

**Minutes of the Future Council Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday, 8th September, 2021 at 6.00 pm
In the Council Chamber, Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor E Lawrence (Vice-Chair in the 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), L Fulci (Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services), H Marsh-Geyton (Acting Director of Public Realm), A Paul (Head of Chief Executive's Office), C Blunn (Corporate Performance Manager), S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager) and K Taylor (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in Attendance:

Councillor I Kettle - Cabinet Member for West Midlands Combined Authority
Councillor C Bayton – Opposition Shadow Cabinet Member for West Midlands Combined Authority
Councillor S Keasey – Cabinet Member for Digital, Customer and Commercial Services
M Waters (Director of Policy, Strategy and Innovation) and A Greatholder (Principal Policy and Strategy Officer) (Transport for West Midlands) for Agenda Item No. 5.

22 **Chair's Comments**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was noted that a revised agenda and an additional report had been circulated. The Chair was of the opinion that Agenda Item No. 10 (Scrutiny of the Black Country Plan) needed to be considered at this meeting, as an urgent item of business, pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in view of the timescales and deadlines involved.

23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor A Lees and K O'Keefe (Chief Executive).

24 **Declarations of Interest**

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

25 **Public Forum**

There were no issues raised under this agenda item.

26 **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.

27 **Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 1**

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the Quarter 1 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1st April, 2021 to 30th June, 2021. Two Directorate Service Summary Documents had been appended to the report submitted, providing an overview of service delivery and achievements during the given quarter focusing on Housing and Community Services and Public Realm.

In presenting key information, the Corporate Performance Manager made particular reference to the thirteen performance indicators that were below target, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report submitted. It was noted that the overall short-term trend for the collective key performance indicators had identified that ten measures had improved performance, three remained consistent and seventeen highlighted a downward trend in comparison with Quarter 4 outturns. A detailed account of the performance indicators was outlined in the appendix to the report submitted.

With regard to performance indicators on sickness absence, it was reported that sickness levels had significantly increased during Quarter 1 with 2.98 Days lost per full time employee, which was reported to be the highest sickness rate since April, 2011. Sickness levels in Quarter 1 last year were particularly low due to the changes in working arrangements and the initial Covid-19 lockdown. It was evident that long-term sickness absence predominately related to Mental Health/Anxiety/Depression, Muscular Pain and Non-Work-Related Stress.

The increase in Covid-19 related absences predominately related to the number of employees developing Long-Covid conditions or reactions to vaccinations, and the long-term impact of the Pandemic was unclear going forward. Reference was made to the introduction of a Wellbeing Calendar to support employees and the Corporate Performance Manager undertook to circulate this to the Committee for information.

It was noted that a review would be undertaken as to how Dudley delivered anti-social behaviour services to ensure that the Local Authority was meeting future need and changing trends, including the introduction of an Anti-Social Behaviour Focus Group that would consult with users focusing on services provided in Housing and Communities. The Deputy Chief Executive undertook to share proposals with the Committee.

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

- Following comments made in relation to sickness absences of employees with Long-Covid related conditions, Members queried whether adequate support would be made available to those families that were affected together with the wider communities, and the measures implemented by Public Health. The importance for the Local Authority in sending a positive message in recognising Long-Covid as a serious condition was mentioned, and it was important that employees were informed of support available and polices implemented accordingly. The Corporate Performance Manager undertook to forward the query to the appropriate officer.
- In responding to concerns raised by a Member in relation to insufficient communication with service users within customer focus groups in respect of anti-social behaviour, the Corporate Performance Manager undertook to request further details from the appropriate officer.
- The considerable amount of work undertaken in reviewing the Key Performance Indicators was referred to and the need to look for more reasonable measures whilst reviewing trend data.

Reference was made to the key performance indicators relating to customer complaints, which had been identified as below target, and officers were in attendance to provide further details and respond to questions asked by the Committee. The Committee was assured that Directorates were regularly monitoring and progressing well in this area.



The Acting Director of Public Realm stated that, although the statistics appeared concerning, the complaints were categorised under five areas including service quality and staff attitude. It was reported that 201 complaints had been received compared to 137 in previous quarters which related predominately to the measures implemented at the beginning of the Pandemic, policies and procedures, closure of the Anchor Lane Household Waste and Recycling Centre and issues arising from fines issued by external enforcement companies.

The Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services emphasised the need to provide data on lessons learnt and confirmed that a review would be undertaken on the process of disseminating data to Members prior to Scrutiny meetings.

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

- A Member referred to the need to improve and resolve issues in relation to Green Care, in particular areas that had been delayed as a result of the Pandemic. The Acting Director of Public Realm referred to the challenges faced arising from a reduction in resources in particular in relation to green care and recruitment, however, the Committee was informed that priority would be given to improving the service next year.

The Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged the backlog of work as a result of COVID-19 and referred to the development of a tracking programme identifying outstanding work, whilst being transparent and honest in disclosing work that could not be undertaken due to budget constraints.

- The Deputy Chief Executive also referred to determining and communicating the definition between a complaint and service requests for users and suggested that a responsive digital system was needed to support users including generating automated messages to those reporting an issue that had already been registered. The complex nature of the process was acknowledged and progress would be communicated to the Committee accordingly.
- The Corporate Performance Manager was requested to include further details and comparative data in relation to recruitment in Dudley within the next Quarterly Performance Report.
- In responding to a request by a Member, the Corporate Performance Manager undertook to request updated information in relation to PI. 120 - 16 to 18 year old's who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) with the appropriate officer.



- Reference was made to PI.2074 Proportion of premises in the borough that are broadly compliant with food hygiene law (star rating of 3 or more), in particular that Quarter 1 outturn of 81.06% was lower than the target rating of 90%, and that Dudley should aspire for all premises to be of a good hygiene standard. The Corporate Performance Manager undertook to request a breakdown of the hygiene ratings and premises within the Dudley Borough with the appropriate officer.
- A Member welcomed the introduction of a new Key Performance Indicator in relation to the reduction in smoking during pregnancy.
- A Member commented on the significant amount of areas identified within the report that were within the remit of the Committee and suggested that performance should be considered in determining the agenda and business for future meetings.

The Corporate Performance Manager confirmed that appropriate scorecards had been presented to individual Scrutiny Committees either electronically or considered at a Scrutiny meeting. It was noted that additional information would be included in future reports including impact and assurances of work being undertaken.

Following suggestions made by the Head of Chief Executive's Office, the Committee agreed that the appropriate Director be invited to attend the Committee to provide further details on service areas that were below target in two consecutive quarters.

Resolved

- (1) That the Quarter 1 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1st April, 2021 to 30th June, 2021, be noted.
- (2) That the Corporate Performance Manager be requested to forward queries and comments raised by the Committee to the appropriate officer for a response, on the following Key Performance Indicators and areas:
 - The support proposed to families of employees together with the wider communities that were affected by Long-Covid, and the measures implemented by Public Health.
 - Improved communication with service users within customer focus groups with regard to anti-social behaviour.
 - PI. 120 - 16 to 18 year old's who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).
 - PI.2074 Proportion of premises in the borough that are broadly compliant with food hygiene law (star rating of 3 or more)



- (3) That the Corporate Performance Manager be requested to circulate the Wellbeing Calendar outlining support available to employees to the Committee for information.
- (4) That the Deputy Chief Executive be requested to provide details on the proposed work in relation to housing and communities, with regard to Anti-Social Behaviour, to the Committee for information.
- (5) That the Head of Chief Executive's Office be requested to invite the appropriate Director to future meetings to provide further details on service areas that were below target in two consecutive quarters.

28 **West Midlands Local Transport Plan – Green Paper Engagement and Local Transport Plan (LTP) Programme**

A report of the Acting Director of Public Realm was submitted on the development of a new West Midlands Local Transport Plan including the publication of the transport Green Paper, proposed West Midlands Leaders summit and COP26 prospectus and the wider programme for developing and adopting a new Local Transport Plan. Representatives from Transport for West Midlands attended the meeting.

M Waters referred to the Local Transport Plan that had been adopted in 2016, however significant developments and changes had taken place in the last five years including concerns regarding the Climate Emergency and the current COVID-19 pandemic. There had been a significant increase in e-commerce and introduction of new technology within the transport system including e-scooters and e-bikes.

