

RESOURCES & DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD

22ND MAY 2023

MINUTES

Present Councillors: M McCarthy (Chairman), Y Clements (Vice Chairman), K Meeson, S Gethen, L Kaye, N Moses, S Sheshabhattar, A Hodgson

Guests Councillor B Sleigh OBE, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources

Officers Samantha Gilbert: Assistant Director Finance & Property Services
Paul Rogers: Democratic Services

1. CONFIRMATION OF ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN 2023/24

At the Annual General Meeting of Council held on Tuesday, 16th May 2023, Councillor M McCarthy and Councillor Y Clements were proposed as Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively for the 2023/24 municipal year, subject to confirmation at the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 22nd May 2023.

On seeking confirmation of appointing the Scrutiny Board Chairman for 2023/24, Councillor M McCarthy was proposed by Councillor K Meeson and seconded by Councillor Y Clements. No further nominations were received. Councillor M McCarthy was duly appointed as Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Chairman for the 2023/24 municipal year.

On seeking to appoint a Scrutiny Board Vice Chairman for 2023/24, Councillor Y Clements was nominated by Councillor M McCarthy and seconded by Councillor L Kaye. There being no other nomination, Councillor Y Clements was duly appointed as Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Vice-Chairman for the 2023/24 municipal year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Adeyemo.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No declarations were received.

4. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

No questions or deputations were received.

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5. MINUTES

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

To agree the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Public Minutes arising from the meeting held on 17th April 2023 as a true record.

6. CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR RESOURCES: PRIORITIES FOR THE 2023/24 MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources presented to the Scrutiny Board his Resources Portfolio priorities for the 2023/24 municipal year as detailed below:

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy

In February 2023, Full Council approved a new Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26. This delivered a balanced budget for all three years despite the significant financial challenges the Council is facing around Children's services, inflation and energy costs. Officers will continue to monitor and report against the MTFS to ensure its deliverability. In June 2023, Full Cabinet will be asked to approve the continuation of the Budget Strategy Group to work on a new budget for 2024/25 and an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 to 2026/27.

2021/22 and 2022/23 Statement of Accounts and External Audits

The draft 2021/22 Statement of Accounts were published in June 2022 ahead of the external audit process. This year, there were two separate issues outside of the control of both the Council and its auditors (Grant Thornton) in relation to Infrastructure Assets and Pension Fund valuations, which have both delayed the sign-off of the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts by the External Auditors.

The Infrastructure Assets issue has been resolved and the Pension fund valuation resolution is imminent, meaning the Final Statement of Accounts can be published.

Officers have continued to work on the 2022/23 Draft Statement of Accounts and are on track to publish these by 31st May 2023, in accordance with the statutory deadline. The audit for these accounts will begin in July 2023 and is expected to be completed during September 2023.

Town Centre Projects and Property Investments

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources informed the Scrutiny Board that he was Chair of the Property Investment Board, established by Cabinet to make recommendations on property investments and acquisitions. During the last financial year, the Council completed the dialogue phase of the procurement process to select a development partner for the redevelopment of Mell Square. Dialogue closed on the 12th May 2023 and the Council is awaiting tender submissions from the parties.

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Following evaluation and engagement with stakeholders, a recommendation will be presented to the Property Investment Board and if supported, to Scrutiny and Full Cabinet in October 2023. The programme remains on track to commence development on the first phase in Summer 2025. In addition to the redevelopment of Mell Square, two further major projects are being worked on; the Council House site (Eastgate), and Westgate at the end of Homer Road. Work on Eastgate is progressing well and a business case is to be progressed in Spring 2024 to draw down funding to complete feasibility and master planning for the site. The Council continues to pursue potential market interest for Westgate in what remains a challenging market before committing to proceed to construction.

Chair of the Remuneration Committee

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources informed the Scrutiny Board that he was the Chair for the Council's Remuneration Committee. In this role, he aimed to ensure that all of the Council's employment policies and practices are fair, comprehensive and up to date. The Remuneration Committee also reviewed sickness levels and the measures that the Council takes to manage sickness.

