

Minutes of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

12th February, 2019 at 3.35pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillors Ahmed and E M Giles.

Apologies: Councillors P Hughes, Rollins and Underhill.

In attendance: D Carter (Executive Director – Resources);
S Tour (Director of Law and Governance and
Monitoring Officer);
R Griffiths (Strategic Finance Manager);
C Davey (Business Partner – Adults);
S Lilley (Business Partner – Finance).

3/19 **Election of Chair**

Resolved that Councillor E M Giles be elected Chair for the meeting.

4/19 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 9th January, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

5/19 **Business Plans 2019-20 to 2021-22**

Further to Minute No. 12/19 of the Cabinet (6th February, 2019), the Board received the Council's proposed Business Plans 2019-20 to 2021-22 for review.

The Scrutiny Management Board considered, in accordance with the referral from Cabinet, how the Plans would support the ambitions contained within Vision 2030 and how they represented value for money.

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

General Comments on Business Plans

- The format was felt to be more reader-friendly and the information had been presented in a way that was easy to understand.
- The inclusion of tables setting out the actions taken in support of the Vision 2030 ambitions and what outcomes there had been was welcomed by the Board.
- The Board was satisfied that the Business Plans were aligned with Vision 2030 and the budgets represented value for money, especially in light of the continued programme of austerity pursued by the government.

Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing

- To assist in transparency, underspend that had been carried forward to address resource reductions in subsequent years had been included in the budget for the Management Team as part of the Supplies and Services budget line.
- There was an open recruitment process for the vacant Public Health Consultant – Healthy People post. In the current year there had been two Public Health Consultants; one was still in post but the other had left the Council in October. It had been decided to wait for the new Director – Public Health to be in post before commencing recruitment for the Consultant post to allow the Director to shape the service as she felt was needed.
- Despite the relatively mild weather this winter, numbers of discharges from hospital had remained consistent. It was reported that Sandwell continued to perform well and had low levels of delayed discharges from hospital.

Children's Services

- The Board noted that some of the figures included in the draft plans needed to be updated. These updated figures were provided and would be reported to Cabinet along with the findings from the Board.

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- The single biggest pressure within this area would be in the event of a sustained increase in numbers of children requiring to be placed in care. The Council was working closely with Sandwell Children's Trust on this, including to understand the key drivers for any trends in numbers of children in care. The Board asked to be kept informed of this key pressure.
- The work undertaken in relation to 'IAG' (information, advice and guidance) and employment support for young people included support with CV preparation, interview techniques and completing job application forms. The Board felt that this could have been clearer within the Business Plan.

Neighbourhoods

- The Council's budget assumptions included an increase of 700 residential properties per year.
- In addition to privately developed residential properties, the Council was also engaged in building new homes. The Council had continued aspirations in this field, which strongly supported Ambition 7 (we now have many new homes to meet a full range of housing needs in attractive neighbourhoods and close to key transport routes). The Government had removed the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap which could open up opportunities that may otherwise not been possible.
- Every directorate had to deal with staffing reductions, and Neighbourhoods was no exception. The Council had been very successful at managing staffing reductions – including an effective planned leaver scheme and using redeployment of staff to prevent redundancies.
- Digital transformation could help achieve efficiencies as the public using online methods to report their issues and make requests for services was more cost effective than other methods.

Resources

- The Governance Review was comprised of a range of inter-related pieces of work. Each element would include a bespoke workstream, but there would be joined up communication and thinking across the Governance Review.

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- It was anticipated that the elements of the Governance Review would take place during the next nine months; although the work to refresh the Council's Constitution would take place at the end of the process to ensure any necessary amendments identified throughout the workstreams are included.
- The Local Government Association Peer Review had acknowledged the achievement of Sandwell in protecting frontline services despite the years of austerity and reduced resources put in place by the Government.
- There was a different mindset and culture within Sandwell compared to many other local authorities – the focus was on what the Council had rather than what it didn't.

The Board thanked officers for attending the meeting and for their hard work in relation to the Council's finances.

Resolved:-

- (1) to recommend to the Cabinet:-
 - (a) that the Directorate Business Plans as now submitted to Cabinet be endorsed and commended for their strong alignment with Vision 2030 and the value for money the target budgets and focus areas represent;
 - (b) that the inclusion within the Directorate Business Plans of actions undertaken and the impact of those actions on the ambitions of Vision 2030 be commended;
- (2) that the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board receive update reports on budget pressures relating to Children's Services and the work being done to address them.

(Meeting ended at 4.25 pm)

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