A Greatholder commented on the five Motives for Change adopted by Transport for West Midlands to frame the relationship between transport and Inclusive Growth including sustaining economic success, tackling the climate emergency, supporting local communities, becoming more active and creating a fairer society. The Green Paper established how the economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities were addressed.

The importance of improving access equitably was critical for social and economic prosperity. The plan would also be honest about difficult decisions and how to restrain behaviours.

It was acknowledged that the issues highlighted were not easy to resolve and therefore engagement was critical in achieving success. A comprehensive consultation process had commenced in July, 2021, engaging widely across a broad range of stakeholders and the public, with approximately 600 responses received to date which had mainly been positive.



A summit with West Midlands Leaders had been proposed for late September to deliberate on key messages and to confirm the scope of ambition and approach for the new West Midlands Local Transport Plan. The high-level programme for developing the Transport Plan was outlined in paragraph 22 of the report submitted.

M Waters confirmed that Council Officers were engaged in the process and Cabinet Members were invited to Regional Working Groups. He specifically referred to developments and areas for consideration within Dudley including Stourbridge connectivity and the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Metro Extension.

Following the presentation, Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given as appropriate:-

- It was confirmed that the consultation process had been extended and would remain open to allow for further engagement and comments submitted by stakeholders and the public.
- A Member suggested that the Green Paper could be the opportunity for the West Midlands Local Authorities to influence and help residents understand the urgency of climate emergency. The possibility of implementing local hubs to allow people to work near to their homes to reduce extended transport journeys was also mentioned.
- In responding to a question raised by a Member in relation to electric vehicle charging facilities, the Acting Director of Public Realm confirmed that the charging infrastructure was currently being considered.

M Waters referred to the significant amount of work already undertaken in relation to electric vehicle charging and undertook to provide a briefing note for the Committee.

- A Member stated disappointment that the report and presentation provided did not specifically relate to implications for Dudley, and it was suggested that it would assist Members to consider Dudley's Transport Plan and data sets in order to compare and make positive contributions towards the content and priorities of the West Midlands Plan.

The Acting Director of Public Realm acknowledged the comments made and confirmed that the process was in the very early stages of development. Officers would ensure that any information relating to Dudley would be shared with Members and updates will be provided where appropriate.

- In responding to a question raised by a Member, M Waters confirmed that Dudley could consider implementing a Local Transport Plan Area Strategy or be included with the Black Country. The Local Transport Plan Area Strategy would complement the core West Midlands Local Transport Plan and focus largely on local and neighbourhood level issues, priorities and interventions required within the initial five year delivery plan.



- Concerns were raised on accessibility issues to services for people that do not have access to their own transport or public transport.
- In view of the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in 2022, a Member suggested that a direct bus route to Sandwell and Dudley Train Station would be beneficial to the Borough.

In responding to comments, M Waters confirmed that the proposals were at the early stages and that consideration would be given to understanding the appetite for change for businesses and residents, and working collaboratively with all local authorities to ensure there were no disparities. It was noted that capacity funding had been awarded from Central Government to distribute amongst local authorities to help develop schemes and local plans.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked officers and representatives from Transport for West Midlands for the information presented and requested that the Committee be updated on progress made when appropriate.

Resolved

- (1) That the progress on development of the West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP) and the publication of the West Midlands Transport Green Paper, be noted.
- (2) That the planned approach for engaging with Leaders on key transport challenges through a transport 'summit' proposed to be held in September, be noted.
- (3) That the high-level programme timescales for developing the core Local Transport Plan strategy through to Summer 2022, be noted.
- (4) That the plan to publish a West Midlands Transport Plan Prospectus to tie into wider West Midlands representation at COP 26 in Glasgow in November, be noted.
- (5) That the information presented on the West Midlands Local Transport Plan Green Paper be circulated to the Committee for comments and questions as necessary.
- (6) That a briefing note on the work undertaken in relation to electric vehicle charging be provided by the Transport of West Midlands to the Committee for information.
- (7) That an update on progress be presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee when appropriate.



