

**Minutes of the Future Council Scrutiny Committee  
Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2021 at 6.00 pm  
In the Council Chamber, Council House, Dudley**

**Present:**

Councillor A Lees (Chair)  
Councillor E Lawrence (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors S Ali, C Barnett, D Corfield, J Cowell, A Davies, P Dobb, J Foster, Z Islam,  
J Roberts, M Rogers and S Saleem.

**Officers:**

B Heran (Deputy Chief Executive), H Martin (Director of Regeneration and Enterprise),  
I Newman (Director of Finance and Legal), S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager) and  
K Taylor (Democratic Services Officer)

**Also in Attendance:**

Councillor P Harley (Leader of the Council), Councillor Q Zada (Opposition Group Leader)  
Councillor I Kettle (Cabinet Member for West Midlands Combined Authority)  
Councillor S Phipps (Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise)

S Cooper (Head of Corporate Landlord Services) and H Coldicott (Team Manager – Facilities  
Management) – for Minute No. 7 below

A Paul (Head of Chief Executive's Office) and C Blunn (Corporate Performance Manager) –  
for Minute No. 8 below

1 **Comments of the Chair**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Future Council Scrutiny  
Committee, in particular welcoming the new Members of the Council following the  
municipal elections on 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2021.

---

2 **Declarations of Interest**

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

In relation to Minute No. 6 below (Independent Remuneration Panel – Review of the Members’ Allowances Scheme), it was noted that, in accordance with dispensations set out in the Members’ Code of Conduct, Members did not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of this item.

---

### 3 **Public Forum**

There were no issues raised under this agenda item.

---

### 4 **Annual Scrutiny Programme 2021/22**

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) was submitted on items to be included in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for detailed considered by this Scrutiny Committee during 2021/22.

Following a suggestion made by a Member, the Chair agreed to consider including an item in relation to the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership to the Scrutiny Programme.

A Member commented on the number of items outlined in the Work Programme hindering the ability to effectively scrutinise matters and considered that scrutiny of one or two items per Committee was preferred.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained in the report and the items in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for consideration by this Committee during 2021/22 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 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2021

Quarterly Performance Report (Quarter 4)  
Members Allowance Scheme  
Council House Refurbishment

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 (Special Meeting)

Budget Scrutiny Process  
Black Country Plan



Working as One Council in  
the historic capital of the Black Country



Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2021

Quarterly Performance Report (Quarter 1)  
Future Council Programme Update  
Local Government Association Peer Review  
Equality and Diversity Update  
Digital and IT Services Update

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2021

Medium Term Financial Strategy  
Major Regeneration Projects Progress  
Annual Town Centres Health Check Survey  
West Midlands Combined Authority Investment – Black Country Review  
Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2022

Quarterly Performance Management Report (Quarter 2)  
Customer Services Update  
Benefit Services Annual Report

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2022

Quarterly Performance Management Report (Quarter 3)  
Major Regeneration Projects Update  
Equality and Diversity Update Report

- (3) That consideration be given to including an item in relation to the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership to the Scrutiny Programme.
- (4) 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 2021/22 municipal year.
- (5) That the terms of reference for the Future Council Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the Appendix to the report submitted, be noted.

---

## 5 **Change in Order of Business**

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c) it was: -



## Resolved

That the order of business be varied and the agenda items be considered in the order set out in the minutes below.

### 6 **Independent Remuneration Panel – Review of the Members’ Allowances Scheme**

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) was submitted to consider the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel established in accordance with the requirements of the Local Authorities (Members’ Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. A copy of the Independent Remuneration Panel’s report was received by the Committee.

The Leader and Opposition Group Leader attended the meeting to provide any submissions or respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee if necessary.

In presenting the report submitted, the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel had been submitted to the Full Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021. The report had been referred to this Scrutiny Committee for further consideration. A final report would be submitted to the Council on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 taking account of any comments or observations made by this Committee and following further consultation with both Group Leaders.

