

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
12th June, 2023 at 6.00pm
at Saltwells Education Development Centre,
Bowling Green Road, Netherton**

Present:

Councillor I Kettle (Chair)
Councillor S Keasey (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Ali, H Bills, J Clinton, R Collins, E Lawrence, P Lowe, A Qayyum,
M Rogers and D Stanley.

Officers:

K O’Keefe (Chief Executive), C Driscoll (Director of Children’s Services), K Jones (Director for Housing and Communities), M Abuaffan (Acting Director of Public Health and Wellbeing), J Branch (Assistant Director People and Inclusion), N Biddle (Head of Digital and Customer Services), R Cooper (Head of Financial Services), A Paul (Head of Chief Executive’s Office), C Blunn (Corporate Performance Manager), S Haycox (Corporate Performance Support) and S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager).

Observer:

Councillor S Henley.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors P Dobb, J Foster and A Hughes.

2 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

Councillors R Collins, P Lowe and A Qayyum had been appointed as substitute Members for Councillors P Dobb, J Foster and A Hughes, respectively, for this meeting of the Committee only.

3 **Declarations of Interest**

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

4 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

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

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance was submitted on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements for 2023/24. At the Annual Meeting of the Council on 18th May, 2023, approval had been given to establish the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, together with seven Select Committees for the 2023/24 municipal year.

The report set out updates to Article 6 of the Constitution together with the associated Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules. The views of the Committee were sought on the development of any aspects of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements during the 2023/24 municipal year.

Concerns were expressed regarding the proposed scrutiny 'call in' arrangements, whereby all 'called-in' decisions would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee rather than the Select Committee that had called in the decision. Reference was made to a recent Member Development session with representatives of the Local Government Association. Concerns were expressed that the proposals may not reflect external best practice advice or examples of good governance elsewhere. Members questioned the reason for changing the Council's existing approach to determining scrutiny 'call-ins'.

The Chair indicated that the structure of Committees had been agreed at the Annual Meeting of the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had the ability to invite any Members, Officers or subject matter experts depending on the business under consideration. The Council had significant local discretion to determine its own Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.

Following a discussion it was moved by Councillor P Lowe, seconded by Councillor S Ali and following a vote

Resolved

That consideration of the proposals be deferred pending the submission of a further report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6 **Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 4 (1st January to 31st March, 2023)**

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the Quarter 4 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1st January to 31st March, 2023. The information in the report was supplemented by a presentation from the Corporate Performance Manager, copies of which were circulated to the Committee, focussing on indicators that were below target.

The Chief Executive referred to a review of Key Performance Indicators to ensure their relevance and achieve a focus on issues that were particularly problematic over a long period and/or which were of key strategic significance. Issues could be considered in more detail by this Committee or the relevant Select Committee by taking a ‘deep dive’ approach where appropriate.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor D Stanley on Performance Indicator 1899 (Rent loss: % of potential rent receipts lost (dwellings)), the Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged the total cumulative rent loss in Quarter 4 equated to just below £2 million. The end-to-end voids review was in progress and was having a positive impact on void turn around times. This would impact on void rent loss in the future. With the current focus on stock condition there may be an impact on void loss in the short term as additional checks were undertaken at void stage. Councillor S Ali referred to improvement targets and timescales and the need for better communication with Ward Councillors. The data could be presented in control charts, which may give a better perspective. A further review of voids requiring an investment decision was underway and recommendations for these properties would be made during Quarter 1 of 2023/24. The Director of Housing and Communities acknowledged the points made by the Committee.

Councillor E Lawrence raised the possibility of Cabinet Member attendance at this Committee in future along with the respective Directors. This was acknowledged by the Chair.

Councillor P Lowe supported a review and refresh of Key Performance Indicators and targets to ensure these were realistic and reported to the Committee in a more strategic way. There should be a focus on the Performance Indicators that had the most significant financial or strategic impact. The Chair supported a focus on those Key Indicators that highlighted consistent under-performance or had a significant impact.

The Chair referred to Performance Indicators 370 and 371 relating to sickness absence and queried the Council's approach to dealing with absenteeism. The Assistant Director People and Inclusion reported that there was no single solution to this issue and that the data needed to be viewed in the context of regional and national trends, including the reasons for absence and the profile of the Council's workforce. A range of actions were being taken corporately, including the timely intervention of Occupational Health and support to managers in dealing with both short term and long-term absences in line with the Council's established policies. The Chair referred to the financial impact of staff absence. Councillor P Lowe also referred to the regional and national context and the general reduction in the resources available to support managers and employees. A full report would be submitted to a future meeting taking account of the issues raised by the Committee.

Councillor S Ali referred to Performance Indicator 2473 (Square metres of highway defect repairs completed) and questioned the length of time taken to deal with potholes. Comments were made concerning the poor condition of roads in some areas, the quality of materials used and the general approach to dealing with potholes reported by Ward Members. It was agreed that this issue should be considered in more detail by the Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee. Benchmarking should also be undertaken with other West Midlands Councils.

With regard to the review of the Key Performance Indicators, the Chief Executive reported that some of the indicators were required nationally. Appropriate benchmarking could be undertaken with other local authorities subject to differences being acknowledged between individual authorities such as City and Metropolitan Borough Councils. Care needed to be taken not to 'drive' Performance Indicators too hard, which might have a negative effect. Indicators needed to remain realistic and achievable, in the context of resources available, whilst fully recognising the need for the Council to work smarter wherever possible and learn from good practice elsewhere in the country.

Councillor P Lowe supported the need to consider Key Performance Indicators more effectively and to identify significant areas of concern to be considered in detail by the appropriate Select Committee or Cabinet Member. The Chair supported a greater focus on a limited number of key strategic indicators and Councillor E Lawrence suggested that these should be aligned to the relevant Directorates. The Corporate Performance Manager indicated that the corporate performance report could be shared in its entirety and that Members could specify those areas they wished to focus on.

The Chair requested that a report be submitted in future on the issue of Procurement. Councillor S Ali referred to further consideration of the issue of Social Value and the Chief Executive indicated that this was an integral part of the Council's procurement processes.

In the context of regeneration, economy and tourism, Councillor S Ali questioned the current approach to packaging and selling the Borough as a whole. He also referred to the need for Dudley to receive fair funding and reduce areas of wasteful spending. The Chair referred to the importance of properly maintaining the Borough's green spaces. Councillor D Stanley referred to the effective promotion of the Borough's tourist attractions and events, whilst reviewing the continuation of events with poor attendance.

Councillor H Bills referred to Halesowen in Bloom and the benefits of the Halesowen Business Improvement District (BID), which could potentially be extended to other Town Centres. Councillor S Keasey acknowledged the comments, however, expressed the view that the Halesowen BID had been set up in a different financial climate.

Resolved

- (1) That Quarter 4 Corporate Quarterly Performance report, covering the period 1st January to 31st March, 2023, be noted.
 - (2) That the proposals to review and refresh Key Performance Indicators be supported.
 - (3) That further reports be submitted on the specific issues of sickness absence and procurement taking account of the issues raised by the Committee.
 - (4) That the Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee be requested to consider Performance Indicator 2473 (Square metres of highway defect repairs completed) with specific reference to issues raised concerning potholes.
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7 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 8.10pm

CHAIR