



## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 14th MARCH 2023**

**PRESENT:** Councillor T Jay (Chair), Councillors D Cook, M Cook, C Cooke, A Cooper, S Goodall, J Harper, S Peple and S Smith

The following officers were present: Tina Mustafa (Assistant Director Neighbourhoods), Wendy Smith (Head of Environmental Health), Gareth Youlden (Head of Technology and Information Services), Tracey Pointon (Legal Admin & Democratic Services Manager) and Leanne Costello (Democratic and Executive Support Officer)

### **75 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence from members.

Apologies were received from the Chief Executive, Andrew Barratt for item 6 on the agenda and from the Portfolio Holder of Homelessness Prevention and Social Housing, Councillor A Farrell in respect of item 8 on the agenda.

The Chair thanked members for their flexibility in moving the meeting.

### **76 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of Interest.

### **77 CHAIR'S UPDATE**

There was no further update which was not otherwise covered on the agenda.

### **78 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Vice-Chair provided an update on the Cabinet meeting held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023, where the recommendations from the Leaseholder Charges Communication Group, decided at the meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> February were presented.

The Vice-Chair acknowledged the work carried out by the working group as an excellent piece of scrutiny.

The Chair confirmed that, of the seven recommendations presented, they were all agreed except for recommendation 5. This was referred to the Committee for further consideration. The recommendation stated that; the contractor hold at least two face-to-face consultation drop ins to enable residents to understand the process. It was asked that Scrutiny should consider whether this is for all works or works over a certain monetary threshold.

It was agreed that the working group should continue and that the item should be added to the Action Log to be discussed at the June meeting.

## **79 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FROM CABINET / COUNCIL**

No new items referred.

## **80 SOLWAY TAMWORTH LIMITED UPDATE**

The report of the Chief Executive to provide Corporate Scrutiny Committee with an update for any trading activities for Solway Tamworth Limited, as is required under the Council's Constitution.

Apologies were received from the Chief Executive and in his absence the Vice-chair, as a former director of the company, provided an overview of the history of the setup of the Company. It was reported that the trading company had been set up as a tool to use to generate income where the options arose. However, to date no such opportunities had arisen.

The Vice-Chair reported that the approximate costs associated with the administration of the company were around £3000/3500 per year, which, after discussion, members considered to be a reasonable estimate.

The Committee questioned whether it could be more beneficial to save these annual costs by winding up the company with a view that it could be set up later if the opportunity arose to utilise the company. The Committee further considered that there would have been initial set up costs associated with establishing the company, but the Committee did not have details of these costs.

The Committee discussed whether before any recommendations to wind up the company were proposed, further information was required including as to whether there were any proposed projects / plans that the company may become involved in or whether the commercial focus of the Council had changed. However, it was noted that this was something which Cabinet could take into consideration on receiving the Committee's recommendation.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee recommended:  
that Cabinet wind up Solway (Tamworth) Limited.  
*(Moved by Councillor R Cooper and seconded by*

*Councillor C Cooke)*

## **81 ASSURE PROJECT UPDATE**

Report of the Portfolio Holder, for Finance, Risk and Customer Services, Portfolio Holder for the Voluntary Sector, Town Centre, Evening economy and Community Safety and Assistant Director, Growth and Regeneration, to give a progress update to Corporate Scrutiny on the Assure project for Environmental Health.

The Head of Technology Gareth Youlden introduced the report and highlighted the following:

Assure, would replace the current system M3 used by the Environmental Health team This is a web based product which is more flexible than the current system and better meets the needs of the Council.

It was reported that M3 would have a de support date of March 2024 and the team would be working towards delivering the project ahead of that date.

Progress identified since the last update included, there now being formal project management in place and a Project Initiation Document which set out governance and that project workstreams were in place.

It was reported that staff had attended document production training, a demonstration of the public facing portal and had looked at templates in M3 ensure that only relevant documentation is was taken in to the new system.

It was confirmed that the Assure test system had been upgraded so that work could start on migration and testing.

It was identified that resourcing was a challenge to deliver the project and that options were being considered around looking at a support package through the provider and the cost associated with this. A business case was being prepared to look at a back-office cover so experienced officers could work on transition.

The next steps identified were to look at project workstreams in detail and develop a project plan, agree resources, understand the level of support required from NEC and making decisions on the self-service options whilst continuing to data cleanse the old system.

The Committee sought and received the following clarifications:

1. In respect of the tender process, The Head of Technology confirmed due diligence had been carried out around other options, including looking at cost impact on resources, staff upskilling, and transition and the outcome was that Assure was considered the best route. The Council had considered whether the system was fit for purpose, budget, and resources. Subsequently, it felt that Assure was best value. In terms of the value for money process, as the Council already runs the M3 system, transition to

Assure, the successor system to M3, would be a less costly option in terms of resource and cost.