Reference was made to the recommendations outlined in paragraph 6 of the Independent Remuneration Panel Report, including setting an aspiration for Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances to be increased towards a reasonable average figure based upon the average Members’ Allowances paid by the Black Country authorities.

Councillor P Harley was invited to make a statement and referred to the voluntary reduction in Members’ Allowances that had been implemented in the 2017/18 financial year. This reduction was in parallel with changes to staff terms and conditions, including the imposition of three days mandatory unpaid leave for staff. It was noted that the mandatory unpaid leave for employees had ceased effective from April, 2021.

The importance of attracting a diverse range of people to become Councillors was emphasised. It was important that the membership of the Council reflected the Dudley community. Reference was made to increasing commitments undertaken by Members, particularly those that were in employment. It was acknowledged that the Members’ Allowances Scheme should reflect the important role and work undertaken by local Councillors. The introduction of a Special Responsibility Allowance for Shadow Cabinet Members was supported in view of their workload and role in the Council’s governance arrangements.



Councillor Q Zada confirmed that he was in attendance to answer any questions asked by the Committee to assist with deliberations. He referred to the demanding role and workloads undertaken by Councillors, particularly those with substantial portfolios and the potential impact upon their professional and personal lives.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given where appropriate as follows: -

- A Member suggested that consideration should be given to Councillors that were earning low incomes and deemed the Basic Members Allowance as a salary, in particular the difficulties faced in defining the allowance whilst claiming benefits if applicable. The opportunity to develop a broad list of available expenditure that could be claimed by Councillors including mileage would be beneficial. It was also noted that elected members were no longer permitted to join the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- The comparative Members' Allowances paid by the neighbouring Black Country Councils, namely, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton were considered to have significant variations, particularly in relation to Special Responsibility payments. The Director of Finance and Legal acknowledged the differences and the levels for Dudley's Scheme would need to be considered alongside budget implications.
- Reference was made to the yearly cost of living pay increases based on pay awards for local government staff and that consideration should also be given to adjustments in rates of inflation.
- Following comments made in relation to the methodology used to determine allowances, the Chair stated that the Independent Remuneration Panel considered Dudley's Members' Allowances to be significantly lower than the local average and should be amended to reflect the work and role undertaken by local Councillors. Although the Independent Panel did not recommend exact figures, the Chair commented that the allowances should be fair and comparable to the average figures set out in the report.
- In responding to a question raised by a Member, the Director of Finance and Legal confirmed that the previous review of Members' Allowance Scheme was undertaken in January, 2017, and that annual inflation increases were applied in line with the agreed cost of living pay increases for Local Authority staff.
- A Member considered the increase to the Members' Basic Allowance in accordance with the average figures to be reasonable. However, there were concerns to the potential increase to the Special Responsibility Allowances given the present financial challenges and a query was made as to whether the roles undertaken had changed significantly since the last review in 2017.



- The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise and the Cabinet Member for West Midlands Combined Authority shared their experiences as Cabinet Members and the level of commitment involved including attending meetings, briefings, the impact on full time employment, and the need to balance other duties within the Council and as a local ward Councillor.
- A Member raised a question in relation to multiple allowances, where a Member held more than one office qualifying for a Special Responsibility Allowance, but was paid the higher allowance only, and whether this was comparable with neighbouring authorities.
- It was noted that there was a statutory obligation for the Council to review the Scheme every four years with yearly increases being applied in line with pay awards for Council staff. The Members' Allowances Scheme could, however, be reviewed more frequently and changes adopted on a phased basis if required.
- A Member referred to the Special Responsibility Allowances paid to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Licensing and Safety Committee; it was considered an anomaly that allowances were not paid to the Chairs of the Licensing Sub-Committees.
- The Cabinet Member for West Midlands Combined Authority suggested that in addition to the Black Country authorities, the economy of the West Midlands in its entirety should be considered in determining the Members' Allowance Scheme going forward.

