



## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 18th NOVEMBER 2021**

**PRESENT:** Councillor T Jay (Chair), Councillors A Cooper, R Ford, S Goodall, J Harper, Dr S Peale and R Rogers

**CABINET** Councillor Jeremy Oates

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

### **32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Chesworth.

### **33 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021 were approved as a correct record.

*(Moved by Councillor Dr S Peale and seconded by Councillor J Harper)*

### **34 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Dr S Peale declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the Welfare Reform project highlight report within the Quarter 2 Quarterly Performance Report due to his position as a trustee of one of the charities referred to.

### **35 CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Committee noted the recent passing of former Mayor, Councillor and County Councillor Terry Dix and passed on their condolences to his family.

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

There were no responses to reports of this Committee.

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

The Chair reported that no matters had been referred to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee from Cabinet or Council.

### **38 QUARTER TWO 2021/22 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council, Councillor J Oates, to the meeting for this item which was for the Committee to receive a performance update and financial health-check, prior to the report being presented to Cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report, thanked the Assistant Director, People, for pulling together the report, and highlighted that:

- The Recovery & Reset programme was progressing, with further details on the programme set out in the report, however this would be a long project and following full Council's discussion in August 2021, suggestions for the scrutiny committees' involvement were to be presented to the scrutiny Chairs shortly.
- The tender for the appointment of a multi-disciplinary team to move the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) project forward had been awarded. The College had followed its own procurement process and appointed the same team, and had also submitted their application for funding from the Government, which met the Government's criteria to reduce the funding requested from Government by 10%.
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy forecast at October 2021, showed a shortfall in the General Fund balances of £1.7m over three years, with this new deficit including circa £2m of additional policy change proposals. The Leader reminded members that there would be the members Budget workshop in December 2021.
- There was an increase in universal credit claimants who were council tenants, but that overall there was a slight reduction in universal credit claimants across Tamworth.
- Council tax recovery remained on target for this year, although this was slightly down on the same position this time in 2019/20.

The Committee sought clarifications in the following areas:

- Future High Street Fund (FHSF) - whether the 10% reduction in the request for funding by the College to Government had resulted in any additional costs to Tamworth Borough Council, which the Leader confirmed had not been the case. The Committee sought further clarification on the intended design and planned use for the Middle Entry area of the project. Further assurances were sought and received regarding the consultants who had been appointed and the thorough procurement process, and scoring, undertaken. In terms of ongoing project management, clarification was sought on whether the appointments to the Project Officer roles were made internally or from external candidates. The Leader reported that following the Audit & