

Minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

**15th September, 2017 at 3.00pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor P Hughes (Chair);
Councillors Edis, E M Giles and Underhill.

Apology: Councillor Hickey.

In Attendance: Councillor Trow (Cabinet Member for Core Council Services);
D Carter (Executive Director – Resources);
C Davey (Business Partner – Adults);
C Sandland (Business Partner – Children);
S Sprung (Service Improvement Lead Officer).

4/17 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 22nd June and 7th July, 2017 be approved as correct records.

5/17 Vision 2030 Update

The Board received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Core Council Services and the Executive Director – Resources on the recently launched Vision 2030 for Sandwell.

Vision 2030 included ten ambitions; five for People and five for Place. These were being built in to business planning processes and were already being used in reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny Boards.

The Vision had been widely consulted upon during its development. This included over 900 face to face interviews with residents in the six towns, an online survey and interactive group discussions with over 200 people. Staff, councillors, the voluntary sector and key partners had all been included in the consultation.

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From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- Vision 2030 was for Sandwell; it was not just a Council vision. Partner organisations were involved throughout the process and would continue to be a vital part of achieving the ambitions for the borough;
- launch events had been arranged to brief staff and to seek ideas and suggestions that could help the Council and partners to deliver the ambitions;
- a 2030 Plan would be developed that included the key actions and approach being taken to achieve the ambitions;
- Vision 2030 was being built into the Council's business planning process. The Chair reported that it was considered good practice to involve the overview and scrutiny function at an early point in business planning. The Executive Director – Resources undertook to consider ways in which this could be best achieved;
- members were requested to use their positions in their local community to seek ideas from local third sector organisations and groups that could help achieve the ambitions for Sandwell;
- it was as important for schools to have high aspirations for their pupils as it was for the young people and their families to have high aspirations themselves. Officers on the graduate programme at the Council were working on a project around aspiration;
- the consultation on the Vision had clearly indicated a sense of belonging and identity to the six towns of Sandwell. This provided the borough with a distinctive nature that should be celebrated. Improving transport links would allow people to access well-paid jobs across the region while choosing to live and raise families in Sandwell;
- resilience was a key strand within the Vision, both for individuals and for Sandwell's communities, neighbourhoods and towns;

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- the West Midlands Combined Authority's Strategic Economic Plan, the West Midlands Mayor's Renewal Plan and Vision 2030 were aligned, especially around key elements such as housing, transport, business and jobs.

The Board thanked the Cabinet Member for Core Council Services for attending the meeting and contributing to the discussion.

Resolved that the Executive Director – Resources be requested to investigate ways in which the overview and scrutiny function can be involved in the Council's business planning processes at an earlier stage.

6/17 **Council Wide Budget Monitoring – Quarter 1**

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 30th August 2017, had referred the Council-wide budget monitoring report for Quarter 1 for consideration by the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

Details of the Council's revenue and capital expenditure as at the end of June 2017 were received.

At a service level, excluding Public Health, there was a forecast year-end deficit of £1.873m made up as follows:

Corporate Management – balanced budget;
Resources – surplus of £0.163m;
Adults Social Care – surplus of £0.514m;
Children's Services – deficit of £4.9m;
Regeneration and Planning – surplus of £0.6m;
Housing and Communities – balanced budget;
Central Items – surplus of £1.750m.

In addition, there was a projected year end surplus of £0.821m within Public Health that related to ring fenced funds carried forward from previous years.

The Board noted the reasons for the variances at the end of Quarter 1 for each service area.

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From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- the deficit in Children's Services was due to increased demand on services due to an increase in referrals to Children's Social Care. This placed pressure on caseloads resulting in the employment of agency staff;
- the Chair suggested that, as the shortage of social workers was an issue across the West Midlands, it might be possible to address social worker shortages through a regional social work college. The Board agreed to refer this topic to the Cabinet for further consideration;
- the Council was investing into new build for its housing stock. This was welcomed by the Board;
- the grant received for Public Health was ring fenced but would be reduced in 2019. The future status of this grant was currently unclear;
- it was acknowledged that expenditure and budget monitoring relating to housing Private Finance Initiatives and Tenant Management Organisations was now included within other budget headings. The information was still available and could be provided to the Board once the level of detail required was agreed.

The Board discussed various matters relating to the use of Section 106 monies, which were raised from planning obligations. Members felt that it was important to consult with ward councillors and the relevant Town Chair on projects utilising these resources. It was also suggested that the relevant Directors explore methods of expediting projects, especially those involving smaller amounts that could make a quick and positive impact on the local community.

The Board thanked officers for attending the meeting and contributing to the discussion.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Cabinet be recommended to discuss possibilities around the development of a regional social work college with Sandwell College;

- (2) that the Executive Director – Resources, in consultation with the Chair of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, develop a breakdown of the Housing Revenue Account budget to ensure the expenditure and financial position of Private Finance Initiatives and Tenant Management Organisations can be considered by scrutiny;
- (3) that the Executive Director – Resources and the Director – Regeneration and Planning consider ways to expedite the use of Section 106 monies raised from planning obligations.

7/17 **Scrutiny Work Programme 2017/18**

The Board considered work programmes for the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Council. Individual Scrutiny Boards had developed their work programmes following a period of open consultation seeking views from councillors, officers, partners and the public. The Board received draft work programmes that included which of the Vision 2030 ambitions the work items would support.

The Chair suggested that where there were linkages between Sandwell's scrutiny work programme and the work of the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny function, the relevant Scrutiny Board Chair should liaise with their counterpart at the Combined Authority.

The proposed work programme was agreed, with additional pieces of work on alternative construction methods for Council-owned social housing and the authority's initiatives to address an aging workforce.

The Board thanked the Council's Scrutiny Officers for their hard work supporting the Overview and Scrutiny function.

Resolved that the proposed work programmes for the Scrutiny Boards as now submitted be agreed with the following additions:

- (1) that Councillors Edis, Hickey and P Hughes carry out a joint piece of work around alternative construction methods for Council-owned social housing;

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- (2) that a report on the Council's initiatives to address an aging workforce be included in the work programme for the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

(Meeting ended at 6.25pm)

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