Following further discussion, the Scrutiny Committee recommended that the review of Members' Allowances be considered upon the average figure based on the three other neighbouring Black Country Councils, namely, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Councillor P Harley thanked the Committee for their comments and recommendations which would assist in the ongoing detailed consideration of this matter.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the comments made by the Committee, as set out above, in response to the Independent Remuneration Panel report on the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Finance and Legal consider the detailed implications of the comments and observations made by the Scrutiny Committee, and following consultation with both Group Leaders, submit a report to the Council on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2021



---

## 7 **Proposed Improvement to the Council House Campus in Dudley**

A report of the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise was submitted on the proposal to refurbish the Council House Campus, addressing long standing maintenance problems, increase desk capacity and provide an improved working environment.

In presenting key information, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services confirmed that following consultation with the Strategic Executive Board, proposals to 'future proof' the Council House campus in Dudley was included in the Capital Programme for consideration by Full Council at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2020. The Council requested that the proposals be submitted to a Scrutiny Committee, however, the COVID-19 Pandemic and subsequent lockdown restrictions had delayed consideration of the proposals.

The original proposals were predicated on undertaking essential repairs across the campus, increasing the amount of useable office space and maximising and utilising desks in a more agile way. The ability to work in an agile manner had been demonstrated successfully by the Council during the Pandemic.

A map outlining the Council House campus included the main Council House, Old Court and Coroners buildings was provided. It was noted that the Library and Town Hall was not included.

The Team Manager – Facilities Management informed Members that the proposals reflected two main areas of work, whilst considering the limitations of the Grade II listed status, namely, addressing known building defects and undertaking improvements to the sites. The projected forecast for both areas of works was approximately £4m.

It was confirmed that some repairs had been undertaken during the Pandemic including the installation of energy saving LED lighting following receipt of European Regional Development Funding. It was recognised that repairing the extensive damage to the roof was a priority and required future proofing to avoid the significant costs of minor repair works.

Modest redecorations to offices, committee rooms and corridors were proposed alongside the removal of internal walls to increase usable office space that was permitted by Historic England. It was also confirmed that an allowance of £130,000 had been included for the replacement of the existing audio and visual facilities in the Council Chamber and Committee Room 2.

The Team Manager – Facilities Management also reported that new proximity door access systems had been installed to improve security, enabling receptionists to assist Members of Public and Visitors without initially being admitted into the building.



If approved, detailed designs would commence, and it was anticipated that the overall timeline for competition would be approximately two and a half years over a phased period.

In concluding, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services emphasised the need to consider future council working styles and how space could be utilised in both the short and long term. The possibility of utilising spaces collaboratively with third parties would also be explored to maximise facilities. It was noted that the Pandemic had demonstrated that designated offices and locations were not necessary for employees. It was acknowledged that outstanding queries remained in relation to Government guidance on social distancing and the long-term impact on the workplace.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given where appropriate as follows: -

- A Member referred to the climate change emergency that was declared in February, 2020 and raised concerns to the proposed increase to the number of desk spaces. He acknowledged the positive response by Dudley to the Pandemic and although employees working from home was not ideal, the benefits in the reduction in the number of vehicles on the road had positively impacted on carbon emissions.

The Head of Corporate Landlord Services confirmed that approximately 93 additional desks would be created and that capacity would be assessed once the current social distancing restrictions had been removed.

- It was confirmed that the Old Police Building was occupied by the Audit Services Team.
- In responding to a question raised, the Leader stated that the proposals enabled an improved working environment. However it was anticipated that future working arrangements would change, and it was possible that some office buildings may no longer be required.
- A Member considered that the full impact of COVID-19 was not yet known and queried whether the proposed project should be progressing prior to understanding the long-term impact of the Pandemic.
- Reference was made to the proposed improvements to the audio facilities, and it was requested that the replacement microphones be of good quality to enable all present to speak and listen clearly.
- The Leader requested that should the project be approved, priority be given to local contractors where possible, and that the budget be carefully monitored with the aim to deliver for less than the budgeted £4m if possible.



