

**Minutes of the Housing and Public Realm
Scrutiny Committee
Thursday 23rd June, 2022 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2, Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor M Westwood (Chair)
Councillor W Sullivan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors M Aston, K Casey, J Clinton, R Collins, J Cowell, J Foster, I Kettle, K Lewis,
D Stanley, E Taylor and T Westwood

Officers:

B Heran – Deputy Chief Executive, K Jones – Director of Housing and Communities and
K Griffiths – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and Legal).

Also in attendance

One member of the public

10 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Aston and P Sahota.

11 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was reported that Councillors J Foster and E Taylor had been appointed as substitute Members for Councillors A Aston and P Sahota respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

12 **Declarations of Interests**

Councillors J Clinton and J Cowell declared non-pecuniary interests in relation to Agenda No. 5 – Annual Scrutiny Programme 2022/23, as Council tenants.

13 **Public Forum**

A member of the public referred to an e-mail that had been circulated to all Members of the Committee prior to the meeting, attaching plans, maps and information on enhancing the Rail Network in the West Midlands. He urged Members to support him in requesting that a review of the decision be undertaken on the proposals to build a high concrete viaduct on the canal embankment to allow the Dudley tram to travel to and from the Merry Hill Centre. The Chair indicated that should Members wish to offer support, individual responses should be provided to the member of the public.

14 **Annual Scrutiny Programme 2022/23**

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance was submitted and a presentation provided by the Deputy Chief Executive on items to be included in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for detailed consideration by this Scrutiny Committee during 2022/23.

Following the presentation, Members were informed that a Working Group meeting would be arranged for July/August 2022 to discuss progress on the Housing Board and Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Association (DFTRA), to include outcomes on the ARK Consultancy report.

In responding to a question from Councillor K Casey, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the contract for the Library Service was due to end in 2024 and strategies to improve the services were currently being considered. Proposals would be submitted to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor D Stanley referred to two separate areas within the Borough where maintenance/repair work was currently being carried out on pavements and the disruption caused to the public transport service, due to roads being closed and use of the temporary traffic lights. Pollution issues, fuel wastage and roads being closed for maintenance/repair work without sufficient notice being provided to Members or residents were also referred to, which were all contributing to issues associated with climate change. Whilst it was accepted that emergency work to the highway infrastructure was unavoidable, improved strategies and planning techniques were considered essential to reduce the impact on communities and public services. In responding, the Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged the issues raised and assured the Committee that the matters raised would be forwarded to the Head of Traffic, Transportation and Engineering Services for a written response and that the strategy and approach to the programme of works on the highway infrastructure had been included in the Scrutiny Programme 2022/23 to be discussed in more detail.

In responding to a comment made by Councillor D Staley in relation to utility companies not completing work within a specified timeframe, the Deputy Chief Executive considered that the use of the Local Authority's enforcement powers could be used more effectively and would be considered as part of the Improvement Plan for that service area.

Councillor E Taylor made adverse comments in relation to temporary traffic lights being erected in advance of programmed maintenance/repair work being carried out and the disruption caused with traffic lights being activated prior to the work commencing.

Members referred to the service provided by Dudley Council Plus in relation to the procedures for reporting and responding to residents' queries. Often residents contacted Councillors direct when responses were not being provided within adequate timescales and it was suggested that the service area be reviewed with a view to improvements being made. Issues associated with inadequate IT systems to support various programmes were also referred to and it was suggested that upgrading systems also be considered as part of a review process. In responding, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that a review on proposed changes to measuring tenant satisfaction and work to improve customer satisfaction and experience and managing complaints was currently being undertaken and would be reported to the Scrutiny Committee in March 2023. Members were advised that specific issues associated with the lack of communication from officers, delays in responses being received or phonelines not being answered within the Housing and Communities Directorate, should be referred to her direct for appropriate investigation and action.

In responding to comments made in relation to void properties, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that any specific enquiries should be raised directly with her outside of the meeting. Members were informed that the recent issue Councillor D Stanley had raised in relation to the void property located within Sedgley had now been rectified.

In referring to the provision of Working Groups, Members considered that two separate Working Groups be set up to discuss Housing and Communities and Public Realm issues separately. The Working Groups would be arranged throughout the year to consider specific key issues and the membership would include all Members of the Scrutiny Committee. The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that a draft programme of potential items to be discussed at future Working Group meetings would be presented to the July/August Working Group.

Resolved

- (1) That the items to be scrutinised by this Committee in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2022/23, be noted.
- (2) That the Committee confirm the programme of business below, subject to the need for flexibility to reflect any changes that might arise during the municipal year:

Wednesday 21st September, 2022

- Quarterly Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 1
- Moving to a Community Housing Model, the Housing White Paper, what it means for the Council and an overview of managing empty homes and garages
- Street cleanliness and plans to improve neighbourhood environmental quality
- Developing the neighbourhood approach to delivering services to keep Dudley clean and safe

Thursday 17th November, 2022

- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Progress with developing neighbourhoods with a focus on repairs, asset management and reducing fuel poverty
- Progress on transport issues including working with partners (Travel for West Midlands), highways maintenance, asset management programming and neighbourhood traffic and highways service

Thursday 26th January, 2023

- Quarterly Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 2
- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Annual update on the Strategic Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and an overview of the Safe and Sound Partnership priorities and action plan
- Update on improvements to managing neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour
- Progress on grounds maintenance, green and open space

Wednesday 29th March, 2023

- Quarterly Corporate Performance Report – Quarter 3
 - Review of proposed changes to measuring tenant satisfaction, consumer regulation changes coming from the Housing White Paper and the work to improve customer satisfaction and experience
 - Future plans for the Lister Road Depot, people and workforce and progress with the work on partnership and neighbourhoods
- (3) That the Lead for Law and Governance, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to make all the necessary arrangements to enable this Committee to undertake its programme of scrutiny work during the 2022/23 municipal year.
- (4) That the terms of reference of the Housing and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the Appendix to the report submitted, be noted.

- (5) That Democratic Services be requested to arrange a Housing and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Working Group in July/August to discuss progress on the Housing Board and Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Association (DFTRA), to include outcomes on the ARK Consultancy report.
 - (6) That the Head of Traffic, Transportation and Engineering Services be requested to provide a written response in relation to the programme of maintenance/repair work to the highway infrastructure and the issues associated with the programmed work as referred to above, to include improvement strategies and planning techniques.
 - (7) That two separate Working Groups be established to provide for the informal consideration and formulation of recommendations concerning items associated with Housing and Communities and Public Realm to comprise all Members of this Scrutiny Committee.
 - (8) That the Deputy Chief Executive provide a draft programme of potential items to be discussed at future Working Groups to be submitted to the July/August Working Group.
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The meeting ended at 6.50pm.

CHAIR



HPR/16