

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Wednesday 6 June 2023 at 6.00 pm
In the Council Chamber at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Moore (Chair);
Councillors Chambers, Fenton, Fisher, Hinchliff, Lewis,
Owen, Taylor and Tipper.

Observing: Councillor Melia.

In attendance: Rebecca Jenkins (Senior Lead - Service Improvement), Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead - Service Improvement), Surjit Tour (Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer), Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager, Statutory Scrutiny Officer) and Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer).

34/23 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Giles.

35/23 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.



36/23

Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 March be approved as a correct record.

37/23

Additional Items of Business

There were no additional items of business.

38/23

Improvement Plan Progress

The Board received an update on the progress of the Improvement Plan up to 11 May 2023. On 22 September 2022, Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board received the Improvement Plan and requested regular updates on progress. This report was the fourth quarterly progress report to Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

Specific feedback and comments made by external reviewers were relayed to the Board. Feedback had largely been positive with no further recommendations highlighted from return visits. Continuous development of member development programme was underway and Chairs and Vice-chairs of Committees and Boards were receiving training. The Cabinet Forward Plan was also being shared with Scrutiny Boards and the Audit Committee.

A summary of progress as of April 2023 consisted of a significant milestone with the expert determination process for Lion Farm, approval of the commercial strategy, a response to the CIPFA follow-up review had been embedded into the improvement which, in turn, had been embedded into the refresh of the Corporate Plan.

An annual report had been prepared that reflected the significant progress over the year with examples of how the changes had an impact on the organisation. Within the annual report was the next steps of the improvement journey.

Areas of concern were broken down by each theme contained within the improvement plan and highlighted to the Board.

Organisation Culture

Issues had been encountered in the member-officer relationship survey work-stream. A lower response rate than expected was received and therefore, consideration would be given to timescales for a repeat survey. Slippage was witnessed in the approval of the next phase of the member development programme due to revisions needed to the member induction as a result of the large quantity of new members. A Member Development Plan was now in place and member handbooks and inductions packs had been issued.

Corporate Oversight:

Slippage had been experienced in establishing the infrastructure for Corporate Transformation. Resources from across the Council had been collated to consolidate resources. Local Partnerships were now supporting a review of Corporate Transformation and PMO arrangements in the Council. Delays to actions related to the improvement framework and lessons learned framework had occurred due to a lack of resources. Directorate level restructuring and reviews of spans of control were initially put on hold but was now being considered after the appointment of an Assistant Chief Executive. The planned due date of March 2023 for the implementation of the workforce development plan had not been met however, it was due to be finalised by July 2023.

Strategic Direction:

The planned due date for the procurement of a strategic delivery partner for the regeneration pipeline had not been met however, a decision was going forward to Cabinet in July. A small response rate had been received in relation to the Customer Journey Strategy member survey. Additional meetings with members were being arranged. Issues in the procuring stock conditions had been experienced as only one tender had been received. An award was not made and therefore, a re-tendering process would need to take place.

Decision Making:

No exception items were raised.

Procurement and Commercial:

Slippage had occurred regarding the original timescales to bring forward an options appraisal due to a lack of resources. Resources and a project plan were now in place. The options appraisal was due to take place by August 2023.

Partnerships and Relationships:

A VCS strategy was being prepared for approval in Autumn. It was brought to the attention of the Board that the strategy was now being developed over a longer period of time to enable a fundamental look at the relationship with the VCS to take place.

Next steps were being considered with the next phase being vital to demonstrating that the changes made were embedded and sustainable. A focus on a stable medium-term financial position to build on Council prosperity and continued focus on improving customer experience were key to streamlining processes and delivering a high quality service.

Following questions from members, the following clarifications were reported:-

- The Assistant Chief Executive position had been advertised via a number of channels. The vacancy was listed in the municipal journal and advertised on WM Jobs. Penna, an external consultant, had also targeted individuals to encourage them to apply.
- The Council's approach to ensuring that the procurement process included a diverse range of companies would be clarified and reported back to members.
- Low response rates to member surveys were most likely due to the busy election period – members suggested the potential of incorporating face-to-face interviews instead.
- A report detailing the implementation of Oracle Fusion would be presented at the next available Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.
- Further communications would take place with members following the request for further information on stock surveys and the timeframes that can be expected for the issues to be addressed and resolved.
- An update regarding the Lion Farm Expert Determination Process would be provided once officers were legally allowed to do so.

- When considering voluntary section funding and grants, officers would ensure that community partnership grants from the Communities Team would be included.
- In the event of organisations not following the correct procedures, they would be removed from the process.

Officers were thanked for presenting to the Board.

39/23

Cabinet Forward Plan

Members considered the possibility of receiving an urgent briefing on the Parking Charges Policy item.

The Monitoring Officer highlighted that a 12-month forward plan was being planned with directorates to enable Scrutiny to add value to the decision-making process well in advance. The suggestion of including further information on each item would be considered by Cabinet Members. Members were reminded that working groups could be created across Boards for certain cross-cutting items if required.

40/23

Scrutiny Tracker

Members noted the updates to the Scrutiny Tracker.

Meeting ended at 6.59pm.

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk