

## Corporate scrutiny Annual report 2018-2019

This report brings to an end the second year of the Corporate scrutiny Committee in its current form. The year started with constructing the work plan, this included items agreed as long running standing items from the previous year.

The start of the year kicked off with plenty of items both large and small the most pressing were the HRA business plan and the then imminent decision of full council to pursue the creation of a trading company. Members were assured that the HRA business plan at that stage was satisfactory however did push that the aspirational options of the plan needed further focus to draw down funding. Unfortunately at the time of the scrutiny committee England were performing very well at the World Cup as a result the scrutiny meeting held the week before the full council meeting clashed with England playing Croatia which ultimately ended the hopes of a nation, a commitment was made for any questions for officers would be answered before full council.

Whilst these two big issues were going on the committee made use of the working group element of scrutiny to investigate and discuss how prayers fit into a 21st century Council meeting. The outcome of this was then tabled at full council for a decision on adopting the suggested changes or not.

Having began the New Year with a new set of senior management the opportunity arose for a refresh in terms of the approach to scrutiny. Following a meeting of the chairman and CEO it was agreed that the Committee would spend some time at its August meeting reviewing, refreshing and reflecting on the committees work plan with particular awareness of the opportunity to look at the previous year's cabinet decisions and the impact of or success of the cabinet's decisions. This created the below list of items deemed to be worthy of scrutiny -

1. Installation of Fire Sprinkler Systems to Leasehold Flats and Flats at Eringden(Cabinet Minute item 21)
2. Private Sector Housing – Housing Enforcement Policy (Cabinet Minute item 32)
3. Customer Portal (Cabinet Minute item 38)
4. Disabled Facilities Grant (Cabinet Minute item 31)
5. Castle HLF Project Update (Cabinet Minute item 41)
6. Public Space Protection Orders (Cabinet Minute item 50)
7. Council Tenants Fire Safety Strategy (Cabinet Minute item 51)
8. Anti-Social Behaviour Policy (Cabinet Minute item 52)
9. Festive Ward Grant Proposal (Cabinet Minute item 53)
10. Tamworth Borough Council CCTV Resilience and Development (Cabinet Minute item 78)
11. Future meetings of the Committee would consider a review of the senior management restructuring, the constitutional working group and the corporate investment strategy.

Some of these were considered by the other two scrutiny committees, the rest have formed agenda items on the corporate scrutiny committee which have or are being dealt with through working groups, reports or presentations to committee and also tabled written papers for discussion and noting. It was also at this meeting that it was noticed a cabinet resolution on the definition of Hate crimes had not progressed to full council and so this was pursued through Democratic services to and on to council. Another outcome of the review was to change the standing items of the scrutiny committee agenda to include responses to scrutiny recommendations as well as picking up items from cabinet's actions which may be considered by scrutiny.

The timing of the August meeting and the review of the work plan meant that some of the items were not timed as appropriately as they would have been if we had picked them up in the initial work plan. The biggest impact of this was arguably the work around festive grants, a working group had been set up to look at the effectiveness and scope of the scheme however the process of the 2018 festive grants had overtaken the scrutiny calendar and thus no recommendations could be made for the 2018 scheme.

The 11th September 2018 became the first council meeting of Tamworth Borough Council to receive 2 direct recommendations from a scrutiny committee, following 2 hours of debate a slightly amended motion passed changing the way full council takes place at Tamworth Borough Council.

As a corporate project in October the scrutiny committee received an update on the Sprinkler installations into Tamworth Borough Council high rise Housing stock. The key elements were that the council had awarded the contract and a 55 week program was due to start following a delay due to late information from South Staffs Water.

November rolled round very quickly and the corporate scrutiny committee considered an update on the Customer Portal project, working group updates and Private Sector Housing enforcement policy. True to form of the corporate scrutiny committee this meeting proved an opportunity for both learning for the committee process and to make recommendations to scrutiny.

The customer Portal item produced an update on the program and it was recommended that an update report be submitted to Corporate scrutiny in 2019. This agenda item also provided an example of how a time lack between cabinet receiving a report and it going to scrutiny needs to be managed in terms of the committee receiving an updated report with cabinet papers providing support. In this case the report that was received mentioned a tender to be agreed however by the time scrutiny had picked it up and received the report the tender had been issued. This issue was picked up in a recommendation from the members support working group.

Two sets of recommendations came out of this meeting, three from the festive grants working group and two from the committee item of Private Sector Housing Enforcement. In the case of the later members used knowledge of a scheme in another authority to make a recommendation aimed at improving standards in Tamworth.

After quite a long break between meetings Corporate Scrutiny met at the start of February, the date of this meeting had changed to benefit from the attendance of Cllr Robert Pritchard who provided the committee with a much anticipated update on the borough council's assets in the town centre. With information on the broader town centre issues being provided by the assistant director the committee was able to get a handle of the number of projects the council is involved with relating to the town centre. A follow up report from the assistant director will be received by the committee on the 13th March 2019 (an updated report will be tabled at the full council meeting when this report is received) The committee resolved that an update from the portfolio holder will be provided to the committee by December 2019.

One large project of Tamworth Borough Council has been delayed during its progress and it was also at the February meeting that the assembly rooms refurbishment was looked at. Progress was noted and details discussed.

***(The final meeting of the corporate scrutiny committee will take place 13th March 2019 and an update of this report will be issued at the following full council)***

## **Working Groups**

It has long been good practice to build the capacity of scrutiny committees by using a number of tools including working groups. This year Corporate Scrutiny created four working groups, which made

varying levels of progress. Each member who volunteered to be on the working groups did work hard and did their best to complete what they could. Below is a brief explanation of the different groups and what they have achieved.

### **Member Support working Group.**

This group was set up at the start of the year and took on three specific elements of member support, Member Induction, It support for members and communications with members. Each of these elements have lead to a great deal of challenge and discussion, 2 elements are still ongoing and they are the It support and Communications with members elements, it is hoped these will report back as soon as work is completed.

The member induction element of the working group has reported back and corporate scrutiny has gone on to make recommendations to cabinet which have been accepted. This work not only relates to members being elected and learning about the organization but also to refresh existing councilors and make them aware of any changes.

Above mention was made of updating reports going from cabinet to scrutiny, this was also picked up in the recommendations from this working group along with the supply of paper to members as discussed at the review of the constitution 6th June 2018.

### **Festive Grants Sub Committee**

This committee was set up and ran during the period when the existing scheme was live; as a result of this the recommendations that came out of this group did not impact on the 2018 scheme. One of the big things to come out of this groups work was the spirit of the scheme and recommendations were more flexible than the impression given by the information around this grant. The recommendations were accepted by Cabinet and a working group of councilors from cabinet, none cabinet, and any political group was to be created to look at the scheme in adequate time to influence 2019.

### **Webcasting working group.**

This has been a difficult working group to manage for a number of reasons however an update will be given at the full council meeting.

### **Prayers at Full council**

This working group met and dealt with its work very quickly with recommendations made from scrutiny to full council, these are detailed above.

### **Quarterly performance reports**

The corporate scrutiny committee is the committee that receives Tamworth Borough Council's Quarterly Performance reports prior to them being submitted to cabinet. The committee has worked hard on this item this year probing and seeking clarity on a range of points some of which have been dealt with as verbal and written answers whilst other items in the performance report has created new agenda items. An example of this is due to committee on 13th March 2019.

Below is a list of some of the queries that have been pursued as a result of the quarterly performance report.

- The upward trend in discretionary housing payments as well as the increase in housing rent arrears and the impact of Universal credit payments;
- The impact on the Council of the Chancellor's Budget changes in terms of rebates on Council Tax to small businesses;
- The expected returns from the Commercial Investment Strategy and any changes in the percentage rate target;
- The colour coding on the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account tables in the report;
- How the grant for works undertaken at Kerria and Tinkers Green had been incorporated in the Housing Revenue Account figures;

- The reasons for the extent of the favourable variance in the Finance line of the General Fund;
- An update on the status of pond dredging works and in particular the silt analysis report;
- The sample size of the Feeling the Difference Survey;
- Details on the projects included within the performance measures for Commercial opportunities in business decision making;
- Clarification on the RAG status for Visitor Numbers as well as feedback from local business on the Fireworks Display
- The under spend recorded in the General Fund in respect of the Assistant Director Finance and Assistant Director Assets. It was reported that work continued regularly in all areas to identify under spends and non-budgeted income and in order to address clarifications sought on the Q2 Quarterly Performance Report an additional table had been introduced to the Q3 Report to record significant variances. This table highlighted that non-budgeted income derived from additional lease income, fees and charges income, grant income, GBSLEP returned levy, and additional interest.
- Corporate Scrutiny Committee noted that changes had been made to the report to reflect previous comments raised by the Committee and thanked the Knowledge and Performance Manager;
- Clarification be circulated to members of the Committee on the reasons for the housing evictions recorded in the Q3 Report;
- The impact of Universal Credit on the rent arrears figures for Council tenants and the costs of the transition arrangements implemented to support the transition and the extent to which any arrears would impact the Council's funds to maintain its housing stock;
- Clarification to be circulated to members of the Committee on how the Discretionary Housing Payments were being utilised, and whether there was any linkage to size and occupation of housing stock

