

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
19<sup>th</sup> October, 2023 at 6.00pm  
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road, Dudley**

**Present:**

Councillor I Kettle (Chair)  
Councillor M Hanif (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors S Ali, H Bills, A Davies, K Denning, P Dobb, J Foster, E Lawrence  
and D Stanley.

**Officers:**

C Driscoll (Director of Children’s Services), K Jones (Director of Housing and  
Communities), G Simpson (Intelligence Manager – Public Health and Wellbeing  
Directorate) and S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager).

**Officers attending on Microsoft Teams**

B Heran (Deputy Chief Executive), N McGurk (Acting Service Director –  
Environment Directorate) and C Blunn (Corporate Performance Manager)

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**8 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors J Clinton and  
E Taylor.

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**9 Appointment of Substitute Member**

Councillor K Denning had been appointed as a substitute Member for  
Councillor E Taylor for this meeting of the Committee only.

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10 **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

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11 **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

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12 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

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13 **Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements 2023/24**

Further to Minute No. 5 of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, a report of the Lead for Law and Governance was submitted on the ongoing development of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements for 2023/24.

The Committee was requested to consider the following issues:

**Scrutiny Call-In**

Guidance had been issued by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and it was noted that the process for dealing with scrutiny call-ins was a matter of local choice. Options were presented for consideration by the Committee.

**Quarterly Performance Reports**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive quarterly performance reports in line with its terms of reference. This did not, however, preclude performance reports from being considered by individual Select Committees.

## Budget Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had overall responsibility for scrutiny of the Council's budget. Reports on the budget proposals would, however, be submitted to individual Select Committees during the January, 2024 cycle of meetings.

## Health Scrutiny

The Public Health Select Committee had a remit to scrutinise functions relating to the improvement of local health and associated services. This was not limited to the Public Health functions of the Council. To reflect this wider remit, the Committee would be redesignated as the Health Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee raised no objections to the proposals in the report concerning quarterly performance reports, budget scrutiny or health scrutiny.

A detailed discussion took place concerning the options for determining scrutiny call-ins. Reference was made to the recent Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review of Dudley Council. It was considered appropriate to defer this specific issue pending receipt of the report and any recommendations from the LGA relating to overview and scrutiny. The Chair undertook to arrange for the LGA Peer Review report to be considered by this Committee as soon as possible following its publication.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That consideration of the options for determining scrutiny call ins be deferred and that this matter be considered at a further meeting of this Committee following the publication of the LGA Peer Review Report.
- (2) That revised versions of Article 6 of the Constitution and the associated Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules be submitted to the Council as part of the Annual Review of the Constitution.

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## 14 **Dudley Economy**

A report of the Acting Director of Public Health and Wellbeing was submitted on an overview of Dudley's economy as at mid-year 2023.

The Intelligence Manager gave a detailed presentation to Members and copies of the presentation slides had been circulated to the Committee.

The Committee expressed thanks for the presentation and recognised that the information was complex, however, this demonstrated a level of resilience in the Dudley economy. The information would form a context for future decisions and assist Members in undertaking their overview and scrutiny role.

Councillor A Davies commented that the data provided by the Office for National Statistics may not fully reflect the impact of recent interventions. Further information was requested on positive actions being taken by the local authority to support local companies. The Intelligence Manager undertook to raise this with the Economic Intelligence Unit.

Councillor J Foster commented on the contribution of the local authority to the local economy. Reference was made to inclusive growth and regeneration, as it was important to consider both the contribution of the local authority, and the activities of local businesses, to support the authority and local people as a contribution to overall economic success.

Councillor D Stanley referred to the need to fill empty units in Town Centres and across the Borough. In this regard, all opportunities should be taken to encourage businesses and attract investment. Reference was made to Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).

Councillor M Hanif supported the above comments and queried the number of jobs affected by the information referred to on the slide in the presentation titled 'new economic shock'.

Councillor K Denning referred to accessibility issues with the reports and presentation to the Committee. The Intelligence Manager acknowledged these points and would consider this further in the presentation of dashboarding and performance data.

Councillor H Bills referred to the success of the Halesowen Business Improvement District (BID), the positive effects on other local areas and support for extending this approach to other parts of the Borough. The Deputy Chief Executive referred to ongoing activity within Regeneration and Enterprise concerning the BID Programme and a further report would be submitted to Members.

