

Council

Circulated to all Councillors - 2 July 2020

Report of the Chair

Annual Report of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Exempt Information

None.

Purpose

To provide full Council with an overview of the work and activities undertaken by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee during the year 2019/20.

Executive Summary

This report covers the following:

- Chair's overview
- Working Groups
- Recommendations made in the year to Cabinet
- Committee Terms of Reference
- Membership and Attendance
- Training & Effectiveness
- Work Plan
- Resource implications

Recommendations

Council is requested to:

- Note the Annual Report of the Committee;
- Note the updated process for production and consideration of this Annual Report;
- Note a particular thank you to the Democratic Services Officer and to all Committee members for the hard work and positive contributions during the year.

Chair's Overview

The level of work and output of the Committee during this year was high and thanks should be noted for all Committee members. Their valuable input, hard work and level of interest shown in the work plan items has ensured the Committee considered an ambitious number of items this year.

The Committee also changed its way of operating slightly this year, by reviewing the Forward Plan in detail in an attempt to bring items into the work plan for scrutiny prior to a decision being made, where this was possible. This has resulted in well considered recommendations at a point in time where such recommendations can have maximum impact on the project, policy or change being implemented.

This seems to be an effective way of fully utilising the vast experience and different valuable opinions of a mixed Committee, for the betterment of the Council's work, and we will look to continue with this way of working as much as possible in the coming year.

The Committee met eight times in the 2019/20 municipal year. The final (expected to be ninth) meeting of the municipal year in March 2020 was cancelled due to the Coronavirus pandemic, although reports for that meeting were made available.

The cancelled March meeting was due to discuss the Member Induction, Member Training and MembersZone report, as well as to consider the decisions taken by Cabinet during the municipal year to date. Both items will be brought forward to the next available meeting of the Committee.

In terms of the work of the Committee during 2019/20 municipal year, this has included:

1. Policy Development and /or Review

This is where the Committee has contributed to the Council's policy development processes and / or where the Committee has considered the implementation of policies and feeding back scrutiny views to Cabinet.

The Committee has received:

- (a) An update on the Private Sector Housing Enforcement policy review which was presented by senior Officers and which explained the progress made since the policy was implemented in September 2017. The update was received positively by the Committee;
- (b) An interim update on member induction, following which the Committee made recommendations on the process to Cabinet;
- (c) Procurement Services and Strategy update which highlighted the proposed future approach of the procurement team and which the committee supported and Cabinet subsequently approved;
- (d) Market Tender update, an update was provided regarding the Tamworth market and it was agreed that this would be further reviewed once the contract had been awarded;
- (e) Review of Council Cleaning Services – this exempt item was considered at two meetings of the Committee before Cabinet considered the matter. The Committee supported the recommendations which were made and subsequently accepted by Cabinet;
- (f) Review of Senior Management Restructuring – senior Officers updated the Committee on the outcome of this review, which had led to the reduction in 7 executive director and 36 senior management posts into 4 executive director and 7 assistance director posts. They updated on how it had resulted in an increased focus on the corporate plan, the strategic objectives and delivering the savings targets, as well as an increased level of agility and responsiveness of management.

2. Monitoring (scrutiny)

This is where the Committee has undertaken monitoring of the Council's performance and progress. In particular the Terms of Reference for this Committee set out the specific areas for scrutiny which include scrutiny of the achievement of the Council's strategic priorities and scrutiny of the performance and functions of other public bodies, statutory undertakers or other such organisations who provide or facilitate the provision of public services within the Borough. To assist in the achievement of this the Committee's remit includes scrutinising matters related to:

- (a) Forward Plan
- (b) Quarterly performance reports
- (c) Corporate plan
- (d) Major Council led projects
- (e) Commercial Investment strategy
- (f) HRA function

Over the year 2019/20, there has been regular scrutiny of the Forward Plan at each meeting to identify areas which would either require pre decision scrutiny and /or post implementation scrutiny.

As a result of this the format of the Committee's Work Plan was improved to assist in tracking progress on scrutiny of matters identified via the Forward Plan. Examples of areas which were identified for the Committee's scrutiny, as a result of regular Forward Plan consideration were:

- Review of Cleaning Services
- Market Tender
- Procurement Service and Strategy Update
- Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2020/21 onwards

Certain areas were also identified for consideration post implementation in the next municipal year, such as the Housing Repairs and Investment project and the Legal Services Review.

The Committee has also during the year considered the Quarterly Performance Reports. The Committee has received the relevant quarter's draft report and the meeting has been attended by senior Officers and /or relevant Cabinet member, normally the Leader. This consideration has been prior to Cabinet's receipt of the report and has enabled the Committee's comments, where relevant, to be taken on board prior to Cabinet's consideration. In addition, early in the municipal year a working group was established to look at the feasibility of implementing a summary dashboard of performance to track trends in performance. Further details are below.

In terms of major Council led projects, the Committee considered:

1. The Customer Portal Project

The Committee sought clarifications in the following areas:

- (a) Accessibility of the digital portal
- (b) Business continuity
- (c) Testing of the system – recommended
- (d) Budgetary requirements

- (e) Timelines
- (f) Resourcing
- (g) Robustness of the IT
- (h) Resources, staffing
- (i) High and urgent priority notifications

2. Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Committee recommended that a cost neutral version of Option 1 be developed for consideration as well as seeking clarification on the following:

- (a) consistency / differences with the county wide scheme;
- (b) details of where (which bandings) the impacts of proposals would be most felt.