29 Future Council Programme Update

A Power Point presentation was given at the meeting by the Deputy Chief Executive updating Members on the Future Council Improvement Programme.

A hierarchy of plans had been developed focusing on the Borough Vision, Council Plan and Future Council Programme identifying aspirations on what the Council wanted to achieve, and Directorate Service Plans and Divisional Delivery Plans enforcing the 'one council approach' and ensuring that priorities and work were not being overlooked.

A review of future work in Dudley had identified a number of themes including productivity and performance, teamwork and collaboration and service provision, and a breakdown of the themes were outlined at the meeting. Engagement with service areas would be undertaken to review how services could be improved, ensuring best value and considering how processes could be amended reflecting customer demand and need.

A review of technology and hybrid meetings was being undertaken as it was considered an effective use of resources and would assist in reducing carbon emissions. The implementation of an accessible digital communication for residents as an efficiency tool was also mentioned.

The challenges faced in recruitment were referred to and the need to build a compelling package to attract, retain and build a skilled workforce, alongside the sense of urgency and collective ownership in reducing carbon emissions. The opportunity to maximise the transformation achieved during COVID-19, including digital payments, was mentioned.

Reference was made to the Workspace Strategy ensuring that physical assets were developed and the office estate shaped to fit the new workstyles and delivering an exceptional customer experience by creating a single digital 'front door' to enable residents, businesses and visitors to access all public services in one place.

The Deputy Chief Executive referred to issues identified within the programme including new workstyles and the importance of ensuring that employees felt included within the change programme. It was stated that resident engagement, appropriate support and developing programmes was critical to assist those that were not comfortable or confident in utilising digital technologies.

Definitions of the revised four workstyles were outlined namely, fixed location worker; field worker; community-based worker and hybrid worker. All workstyles would be encouraged to utilise Microsoft Teams and minimise travel between sites.

Reference was made to the timetable of actions completed and the next steps in relation to workforce, digital and facilities.



The Deputy Chief Executive referred to the development of ward based plans that enabled residents, businesses, Councillors and partners to identify issues within each ward, opportunities for improvements and provide a strong evidence based baseline for each ward including information from the National Health Service and Police.

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

- The Chair commented positively on the presentation and considered that the Pandemic had escalated the digital programme and looked forward to the implementation of the proposals.
- The Deputy Chief Executive agreed with comments made by a Member on the importance of communication between directorates being critical in ensuring services were being delivered and referred to the Local Authority's ambition of operating a 'one council approach'. The Pandemic had provided the opportunity to drive forward change and overall there had been a positive response from employees, however it was acknowledged that the process would be long and complex. There would be further opportunities for Members to scrutinise the programme as it developed.
- A Member suggested that the presentation should be provided to all Members of the Council for information and commented on the importance of implementing timelines as plans required continuity in order to complete and work effectively.

The Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged comments made and assured that timelines would be introduced and that the Committee would be updated on progress accordingly.

- The importance of employees across all Directorates and service areas understanding the role of Councillors and the necessity of providing political-awareness training sessions to employees was highlighted.
- Arising from concerns from a Member in relation to residents who did not have access to digital services, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services referred to the proposed programme to ensure that all options were made available including the use of social media, whilst recognising that some users would prefer face to face meetings. The importance of creating a singular system to ensure that there was no repetition was expressed.
- A Member commented positively on the proposed development of Ward Plans, and in responding, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the first draft of the template was anticipated to be completed within six to nine months.
- A Member welcomed the opportunity of utilising post offices and similar operators in delivering Council services.



- A Member commented positively on the proposed hybrid workstyles in particular the need to be flexible to maintain a full workforce. In responding to a suggestion made, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services confirmed that a business case was being prepared in relation to enhancing equipment for staff working at home.

Resolved

That the report and information be noted and that the Committee be updated on progress in due course.

30 **Digital and Information Technology Services Update**

A report of the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services was submitted on the ongoing and planned developments relating to Digital and Technology Services.

In presenting key information, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services confirmed that a significant change would occur within the next three years in relation to resource allocation with fewer employees working on infrastructure and additional resources on supplier management and requirements capture. It was noted that focus would be given on requirements capture, architecture design and organisation-level integration rather than developing in-house products.