Councillor S Ali referred to the need for Officers to work closely with Ward Councillors at the earliest stage to support initiatives including the improvement of education standards, training and skills. The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that Officers in Regeneration and Enterprise would report further on issues concerning skills and growth.

Councillor D Stanley referred to the condition of pavements and the need to make improvements, including dealing with litter and rubbish, to attract people into the Town Centre

Councillor J Foster again referred to the issue of inclusive growth and suggested that it would be helpful to receive future presentations from the Intelligence Manager together with the Head of Economic Growth and Skills.

The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that further updates would be given on major regeneration innovations in the Borough and inclusive skills development. It was acknowledged that Members required early updates on matters affecting their wards.

Councillor J Foster referred to the ongoing work of the Corporate and Economic Strategy Select Committee and the need to focus on how the inclusive growth approach could benefit other areas, not just the recognised Town Centres.

Councillor A Davies referred to the employment status graph in the presentation and requested that future reports contain a national comparator regarding the employment sectors.

Councillor K Denning commented positively on the restoration works to the Plaza Malls building in Dudley Town Centre, the growth of units in the building and the associated heritage value. Councillor D Stanley indicated that the owners of some premises had refused approaches to undertake similar works.

The Chair thanked the Intelligence Manager for the presentation and noted that the information promoted a wider understanding of all the complex issues affecting the local economy, together with recognition of the ongoing activity to enhance the quality of life for people in the Borough.

## **Resolved**

That the report and presentation be noted and that further reports be presented to Members in due course.

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15 **Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 1 (1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023)**

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the Quarter 1 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023.

The Committee considered the report and the following points were made during the discussion:

- Councillor J Foster expressed the view that it was important for this Committee to have an overview of the corporate report, however, any areas of significant or consistent under-performance should be referred for detailed consideration by the relevant Select Committee. There was a need for this Committee to be assured that issues were addressed with outcomes being reported accordingly.
- The Chair noted that the information presented for the first quarter may not represent the current position due to the implications of subsequent budget decisions. Any areas of under-performance could be brought to the attention of the Leader or Cabinet Members.
- Councillor E Lawrence indicated that issues concerning highway safety inspections (PI 2383) were being considered by the Highways and Environment Services Select Committee.
- Councillor A Davies stated that considerable work was in progress to address challenges in relation to housing and these would be discussed by the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee.
- Councillor D Stanley referred to PI 1899 concerning rent loss and the need to include a monetary value along with the percentage figure. The Director of Housing and Communities clarified that this was a national indicator and acknowledged the need for action to reduce rent loss.

- With reference to PI 1447 – % of agency social workers (children’s), the Director of Children’s Services gave a detailed analysis of this long-standing workforce challenge. Reference was made to the importance of safeguarding, the ongoing redesign of Children’s Services and changes in definitions that affected the figures. It was noted that the agency figure had reduced to 18% by the end of September, 2023. Reference was made to recruitment and retention challenges, including support to newly qualified staff. The current number of Looked After Children was 587 and keeping children safe was the key priority. It was noted that the Children’s Services Select Committee also continued to challenge detailed performance information at their meetings.

The Chair undertook to highlight this issue to the Cabinet and seek further assurances that the ongoing issues were being addressed.

- Regarding highway safety inspections (PI 2383), the Acting Service Director gave an analysis of the actions being taken and noted that these issues were being considered in detail by the Highways and Environment Services Select Committee. Members acknowledged that the backlog of work was impacted by the availability of resources for highway maintenance and associated issues. Councillor S Ali stated that a focus should be given to areas and wards with the greatest need and action was necessary to improve response times.
- Councillor H Bills referred to the use of quad bikes to improve weed control and requested a report on the effectiveness of this method of operation. Councillor P Dobb reported that this was a planned agenda item for the Climate Change Select Committee in January, 2024.
- The Corporate Performance Manager reminded the Committee of the offer of performance training for Members to be provided by the Local Government Association.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That, subject to the specific points noted above, the Quarter 1 Corporate Quarterly Performance report and service summary sheets, covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, be noted.
- (2) That the performance framework that has been embedded and adhered to across the organisation be noted.

- (3) That the corporate key performance indicators agreed in June, 2023 to be monitored and reported against the Council Plan for 2023/24, be noted, together with the benchmarking exercise as referred to in the report.
  - (4) That the alignment of this report with the Directorate dashboards, in accordance with previous feedback from Members, be noted.
  - (5) That the refresh of the Council Plan be noted.
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16 **Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 8.50pm

CHAIR