



## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 4th OCTOBER 2023**

**PRESENT:** Councillor D Cook (Chair), Councillors M Bailey, C Bain, L Clarke, R Claymore, G Coates, S Doyle, D Maycock and B Price

**CABINET:** Councillor P Turner (Leader of the Council)  
Councillor S Smith (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning)

The following officers were present: Andrew Barratt (Chief Executive), Joanne Goodfellow (Assistant Director Finance), Rob Barnes (Executive Director Communities), Paul Weston (Assistant Director Assets), Tracey Pointon (Legal Admin & Democratic Services Manager) and Leanne Costello (Democratic and Executive Support Officer)

### **35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **36 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2023 and 8<sup>th</sup> August 2023 were approved as a correct record.

*(Moved by Councillor B Price and seconded by Councillor S Doyle)*

### **37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

### **38 CHAIR'S UPDATE**

None.

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

None.

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

No new items referred.

#### **41 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The Leader of the Council Paul Turner introduced the Interim Executive Director Finance who provided the Committee with a summary of the report to provide further information on the latest Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) forecasts.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. Where the assumptions within the report came from and whether a session could be provided to go over where the assumptions come from and what position the Officer felt the Council was currently in?  
The Officer confirmed that they work on the base budget that was approved in February, they will then consider any known changes for example, planned increases in National Insurance, pay awards and latest forecast outturns. The Officer clarified that there was further detail in the report which went to Corporate Scrutiny at the end of August around the assumptions and that the budget report could set out the inflation rates which are used. The report contains a central case and a best- and worst-case scenario, of which the central case is the more reasonable but that it is still early stages in the process and subject to policy changes submitted.
2. The Chair made the observation that for a long time the Council has only dealt with the current situation, reacting to Government changes/initiatives and had not been doing any long-term planning to consider how to secure the long-term future of the Council. The example given by the Chair was the Government's fairer funding review and the retention of Business rates. The Officer agreed with the Chair's comments in terms of the Government's funding but highlighted that the Council could start making cuts and savings to balance the five year position that may not actually be necessary if the Government came back with a better settlement than was expected. The Chief Executive confirmed that assumptions are made on best knowledge at the time. They acknowledged that business rate retention is a big issue and that there are only so many things that can be done to mitigate the impact of this and whilst they try and plan long term, it can be difficult after three years. If there were more certainty around if/when changes are going to happen, then the Council could plan from there.
3. Whether there was a way that a case could be made for the Council to keep anymore of their business rates and introduce more certainty for the Council?

The Officer confirmed that the business rates retention system is governed by the 'top up and tariff' process and levy payments, and the distribution of income to the government and preceptors is based on set amounts.

Tamworth is currently in a pool with Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. The chief executive confirmed that the Council have lobbied in the past and will continue to do so.

4. The Chair suggested that it would be a cross party drive could be established to consult with/challenge Government. The leader of the Council acknowledged that the Council was doing a fantastic job with scenario planning and whilst he would support any work Cross Party work to challenge Government but that the external circumstances may make strategic planning difficult.

**Resolved: That the Committee make the following recommendations to Cabinet:**

1. That Cross party write a letter to Government to lobby for a better position for long term strategic planning for the Council.
2. That the three Scrutiny chairs are invited on to the budget setting group.

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

## **42 UPDATE ON LEASEHOLDERS**

The Report of the Assistant Director Assets provided a timeline of events relating to the Corporate Scrutiny review of Leaseholder Service Charges, the report also provided an update on progress to date against each of the recommendations made to Cabinet by Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair introduced the item to consider the issue around the recommendations that were submitted to Cabinet in February 2023 from the Committee, around the Leaseholder Services Charges item, six of which were approved however at a meeting in June 2023 it was established that no action had been taken. The purpose of the item to understand what we can learn from this and ensure that it doesn't happen again.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. Where are we now with the situation since the item was discussed at Full Council?

The Executive Director, Communities confirmed that following the recommendations at Full Council to complete a strategic review, Officers have been working with the Portfolio Holder to consider the scope and

nature of the Review which is due to go to Cabinet in October. All non-essential works have been stopped as per the recommendations.

2. How many urgent works have been carried out since the meeting? Officers confirmed there have been no reported urgent works, so only one piece of work to replace fire doors at a block as identified through fire risk assessment has been ongoing.
3. Has there been any further communication with the leaseholders? Officers confirmed that suspension notices have been sent out along with confirmation that urgent works will continue and that these won't be delayed by the suspension notices.
4. The Committee highlighted the importance of improving communication with residents generally within Tamworth and particularly with regards to elderly and vulnerable residents. On the matter of the Leaseholders the importance of proactive communication with the leaseholders, including the removal of tier one tribunal information.

Officers acknowledged that a balance needed to be achieved but that there may also be information that may need to be provided legally to residents, they confirmed they were looking to improve on communications. The Portfolio Holder also acknowledged that communication could be improved but that he would try to contact the leaseholders verbally to discuss the situation.

5. The Chair confirmed that he had requested access to emails between the dates of the 23<sup>rd</sup> February and the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023, which he had been given access to, and provided the Committee with a timeline of events which included discussion of a Cabinet report that has never been to a meeting. The Chair asked for clarification around where that Cabinet report had gone and how can we ensure that Scrutiny recommendations to Cabinet which are approved do not disappear?

The Chief executive confirmed the information requested was not forthcoming from the Portfolio Holder at the time making it difficult for Officers to have a clear direction.

The Chief executive confirmed that an action log has now been implemented to log every recommendation that goes through Cabinet. This will be reviewed regularly by the Executive Leadership Team who will delegate to the relevant Officers to ensure that this does not happen again. The Leader of the Council confirmed that action has been taken to address issues around the Leaseholders. The Portfolio Holder stated the first time he was made aware of the extent of the recommendations was at the meeting of Corporate Scrutiny in June and since then he has worked hard to review the information and move this forward. With regards to learning from this we need to look at whether it is the Portfolio Holder or Officer who is responsible for driving things forward?

6. The Committee highlighted that for people to trust in a process there has to be strong governance arrangements in place to support accountability and that the public may not have confidence in the process currently. The Chair and the Committee confirmed that based on the Chief Executive confirming that processes are now in place that they were happy to draw a line under

the matter but that they would be monitoring the processes with a view to taking action if the situation arises again.

#### **43 WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

It was agreed that two working groups listed below would be removed from the Workplan –

- Review of Leaseholder Charges Communications
- Review of Quarterly Performance Report

#### **44 HOUSING REPAIRS WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

A meeting was arranged for the Housing Repairs working group on Wednesday November the 1<sup>st</sup> at 6:30pm.

#### **45 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee asked for an update on the Social Housing Regulations at their next meeting in November following it going to Cabinet in October.

#### **46 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN & ACTION LOG**

The Committee agreed to remove the following items from the workplan –

Update on Corporate Prioritisation  
Joint Waste Contract Update  
Staffordshire Leaders Board Update  
Corporation Street (Gateway Project)

The Chair closed the meeting at 7pm.

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Chair