Health, Safety and Risk Manager informed Members that the Council had a legal duty to demonstrate it had sound internal controls in place. The Council had an agreed Risk Management Policy in place, which was updated annually. References were made to the Risk Matrix within the policy, which looked at the likelihood and impact of risks the Council faced. A Corporate Risk Register was also established across the Council, which was regularly reviewed at Directorate and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) level.

Operational risk was managed on a daily basis at Directorate level by each respective Director. The Audit Committee held CLT accountable for risk management. Appendix B to the report detailed the corporate risks identified and how they are managed. Risks were published on the Council website in a slightly redacted version.

Having received the report introduction, Members of the Scrutiny Board asked several related questions, which in summary included the following matters:

Councillor Gibbin raised the matter of existing financial pressures within the Childrens Directorate and of the anticipated, on-going fiscal pressures in future years. Furthermore, Councillor Gibbin raised recruitment and retention in Adult Social Care as a future risk.

Councillor Tildesley referred to the Corporate Risk Register and to the risk title '*avoidable death, serious harm or abuse of a child where the Council has a duty of care; Child safeguarding practice review or Domestic Homicide review publication leading to adverse publicity*', expressing surprise that the level of risk had been reduced from a 9 to 8. Councillor Tildesley further noted that development of a workforce strategy regarding MASH should be raised under mitigating actions in the Corporate Risk Register, and that further information was required in relation to recruitment of social workers.

The Acting Director for Children's Services informed the Scrutiny Board that nationally there was a shortage of 7,000 social workers. Solihull Council was seeking to recruit, as were all local authorities nationally. The Council was seeking to make the employment offer available at Solihull to be more attractive to potential employees. A good response had been received to adverts placed in the national press, but it was recognised that national demand for social workers would out strip supply. The Council was in talks with the Department of Education as to how to make careers in social work attractive, seeking to put a range of strategies in place which would support recruitment and retention as well as looking to move additional staff into pressured areas.

In respect of amendment of the Corporate Risk Register rating from a 9 to 8, there were a range of mitigating actions in place. Further enhancement of the MASH capacity was sought and extension of management oversight and reporting to manage these issues was also being put in place.

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Councillor Parker referenced the risk title '*failure to secure sufficient funding to deliver the UK Central Programme*', stating that non-delivery would jeopardise the proposed health campus at the Arden Cross development.

The Assistant Director, Economy and Infrastructure advised Members that the Council was working closely with the health sector, UGC and Arden Cross Ltd to deliver the health campus, with an emphasis on health and innovation. The proposal required working from a health/regional perspective through the Arden Cross site, but it was too early to predict at this stage what would be brought forward for development.

Councillor Parker referenced risk title '*failure to manage the structural deficiency at Mell Square Car Park*', querying what would happen after the two-year life period expired for the car park.

The Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the life span was regularly reviewed by structural engineers and that this would continue up to the point of redevelopment as part of the wider masterplan for Mell Square.

In response to Councillor Parker querying the progress with Spandrel Panels, the Assistant Director Economy & Infrastructure advised that the associated risk wording for the Spandrel Panels reflected that they may not all comply with the latest relevant regulations. However, a number of mitigating actions had been taken, with a programme in place to replace the Spandrel Panels.

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

- (i) Having commented on the risks detailed within the Corporate Risk Register, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board agreed to note the report.

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

9. APPENDIX C – CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting
Closed at 7:15 p.m.