



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 13th MARCH 2019

PRESENT: Councillor J Oates (Chair), Councillors M Summers, C Cooke, R Ford, T Jay, Dr S Peple, B Price, P Standen and R Claymore

CABINET Councillor Michelle Cook

The following officers were present: Tina Mustafa (Assistant Director Neighbourhoods), Leanne Lea (Housing Manager) and Jo Hutchison (Democratic and Elections Officer)

62 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Goodall. Councillor R Claymore attended as substitute for Councillor Goodall.

63 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th February 2019 were approved and signed as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peple and seconded by Councillor M Summers)

64 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest

65 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair reported that the Committee had requested an update in respect of the Town Centre Design Supplementary Planning Document and that he could confirm that the consultation had closed on 11 February 2019 after a four week consultation period. Invitations to participate in the consultation had been sent to 175 organisations and individuals as well as the consultation being publicised through the Council's website. In total 27 responses were received to varying levels of detail and Officers were reviewing whether any changes were required to the document. In terms of timelines, it was expected that there would be a report back to Cabinet in April 2019.

66 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair reported that the recommendations from this Committee following the work of the Member Induction sub-group of the Working Group on Member Support had been endorsed by Cabinet, and that work continued to progress the recommendations.

67 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FROM CABINET

None.

RESOLVED under Procedure Rule 9.1.3 that the Housing Update agenda item be brought forward to item 68.

(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peuple and seconded by Councillor J Oates)

68 HOUSING TEAM UPDATE

The Committee received an update from the Housing Team from the Assistant Director – Neighbourhoods.

The Chair introduced the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services and Neighbourhoods, Assistant Director – Neighbourhoods and the Tenant Regulation and Involvement Manager.

The Assistant Director provided an overview of the Report which included details on the following:

- Managing the migration of Universal Credit;
- On average there was a 10 week wait for Universal Credit to be paid;
- Core rent arrears were going down in Tamworth, as a result of robust management;
- Tamworth was in top quartile in terms of income collection and position in terms of prevention;
- Taking Universal Credit debt out of the equation would have meant that the Council's core arrears would have decreased;
- That Tamworth was one of the first local authorities to get independent accreditation for procedures for management of debt;
- the welfare reform preparations and Universal Credit will be one of the Councils core corporate projects;
- introduced a rent income analytics tool to intelligently assess arrears and identify anomalies;
- the Council had been nominated as a trusted partner with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), which allowed conversations to be held with the DWP, provided explicit consent from residents had been provided;

Councillor Price joined the meeting.

The Committee thanked the Housing team and all front line staff for their work and the quality of advice provided to residents.

Committee Members sought and received clarification in the following areas:

- the careful application to rent arrears of the homelessness support funding in line with the detailed protocol to support homelessness prevention;
- the work that staff undertook with the DWP to ensure that joint tenants received the appropriate amount of Universal Credit and to mitigate any discouragement of joint tenancy arrangements;
- the accessibility of the Council's Benefits webpages and the format and content of documents on it, as well as the ability for residents to access support from the housing team in a variety of ways;
- challenges which had been encountered with the DWP and how the trusted partner status had assisted as the relationship with the DWP regional lead had developed, albeit that at times there remained issues with explicit consent and ensuring that the consent language from residents was as clear and detailed as possible;
- the trigger for a move onto Universal Credit which remained a change in a resident's circumstances which would lead to a full assessment;

Councillor C Cooke joined the meeting.

The Committee agreed that following consideration of the update provided, a recommendation should be made to Cabinet to raise certain matters which had been identified from the update received, with the Department for Work and Pensions.

RESOLVED that a recommendation be made to Cabinet that a letter be issued in the name of Tamworth Borough Council to the Department of Work and Pensions setting out the following issues which had been identified:

- access to the Department of Work and Pension, via telephone, appeared at times to be rationed, and that steps be taken to ensure that, in the light of the Trusted Partner status which Tamworth Borough Council had, there be no rationing of access to the Department of Work and Pensions;
- that GDPR was potentially creating barriers to the processing of claims for Universal Credit and that steps be taken to ensure that GDPR was not restricting access nor slowing down the process of a claim for Universal Credit.

(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peuple and seconded by Councillor M Summers)

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services and Neighbourhoods, the Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods and the Tenant Regulation and Involvement Manager, Housing for their comprehensive update, who then left the meeting.

69 2018/19 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan.

70 CONSTITUTION REVIEW DISCUSSION

The Committee discussed whether it would be beneficial to schedule additional meetings of this Committee for the next Municipal Year. It was noted that in the Municipal Year 2018/19 there were seven meetings of this Committee. The Chair reported that given the volume of business considered by this Committee an additional meeting would help facilitate the timely consideration of the Quarterly Performance Report and other relevant matters requiring the Committee's consideration.

RESOLVED that the Committee suggests that eight meetings of this Committee be scheduled for the 2019/2020 Municipal Year and that the Chair liaise with the Constitution Review Working Group to put this forward.

71 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

71.1 Support for Members Working Group

The Chair reported that the recommendations from the Induction sub-group had been put forward to Cabinet and agreed and that work to progress these recommendations for Member induction was underway.

The IT Sub-Group of the Member Support Working Group had met and agreed proposals to bring to this Committee. The following had been discussed by the sub-group:

- The need for there to be a pool of IT devices, which were fit for purpose, and could be made available to Councillors, whether newly elected or upon return of old devices
- Initial IT training to be made available as soon as reasonably practicable after election and should include use of Councillor email system, calendar access, access to confidential reports, IT security; physical and virtual, impact of GDPR, hardware support and software support, communications and use of personal devices
- To seek new member feedback after the initial roll-out of IT support.

Following consideration the Committee agreed that recommendations be made to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the following recommendations from Corporate Scrutiny Committee be made to Cabinet:

- A pool of five IT devices, which were fit for purpose, to be available for Councillors;
- Initial IT training to be made available to Councillors as soon as reasonably practicable after election, and by no later than the first full Council meeting of the new Municipal Year.

(Moved by Councillor P Standen and seconded by Councillor Dr S Peaple)

The communication sub-group of Member Support was expected to be a longer term piece of work and would continue into the next Municipal Year.

71.2 Webcasting Council Meetings Working Group

The Committee had been requested to investigate and make recommendations in respect of live streaming Council meetings. The Committee had set up a Working Group comprising the following Members to consider and report back to the Committee with their findings and proposed recommendations:

- Councillor C Cooke;
- Councillor R Ford;
- Councillor J Oates;
- Councillor Dr S Peale
- Councillor P Standen;
- Councillor M Summers;

The Chair reported the findings of the Working Group to the Committee, which were discussed and the Working Group's proposed recommendations were considered.

Following consideration the Committee agreed that recommendations be made to Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the following recommendations from Corporate Scrutiny Committee be made to Cabinet:

- Tamworth Borough Council to invest in suitable equipment to produce a publically available visual and audio recording of all it's Council and Committee meetings, excluding those which are confidential by nature, for example hearings. It was felt that live streaming was not necessary;

(Moved by Councillor C Cooke and seconded by Councillor Dr S Peale)

- All recordings made by Tamworth Borough Council to be publically available with relevant regard to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, relating to confidential matters;

(Moved by Councillor J Oates and seconded by Councillor Dr S Peale)

- Recordings made by Tamworth Borough Council to be uploaded onto an online platform utilised by Tamworth Borough Council at the earliest opportunity;

(Moved by Councillor J Oates and seconded by Councillor Dr S Peale)

- All Members to be offered training in the following areas: (1) use of in-house equipment in meeting rooms; (2) appropriate Equality and Diversity training; and (3) procedural training, in each case prior to the introduction of recording and as ongoing training;

(Moved by Councillor J Oates and seconded by Councillor R Claymore)

- Tamworth Borough Council to revisit its Protocol for recording of its meetings at regular intervals to ensure compliance and to protect the public and the Authority from unanticipated reputational damage.

(Moved by Councillor R Ford and seconded by Councillor Dr S Peaple)

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CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

Corporate Scrutiny Work Plan

Work Plan 2018 - 2019	
DATE	SUBJECT
Quarter 4	Quarterly Performance Reports;
June 2019	Support for Members – Working Group – 1 remaining sub-group - Communication (JO, MS, PS, CC, RF, SP, TJ, SG, BP)
June 2019	Festive Ward Grants – review of 2018 scheme
June 2019	Customer Portal – update on progress
June 2019	Town Centre Strategy update
TBC / mid 2019	Garage Sites
TBC	Gungate Site – Working Group (JO, RF, SG, CC (provisional) and Labour Group to nominate two attendees).
TBC	Isolation – Working Group (TJ, JF and RB from H&W Scrutiny and JO, SP and CC from Corporate Scrutiny)
TBC	Review of senior management restructuring
TBC	Review of Cabinet decisions over previous 12 month period
November 2019	Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy – 12 month update
December 2019	Asset Management Review update (including town centre) – Councillor R Pritchard to be invited
TBC	Corporate investment strategy

Upcoming Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meetings

To be confirmed

Chair