3. Town Centre Work streams

This introduced the Committee to an overview of the work undertaken by the council in the town centre. It was noted that some of the strategy work, which was at an initial point, would be postponed due to the requirements of the Future High Street Fund process. The scrutiny of the detailed work on the Future High Street Fund process had, however, already been undertaken by the Infrastructure Safety and Growth Scrutiny Committee, with appropriate decisions being made by full Council.

4. Review of Housing Garage Sites

The Cabinet member reported that this was at an early stage in development and that two work streams had been identified. The Committee sought assurances from the Cabinet member that ward councillors would be engaged in this process.

5. Gungate Update

This was attended by the Cabinet member and senior Officers who reported that Cabinet had approved a preferred draft masterplan. Cabinet had also authorised the Chief Executive and his team to enter into discussions and prepare and submit funding applications. Work was underway on this and the key areas were to ensure that the scheme retained flexibility in terms of options and in regards to the timing of achieving land assembly. The committee sought clarification in the following areas:

- (a) Facilitation of electric vehicles
- (b) Any interaction with the Future High Streets Fund
- (c) The process for further consideration by the Committee, as well as all members, before Cabinet made a decision which would go out for public consultation. An indicative timeline for this process was agreed.

3. Call-in

This is where a decision of the Executive has been called in to be considered by a scrutiny committee, after a Cabinet decision has been made but ahead of its implementation, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

No decisions have been called in to date.

The process for the production and consideration of this Committee’s Annual Report, together with the two other Scrutiny Committees’ Annual Reports, has been updated. This change was designed to:

- facilitate the production of an annual report which covered the business of the full municipal year (2019/20); and
- Ensure that members of the relevant scrutiny committee had an opportunity to comment (by circulation) on the draft Annual Report, before its receipt by full Council.

Accordingly, each scrutiny committee Annual Report is to be received at a full Council meeting in the following municipal year (2020/21).

Working Groups

The Committee established one working group during the year which focussed on working with Officers to develop an executive summary dashboard for the Quarterly Performance Reports, which would assist in identifying the performance of key indicators at a glance, with a brief commentary where required, and to highlight any trends in performance over time.

The working group comprised:
 Councillor T Jay;
 Councillor Dr S People; and
 Councillor P Standen

The outcome of the working group’s meetings, as a group and with Officers, led to the production of a draft executive summary report. The new executive summary report was considered along with the full QPR Quarter 3 Report at the Committee’s meeting on 5th February 2020 and endorsed by the Committee. The Committee agreed that a recommendation should be made to Cabinet that the changes be made for the production of the Quarter 4 report.

Whilst there was minimal use of working groups this year, the group which met was productive and effective. Depending on items reviewed in the year 2020/21 working groups will be considered.

Recommendations made to and Responses received from Cabinet

Recommendations were made to Cabinet on the following Reports and Cabinet’s response is highlighted:

Scrutiny meeting item	Cabinet Response
Member Induction recommendations – 10 July 2019 meeting	All recommendations accepted – 26 September 2019 meeting
Quarterly Performance Report – joint letter regarding waiting times for universal credit – 14 August 2019 meeting	Recommendation to issue a joint letter agreed – 5 September 2019 meeting
Quarterly Performance Reports Review recommendations – 5 February 2020 meeting	Not yet presented due to cancellation of Cabinet meeting on 9 April 2020.

Committee Terms of Reference

The Committee Terms of Reference are set out in the Constitution and for ease are included as Appendix 1 to this Report.

The Primary Scope, the General Role and the Specific functions detailed there have been largely achieved through the Committee's work this year. Elements of the Commercial Investment Strategy had been considered by this Committee when it received the Gungate update. Investment funds aspects are considered by the Audit & Governance Committee and full Council. The Committee's Work Plan has been updated in terms of updates regarding Solway Trading Company, when these are ready to bring forward.

Members and Members Attendance

The following sets out the membership and attendance of members at the 8 Committee meetings during 2019/20:

Member	Number of meetings attended (out of 8)
Thomas Jay (Chair)	8
Ben Price (Vice-Chair)	4
Robert Bilcliff	6
Rosey Claymore	7
Richard Ford	6
Simon Goodall	6
Simon People	8
Patrick Standen	8
Martin Summers	8

Training and Effectiveness

Councillor Dr S People attended a Government Scrutiny Guidance Symposium in June 2019 which discussed the Government's statutory guidance for scrutiny. Following his attendance at that symposium, Councillor Dr S People provided a valuable update to the Committee at its meeting on 8 October 2019 which was discussed and Councillor People's report was noted.

Work Plan - Items identified for next municipal year

The existing Committee Work Plan is as available at Appendix 2. In addition to those areas already identified, the following area was highlighted for possible further review:

- (a) Customer Portal – post implementation review.

Please note that it is expected that the activities of the Committee may be impacted by the ongoing COVID19 pandemic. This is expected to result from the fact that the committee meetings will be held remotely for at least part of this municipal year, and in order to ensure that there is a tight focus on business critical items at this time.

Resource Implications

None to note.

Report Author

Councillor T Jay

Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Article 6 of the Constitution – Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 – Committee’s Work Plan

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