- In responding to comments made in relation to the inadequate disabled facilities at the Council House, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services confirmed that improvements were proposed to the lift and that disabled access was available on the lower ground floor, however he acknowledged that accessibility to the Council Chamber required further consideration. The Head of Corporate Landlord Services welcomed the comments made and undertook to investigate further.
- A Member commented positively on the proposals and acknowledged that employees required good modern offices and suggested that a campaign be developed to attract local contractors and promote the tendering opportunities available.
- Although appreciating the significant work and repairs required, a Member questioned the overall project costs. Reference was made to significant unknown factors and restrictions resulting from the Pandemic and it was queried as to whether issues such as hybrid meetings and social distancing requirements had been fully considered going forward. In responding, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services referred to the work undertaken by the Future Council Project Group to create a 'hybrid' workplace for a flexible workforce to deliver services.
- It was confirmed that Dudley College had been invited to express an interest in utilising space within the campus, which also included a comprehensive tour, however they declined to respond. It was noted that other companies had not yet been contacted.
- A Member queried the significant impact to Council finances and suggested whether priority could be given to works that required immediate repairs in the first instance. The Director of Finance and Legal confirmed that the proposals had not been included in the capital programme, however it was anticipated that £200,000 would be allocated each year. The Head of Corporate Landlord Services also confirmed that a detailed phased approach would be undertaken allowing the daily operation of buildings and meetings to continue and would consider prioritising repairs according to need.
- The Head of Corporate Landlord Services undertook to provide an overview of the financial impact to the Council, including borrowing and Council Tax percentages, should the proposed refurbishment be approved.
- In responding to a question raised, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services confirmed that a dedicated Prayer Room was located within the Old Police Building and would ensure that all employees were informed accordingly.
- In responding to comments made on safety concerns in relation to the steps outside the Council Chamber, the Head of Corporate Landlord Services undertook to assess the matter immediately.



- Reference was made to the national issues surrounding supply and cost of materials required to undertake building works, and although a Member welcomed the opportunity to source locally, it was suggested that a finance cap against the market was necessary and supply delays considered and factored into projections and costs accordingly.
- In view of projected costs, a Member suggested that consideration be given to implementing the project in stages according to need and that a review of current and future costs was regularly undertaken.

The Head of Landlord Services stated that it was the Council's duty to maintain assets in the long term and consider the potential risks should they not be addressed. He also confirmed that although there was an allocation of £2m for repairs within the Capital Programme, the budget was utilised across all buildings.

The Chair requested that an update report be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee in six months' time, outlining confirmed proposals, incorporating suggestions and comments made by the Committee if deemed appropriate, and proposed financial and energy savings.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained within the report submitted on the proposed refurbishment of the Council House Campus, be noted.
- (2) That the proposal to identify and make available finances that enables the implementation of the work outlined within this report in accordance with the indicative timelines, be supported.
- (3) That the Head of Corporate Landlord Services be requested to provide an overview of the financial impact to the Council, including borrowing and Council Tax percentages, should the proposed refurbishment be approved.
- (4) That an update report be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.

---

## **8 Corporate Quarterly Performance Report - Quarter 4 (1<sup>st</sup> January, 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2021)**

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the Quarter 4 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2021. Additional information in relation to COVID-19 in Dudley was appended to the report submitted.



Working as One Council in  
the historic capital of the Black Country



FC/10

In presenting key information through presentation slides, the Corporate Performance Manager made particular reference to the 14 performance indicators that were below target, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report submitted, including a decline in PI.1466 - Number of early help assessment as a result of the post-Christmas lockdown which was expected to improve in Quarter 1. It was noted however that performance had improved in relation to PI.432 – the number of looked after children. A detailed account of the performance indicators was outlined in the appendix to the report submitted.

