



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 6th SEPTEMBER 2022

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

CABINET Councillor Jeremy Oates

The following officers were present: Andrew Barratt (Chief Executive) and Jo Hutchison (Democratic Services, Scrutiny and Elections Officer)

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies from Councillors Samuel Smith, Jason Jones and Sheree People. Councillor Andrew Cooper attended as substitute for Councillor S Smith.

24 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes from the meeting held on 16th August 2022 were approved as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor C Cooke and seconded by Councillor J Harper)

The Chair confirmed that the Committee's Work Plan had been updated to include a Street Market update later this year.

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

26 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair highlighted that this meeting had been scheduled as an additional meeting to focus on the Quarter 1 2022/23 Performance Report.

27 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

28 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FROM CABINET / COUNCIL

None.

29 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan and noted that the Gungate Regeneration Programme Terms of Reference item due for a Cabinet decision on 10th November was scheduled for consideration by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 6 October 2022.

30 QUARTER ONE 2022/23 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Report of the Leader of the Council to provide the Committee with an overview of Council performance update, risk and financial health-check towards achieving the strategic priorities detailed within the Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The information contained within the report covered performance for the first quarter of the financial year i.e., April to June 2022. Cabinet would consider the report on 8th September 2022.

The Leader introduced the Report and highlighted to the Committee that:

1. the Recovery and Reset Programme showed some red and amber. The Leader reported that given the opportunities available through the Government announcement of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF), the programme had been paused in part whilst the outcome of the Levelling Up Fund bids which had been approved by Council were awaited. This was because the opportunities available from the Levelling Up Fund could solve some aspects of the Recovery and Reset project. However, this meant that some aspects of the programme were paused until the outcome of the Levelling up fund were known.
2. In terms of the Corporate Projects Summary there were none with a red project status currently.
3. The uncertainty on the impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) continued.

The Committee commented and sought clarifications in the following areas:

1. The Committee requested that the report focussed on red and amber items, rather than recording green items, with deep dives undertaken by the Committee on red items. The Chair requested that this was fed into the working group on the QPR which was underway. It was further noted that the working group could consider where the content was included to avoid repetition, at differing levels of detail, and to focus on the key aspects.
2. Net Zero Carbon project and how the Council aimed to achieve its targets. It was reported that the Baseline Report would require close scrutiny and was due for consideration at the Infrastructure Safety & Growth Scrutiny Committee at the end of September, prior to Cabinet consideration in October. Through that process there would be opportunities to understand

what the baseline positions was and what it would mean for the Council and to enable a focus on the costs which would be associated with achieving the targets.

3. Whether there had been increased contact from residents, due to the cost of living, which could have impacted on resources within the Council. It was reported that whilst the report focussed on Quarter 1, there had been an increase in universal claimants of 2.1% at July 2022.
4. Whether the increased costs (including in terms of energy) had impacted on the Council's Budget, where it was reported that anticipated impacts and outturns (Allowance for Inflationary Cost pressures) on the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account were recorded of £250,000.
5. Whether there was an update on the rationalisation of building requirements and utilisation of Marmion House in the Recovery & Reset Programme. It was reported that the agreement was to pause work until the outcome of the LUF bid was known, however, work continued to understand how we could reduce the occupation of Marmion House so areas could be shut off whilst we await the outcome of the LUF bid, which would deliver a saving in terms of costs and carbon footprint. Work to reinvest in alternative premises would be paused until the outcome of the LUF bid was understood.
6. Clarification on the SMART working project (in the Recovery and Reset Programme) was sought where it was confirmed that this project was completed.
7. An update on Corporate Project referred to as Solway, where it was confirmed that Cabinet had made a decision on the land, which was what this project related to, however there was a wider debate to be had over the future of the trading company.
8. The Local Council Tax Reduction Banded Scheme project which had been under consideration for several years.
9. Whether the graphs for the General Fund which showed by quarter the anticipated spend against budget provided the information in the best format to provide the information required by the Committee to scrutinise this area. The Chair reported that the data had been presented this way to help explain the quarterly fluctuations in data, however, further consideration could be given to these graphs, and their detail and scaling, in the working group.
10. The Key Project - Assure, which was rated as amber. The Committee considered that it required further assurance as to whether work on this project was on track to ensure timely delivery. The Committee moved and seconded, but did not vote on, a Motion to request an update to the next meeting of this Committee, and instead agreed that a written update be provided by Officers and circulated to members, and if required the item be considered at a future Committee meeting.
11. The Key Project – Corporation Street (Gateway Project), and its alignment to priorities within the Vision where the Leader reported that this was an area where a review could be considered.
12. Discretionary Housing Payments where an explanation for the drop in approvals of these payments was requested as well as a request that the data be provided as a percentage in future reports. It was agreed that a written update would be provided to the Committee.

13. The Committee requested updated figures regarding the revenues billing position to assure members that the trend was in the right direction following the work which had been required to focus on energy rebates and the consequences this had on the team's resources.
14. Whether the Property Fund Investments were delivering the targeted revenues. The Chief Executive reported that this remained the most prudent way of investing the Council's available capital and the fund value had shown capital growth as well as a revenue return. It was also reported that treasury would be before Council later in September.
15. Rent arrears and the reasons for the increase in this figure, and whether these arrears were of a short or longer term nature. It was also requested that this data be provided as a percentage in future reports.
16. Review of Swimming Subsidy and Future Options, where the Committee requested a more detailed update.

RESOLVED that the Committee endorsed the Report.

(Moved by Councillor C Cooke and seconded by Councillor A Cooper)

31 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee considered its Work Plan and updated it as follows:

Corporate Scrutiny Work Plan

Work Plan		
TARGET MEETING DATE	SUBJECT	MEETING WHEN ITEM ADDED TO WORK PLAN
6 October 2022	Draft Asset Management Strategy	June 2022
6 October 2022	Gungate Regeneration Programme Terms of Reference	
6 October 2022 (to be confirmed if required)	Update on Assure Project (Environmental Health)	September 2022
17 November 2022	Quarter 2 2022/23 Performance Report	
17 November 2022	Joint Waste contract update	June 2021
17 November 2022	Street Market update	August 2022
8 February 2022	Quarter 3 2022/23 Performance Report	
Dates to be agreed		
TBC	Update on corporate prioritisation	August 2020
Bi-annual updates (March & September)	Solway Trading Company Update	December 2019
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

Working Groups		
TBC – which meeting Working Group to report back to	Review of Quarterly Performance Report to align with new Corporate Plan 2022-2025 Members: Cllr T Jay, S Goodall, C Cooke	June 2022

Upcoming Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meetings

Meeting dates:

6 October 2022

17 November 2022

8 December 2022

8 February 2023

9 March 2023

Chair