The three-year digital and technology roadmap outlined the future objectives of Dudley with new technology, the initiatives needed to achieve the objectives, and the order of priority of delivery. It was noted that 150 digital and technology initiatives were prioritised alongside 115 'must do' initiatives, which would be considered and agreed by a representative group under an agreed scoring system. The ambitions outlined in the Borough Vision and the Future Council programme supported the roadmap.

The proposed Governance Model to commence in October, 2021, included the introduction of a Councillor Digital Forum, Digital and Technology Working Group and Digital Board. The draft membership of the Digital Forum included Councillors to represent residents needs and to hold the Local Authority to account. The Digital and Technology Working Group would feedback to the Digital Board to ensure that the priorities of the Council were being delivered and funding allocated appropriately. The Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services requested any Members that were interested in joining the Councillor Digital Forum to contact her directly.

Reference was made to the proposed ICT team restructure which had created two new Heads of Service, namely, the Head of Digital and Data Integration and the Head of Technology, Delivery and Services. The Head of Digital and Data Integration enabled the development of digital capabilities more efficiently and with greater accountability and responsibility for implementing digital initiatives that enabled innovation and transformation. It was also proposed that customer service functions would be incorporated into the role. The Head of Technology, Delivery and Services would be responsible for improving and overseeing the IT infrastructure. The Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services confirmed that the recruitment process had commenced for these posts.

Reference was made to the three key business cases that were currently being processed namely: Digital Platform, Future Workplace and Migration to 365.

The Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services acknowledged that, due to the rapid progress made, this had created some anxiety amongst teams. Assurances were given to the Committee that the proposals would not result in a risk to employment, but were focussed on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of work undertaken.

Following the presentation, Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given as appropriate:-

- The Chair welcomed and noted the importance of the Digital Forum, and in responding to a question, it was confirmed that support was available to staff following the proposed re-structure.
- A Member commented positively on the presentation, in particular that digital and IT had been separated and that it was important for the success of organisation to allow employees to express their preferences in order to undertake their work effectively.
- A Member referred to the use of jargon within the report and presentation and suggested that an index or plain language be utilised in future.
- In responding to comments on the proposed governance model, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services confirmed that any Member could attend the Forum if interested. It was confirmed that the Councillor Digital Forum would act as the single platform to represent users going forward. It was also noted that feedback from the Councillor Digital Forum to the Digital Board would be communicated through the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services.
- In responding to a question by a Member, the Director of Digital, Customer and Commercial Services confirmed that the Local Authority had procured an external provider, namely, Whitespace, a digital platform that enabled efficiency in developing and utilising systems across all Directorates.



Resolved

- (1) That the information reported on the ongoing and planned developments relating to Digital and Technology Services be noted.
- (2) That the development of a 3-year digital and technology roadmap for the agreement by the Strategic Executive Board in October, 2021, be noted.
- (3) That the establishment of a Digital and Technology governance model, to be agreed effective from October, 2021, be noted.
- (4) That the restructuring of the ICT team by March, 2022, subject to the outcome of the recruitment of the Heads of Service, be noted.
- (5) That the development, for Cabinet approval, of three significant business cases: Digital Platform (October 2021), Future Workplace (September, 2021) and Migration to 365 (2022), be noted.
- (6) That the deployment of a development plan to close the skills gap in digital and technology, be noted.

31 Scrutiny of the Black Country Plan

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) was submitted on the arrangements for the scrutiny of the Black Country Plan. The Chair was of the opinion that this item of business should be considered as a matter of urgency, pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, in view of the timescales and deadlines involved with this work.

The Chair reported verbally on revised recommendations for consideration by the Committee. Following a discussion, it was

Resolved

- (1) That two further Special Meetings of the Scrutiny Committee be arranged to consider the Black Country Plan, with the option of more if necessary.
- (2) That the Lead for Law and Governance, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair and appropriate Directors, be authorised to take any necessary actions to progress this scrutiny work.
- (3) That an e-mail be circulated to all Members of the Committee outlining the proposed dates and clarification of the process to be undertaken at the Special Meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.50pm

CHAIR



FC/43