A summary of key highlights and concerns was outlined, and it was reported that the overall short-term trend for the collective key performance indicators had identified that 22 measures had improved performance, 6 remained consistent and 16 highlighted a downward trend in comparison with Quarter 3 outturns.

Reference was made to the two Directorate Service Summary Documents that had been appended to the report submitted, providing an overview of service delivery and achievements during the given quarter focusing on Adult Social Care and Public Health and Wellbeing.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given where appropriate as follows: -

- With reference to PI 433 Number of Children subject to a child protection plan per 100,000 of the population, a Member requested further information on the measures implemented by the service that resulted in the performance improving. The Corporate Performance Manager undertook to forward the query to the appropriate officer for a response.
- A Member considered the key performance indicators to be a good management tool and in responding to a question raised, the Corporate Performance Manager confirmed that the indicators were reviewed on an annual basis and endorsed by the Strategic Executive Board.
- The Head of Chief Executive's Office confirmed that the key performance indicators were in line with the Council priorities and referred to the proposed refresh of the Dudley Council Plan 2019/22 for a further three years considering future outcomes and Directorate Plans. The Council Plan should map the journey to achieving the aspirations in the Future Council 2030 programme and the Forging a Future Borough Vision 2030. A Performance Management Framework was being developed to enable a consistent approach towards performance management and reporting processes across the Council.
- Reference was made to performance indicators regarding sickness absence, in particular the figures had not incorporated the impact of COVID-19. The Head of Chief Executive's Office undertook to forward the query to the appropriate officer for a response.



- The need to improve engagement with employees was mentioned following the reduction in PI2062 - Employee engagement return rates, which remained an Organisational issue to increase completion rates. It had been recognised that a different approach was required to undertake staff surveys, with the possibility of introducing focus groups and workshops with front line staff, and an employee's engagement application for phones and devices.
- A Member, although recognising the improved trend on PI.1798 Percentage of eligible people receiving a health check (coverage), considered that the 33% target was significantly lower than the England benchmarking comparative data of 77.4%. The Corporate Performance Manager confirmed that health checks were only being undertaken at General Practitioners surgeries during the Pandemic.
- With reference to PI. 120 - 16 to 18 year old's who are not in education, employment, or Training (NEET), it was noted that the measure was below target this quarter and showed a downward trend compared to the previous quarter and annual trend. A Member sought clarification on the overall borough position, the specific ward areas and reasons as to why young adults were not in education, training or employment together with proposed measures by the service to address the area. The Corporate Performance Manager undertook to forward the query to the appropriate officer for a response.
- Following comments made in relation to the introduction of an employee engagement application for phones and devices, the Head of Chief Executive's Office stated that the proposal would enable an easier platform to share information, initiatives and offers and discounts available to employees in local town centres.
- In responding to a request by the Chair, the Corporate Performance Manager undertook to request updated information in relation to PI.2056 – Number of the Council's headcount to be part of an apprenticeship (Annual) with the appropriate officer.

In concluding, the Head of Chief Executive's Office referred to comments made by the previous Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee regarding the future reporting of the Corporate Quarterly Performance Report. The Scrutiny Committee subsequently agreed that appropriate scorecards be circulated to the individual Scrutiny Committees for information and consideration.

## Resolved

- (1) That the Quarter 4 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2021, be noted.



(2) That the Corporate Performance Manager and the Head of Chief Executive's Office be requested to forward queries and comments raised by the Committee to the appropriate officer for a response, on the following Key Performance Indicators:

- PI 433 Number of Children subject to a child protection plan per 100,000 of the population
- Employees Sickness Absence Performance Indicators
- PI. 120 - 16 to 18 year old's who are not in education, employment, or Training (NEET)
- PI.2056 – Number of the Council's headcount to be part of an apprenticeship (Annual).

The meeting ended at 8.15pm

CHAIR



FC/13