Smarter Working and Employee Wellbeing

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources informed the Scrutiny Board that he was in regular dialogue with the Acting Chief Executive and other senior members of the Resources Directorate on progress with Smarter Ways of Working and on the steps being taken to ensure the wellbeing of Council employees.

Health & Safety

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources informed the Scrutiny Board that he had responsibility for Health & Safety and worked with officers to track progress against the Corporate Health and Safety Action Plan. Representatives from all Directorates of the Council, including the Trade Unions, attend a Corporate Health & Safety Board that has oversight of all health and safety matters.

Income Collection

The Council has continued to take a sympathetic approach to debt recovery in response to the cost-of-living impact. Despite this, Council income collection levels for last financial year, 2022/23 were good compared to neighbouring authorities, albeit slightly lower than the Council's intended target of 98% (97.40% collected for council tax and 97.48% for business rates). The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources will receive quarterly reports on income collection to ensure 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, the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources will consider applications for discretionary rate relief from small organisations within the borough. 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 had a comprehensive Digital Strategy in place, which aims to expand the range of digital services and channels for residents. Working with officers, the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources informed the Scrutiny Board that he was seeking to ensure that the Strategy and underlying Roadmap are progressed during 2023/24.

ICT Projects

The previous arrangements for approving IT projects will continue into 2023/24, in that no spend on a major ICT project can be incurred without first presenting a report to one of the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources decision sessions for approval.

Corporate Asset Management

The Scrutiny Board is aware that the Council will adopt a Corporate Landlord model for all its property assets. Property will now be managed corporately, rather than by individual directorates, leaving directorates to get on with providing services. The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources will continue to receive regular updates on the implementation of this corporate model.

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

As well as his role at Solihull, the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources is also Deputy Mayor and the Resources Portfolio Holder for the West Midlands Combined Authority, which has recently agreed a new Deeper Devolution Deal which brings further additional flexibilities and funding to the local authorities that make up the West Midlands Combined Authority. The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources will make sure that Council officers know how to access all the new funding streams available through this Deal.

Having considered the verbal 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 2023/24 municipal year.

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7. RESOURCES AND DELIVERING VALUE SCRUTINY BOARD DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

Having received the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board Draft Work Programme 2023/24, the Chairman invited comment from Scrutiny Board Members.

Councillor Meeson noted that there were some obvious matters identified in the draft Work Programme for Members to consider during 2023/24, such as the Risk Register, but considered the draft programme rather bland. Councillor Meeson highlighted the requirement for the Scrutiny Board to hold the Executive to account and to put forward alternative policy options to Cabinet for consideration. As the Council's employees represented its largest resource, Councillor Meeson wished to see this area better represented in the Boards Work Programme, along with topics pertaining to Best Value, cost implications of agency staff and the expenditure and value arising for the Council arising from its membership of West Midlands Employers.

Councillor Clements identified the inclusion of the Councils Procurement Strategy, Risk Management and Insurance arrangements as part of the Scrutiny Boards Work Programme for 2023/24. The Assistant Director Finance & Property Services informed the Scrutiny Board that the Councils Procurement Strategy was currently being updated and could be submitted to a future meeting. The Risk Register was included on the draft 2023/24 Work programme, for which the report remit could be extended to include wider risk management issues.

Councillor Moses requested further details to be provided pertaining to future ICT project proposals identified in the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources portfolio.

The Assistant Director Finance & Property Services advised Members that the Councils Digital Strategy would be included within the Work Programme and could be extended to include IT projects. Members were also requested that the Oracle Closedown report originally proposed for the Scrutiny Board meeting scheduled for July 2023 be moved to September 2023.

Having considered the Draft Work Programme 2023/24, the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

To agree the Resources and Delivering Value Work Programme 2023/24, subject to the Member requests detailed above and for further

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amendments to be made to the Work Programme through the 2023/24 municipal year as considered necessary by the Scrutiny Board.

8. 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.

9. PRIVATE MINUTES

The Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board:

RESOLVED:

To approve the draft Private Minutes arising from the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting held on 17 April 2023.