### **Recommendations of Corporate Scrutiny**

Below is a list of the recommendations made by corporate scrutiny 2018-2019

1. In the light of modern times prayers should be held before the Mayor opens the formal part of a full council meeting
2. A signal to be given to either enter the chamber for a moment of reflection or to attend another room (committee room 2 gives access to the chamber) for prayer at 17:55, at 18:00 member will all enter the chamber
3. When the meeting is in order the Mayor is informed by the Deputy or assistant to make their entry in the traditional way
4. The Mayor opens the meeting with a 'thought of the day' style comment to remind attendees why the Council exists.
5. The Committee's Work Plan be updated to include an update on the Customer Portal to this Committee in June 2019.
6. That Cabinet be requested to investigate the potential for there to be more flexibility in the festive grant scheme to allow smaller groups that do not meet the exacting requirements that the scheme currently prescribes.
7. That the scheme should not be openly promoted through the press.
8. That no issues were found in allowing grants to be awarded to the previous years' recipients.
9. That Cabinet be invited to consider whether to establish a self-financing scheme to regulate HMOs.
10. That a further review be undertaken by this Committee in 12 months time and that the matter be added to the Work Plan accordingly.
11. The Portfolio Holder for Assets and Finance reported that he expected that the review of assets would be completed by December 2019, and according the Committee requested a further update from the Portfolio Holder at that time.

12. At signing of the declaration newly elected and returning members will receive an updated list of officers and details of their responsibilities.
13. At the earliest opportunity post local election existing members will receive an updated list of officers and details of their responsibilities
14. At signing of the declaration newly elected and returning members will receive "First point" of contact details
15. At the earliest opportunity post local election existing members will receive "First point" of contact details
16. Contact details of officers and information how and who to escalate issues with will be circulated to all members in full at the start of the municipal year.
17. Updates from cabinet members and senior officers highlighting key projects of the year, risks and challenges against their corporate plans will be presented to all members at the earliest opportunity post the Council's AGM
18. Where scrutiny receives reports, papers must be updated with the latest information. Including cabinet papers as appendices.
19. the supply of paper to members be removed from the constitution and printed copies of reports to be administered on a case by case assessment..

#### **Recommendations:**

1. That the council continue to support the Corporate Scrutiny Committee in its current form.
2. That the council consider planning 8 corporate scrutiny committee meetings for 2019/2020, 4 for the purpose of Quarterly Performance Reporting and 4 for general business of the committee.

#### ***Update since original report being published.***

Since publishing the original report the Corporate Scrutiny committee has met and considered 3 substantive items each of which generated recommendations in addition to the ones contained in the report above. These recommendations will be presented to Cabinet at their meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

The members support working group as previously mentioned was split into three sections. The second part to feedback was the IT support to members of the council has now been completed with recommendations relating to a fast tracked supply and training for new members after winning elections.

The committee also received the final recommendations from the Webcasting working group which included a series of recommendations. This group was made up of a number of members of the committee and input from none corporate committee members. The recommendations support the recording and publication of meetings both audio and visual in their nature.

The first item the committee dealt with at its final meeting was presented by the cabinet member and officers from the housing department who presented a picture of the impact of Universal Credit on their service.

The whole committee needs to be recognised for the way it dealt with this report. In the style that the committee has now become accustomed to members listened, took note and challenged in a constructive and investigative way. The outcomes of this discussion related to both the preparedness of the council to

deal with the introduction of Universal Credit but also a number of challenges that are faced by the council and claimants. The committee progressed this and after identifying some huge blockers in the administration of support and help have recommended that this council represents both its self and others by highlighting these issues with the powers that be via the councils Cabinet.

Below is a list of the additional recommendations which will be taken to cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

#### Additional Recommendations

- 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.
- 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;
- 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;
- Recordings made by Tamworth Borough Council to be uploaded onto an online platform utilised by Tamworth Borough Council at the earliest opportunity;
- 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;
- 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.
- 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 those steps are taken to ensure that GDPR was not restricting access nor slowing down the process of a claim for Universal Credit.