2. How confident they were in the security of the system? The Head of Technology confirmed that the transition was based on internal systems which were protected by current boundary security. Further clarification was sought on processes in place to ensure validity of documents and the Head of Environmental Health, confirmed that face to face validation processes that currently takes place would continue.
3. The difference in cost? The Head of Technology confirmed that there was no difference in cost on a 'like for like' basis, however additional costs would be incurred if the Council took on the additional modules such as the self-service portal, but this could be offset in terms of a business case. The committee sought clarification on what the self-service system would look like for users, for example in taxi licensing, The Head of Environmental Health confirmed that the system would enable taxi drivers to provide all necessary information online before the back-office team picked up the application, as opposed to the current email system.

## **82 THE SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION BILL - DRAFT IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, introduced the report on behalf of the Portfolio Holder which had been previously considered by the Committee in November 2022, when the Committee had requested another opportunity to consider the draft improvement plan prior to it being present to Cabinet in April 2023.

The Assistant Director confirmed that the legislation shifts the way Councils are regulated into an inspection framework and a very recent update confirmed that from April 2023, there would be a requirement for Councils to upload tenant satisfaction measures to the portal and that the Government will use these to benchmark Councils performance in a number of areas.

From 2024 this data along with other information would be used to prepare a 4-year inspection cycle which would be risk based.

It was highlighted there would be a requirement that all council housing managers and housing executives be professionally qualified to drive up standards and a consultation was due to start on that.

The Committee sought clarification on the following areas with the draft improvement plan:

1. Why the target date and owner columns of the report were empty? The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods confirming they were awaiting final

guidance from the regulator on timescales as to when work needs completing and then this detail would be added.

2. The Committee acknowledged that it could see that a colour coding or RAG system was being used, however there appeared to be more than the usual three colours used that this was confusing. It was also noted that for those that were colour blind this system would have no benefit. Whilst the Committee acknowledged the amount of work that had been undertaken, the document needed to be more accessible and recommended a key, more separated points and work around the abbreviations which made the document difficult to understand. It was requested the document be bought back to the Committee after document control. The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods accepted the comments and confirmed that these would be taken away for consideration and that she would use the Council's highlight report to provide a more accessible, smarter document.

**RESOLVED:** to thank the officers for their diligence in this matter.

*(Moved by Councillor D Cook and seconded by Councillor S Goodall)*

### **83 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Chair introduced the Draft Annual Report of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee endorsed the draft Annual Report and Introductory Report for submission to full Council, following agreement by the Chair of any final amendments and updates to reflect the March 2023 meeting.

*(Moved by Councillor D Cook and seconded by Councillor J Harper)*

### **84 WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

There were no further Working Group Updates.

### **85 FORWARD PLAN**

No further items were identified from the Forward Plan for this Committee's consideration at this time.

**86 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN & ACTION LOG**

The Committee reviewed and updated the Work Plan as follows:

**Corporate Scrutiny Work Plan**

| <b>Work Plan</b>                      |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>TARGET MEETING DATE</b>            | <b>SUBJECT</b>  | <b>MEETING WHEN ITEM ADDED TO WORK PLAN</b> |
| June 2023                             | Working group feedback - Review of Quarterly Performance Report |   |
| June / July 2023                      | QPR Q4 2022/23  |   |
| June 2023                             | Repairs – Contract Performance Standards                        | March 2023                                  |
| June 2023                             | Leaseholder Charges update                                      | March 2023                                  |
| <b>Dates to be agreed</b>             |   |   |
| TBC                                   | Update on corporate prioritisation                              | August 2020                                 |
| Bi-annual updates (March & September) | Solway Trading Company Update                                   | December 2019                               |
| TBC (September 2023)                  | Joint Waste contract update                                     | June 2021                                   |
| TBC                                   | Gungate Masterplan  | January 2020                                |
| TBC                                   | Reset & Recovery Workstreams                                    | November 2021                               |
| TBC                                   | Staffordshire Leaders Board                                     | February 2022                               |
| TBC                                   | Corporation Street (Gateway project) – review                   | September 2022                              |
| TBC                                   | Draft Improvement Plan (Regulation of Social Housing)           | March 2023                                  |

| <b>Working Groups</b>  |   |                     |
|--|---|---------------------|
| <b>Aiming for June 2023</b><br>– which meeting Working Group to report back to | <b>Review of Quarterly Performance Report</b> to align with new Corporate Plan 2022-2025<br><br>Members: Cllrs T Jay, D Cook, C Cooke, A Cooper | <b>June 2022</b>    |
| <b>Ongoing</b>   | <b>Review of Leaseholder Charges Communications</b> following referral from full  | <b>October 2022</b> |

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|--|--|--|
|  | <p>council meeting on<br/>27.09.2022 meeting</p> <p>Members: Cllrs D Cook, M<br/>Cook, C Cooke, S Goodall, J<br/>Harper, S Peale</p> |  |
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Chair