

Minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

2nd October, 2019 at 5.45pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor L Giles (Chair);
Councillors E M Giles, Moore and Singh.

Apology: Councillor Rollins.

In attendance: D Stevens (Interim Chief Executive);
S Tour (Director – Law and Governance and
Monitoring Officer);
S Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager);
I Parry (Centre for Public Scrutiny).

18/19 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2019 be approved as a correct record.

19/19 **Scrutiny Review**

Further to Minute No. 11/19, the Scrutiny Management Board received the report of the Scrutiny Review Working Group, which had been endorsed at its meeting on 24 September 2019.

The Working Group was established to examine how the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements, including scrutiny outcomes, could be improved so as to reflect recognised good practice.

The Working Group considered the insight and evidence gathered through a series of engagement sessions, desktop studies, one-to-one interviews, member surveys, analysis against statutory guidance and explored good practice to make evidence-based recommendations.

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The Working Group had been supported in its work by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

It was reported that six key themes emerged from the engagement sessions:-

- Culture;
- Relationships;
- Work Programme;
- Structure;
- Support;
- Agile Working.

These were also borne out by the findings of the work undertaken by CfPS during the review.

The Board acknowledged the excellent work that had been undertaken in respect of the review. Particular thanks were given to officers who had supported the Working Group and the Review, along with the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Local Government Association. The Board praised the approach taken to engage Members which had proven to be an excellent piece of work.

The Board further acknowledged the hard work undertaken to prepare the Review Report and the pace within which the Review had been undertaken, which ensured a strong focus was maintained throughout.

The Review demonstrated that the single most important determinant of whether the Council delivered an excellent overview and scrutiny function that was nationally recognised, was the need for embedding a positive, passionate culture and approach amongst councillors to undertaking scrutiny, that was underpinned by a strong commitment to maximising the opportunities effective scrutiny provided.

A number of recommendations were proposed by the Working Group to strengthen the Council's overview and scrutiny function which included a focussed Scrutiny Work Programme to align with the ambitions within Vision 2030. These included a revised structure for the overview and scrutiny function, terms of reference for the panels and sub-panels and refreshed role descriptions for scrutiny chairs, vice-chairs, panel members and co-opted members.

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Ian Parry, CfPS, attended the meeting and commended the thorough and inclusive work that had been done in Sandwell on the Review. The engagement programme with councillors that had taken place was highlighted as a strength, demonstrating the enthusiasm and commitment elected members had to improve scrutiny. The CfPS had been particularly impressed by the pace of the Review and agreed that the proposed model for overview and scrutiny in Sandwell would be an innovative and bold step to modernise the function.

The Scrutiny Management Board recognised that the Review outlined many positive and worthwhile proposals; however also felt that more time was needed to reflect upon the following:-

- The proposed structure included a 2030 Scrutiny Panel with a membership of 24. This would have three sub-panels reporting to it and concerns were raised as to the practicality of such an arrangement.
- More clarity was needed around the roles of Vice-Chairs in leading the sub-panels of the 2030 Scrutiny Panel and how this differed to the role of Scrutiny Panel Chairs.
- Greater analysis required on how the proposals met the Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities, published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. In particular, public engagement principles and mechanisms needed to be more explicit.
- It was recognised that protocols were a tool to creating a change in culture and the Scrutiny Management Board requested that further work be done by the Working Group to develop the protocols before any new proposals were presented to Full Council.
- Greater emphasis was needed in relation to the how scrutiny of the West Midlands Combined Authority would be undertaken.
- The Scrutiny Management Board highlighted the need to conduct further engagement with elected members on the proposals, to maintain the momentum that had been gained from the previous engagement sessions which had been well attended by councillors.

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- It was felt that further information on the proposed methods of resourcing the support for scrutiny needed to be made clearer.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board:-
 - (a) note the excellent work undertaken in relation to the Scrutiny Review so far;
 - (b) place on record its thanks to the Centre for Public Scrutiny, Local Government Association for their support to the Scrutiny Review and Officers for all their hard work;
- (2) the comments of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board set out in these Minutes be referred back to Scrutiny Review Working Group for consideration and action;
- (3) the Scrutiny Review Working Group co-ordinates and undertakes further engagement work with Elected Members and the Executive (as necessary) on the proposals detailed in the Scrutiny Review before preparing final proposals;
- (4) a revised Scrutiny Review Report of the Working Group detailing the final proposals be submitted to a future meeting of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board;
- (5) in order to keep the pace of the Scrutiny Review, an extraordinary meeting of the Council be arranged (if necessary), with the Mayor's consent, prior to 14 January 2020 to consider the recommendations of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board in relation to the Scrutiny Review.

(Meeting ended at 7.56 pm)

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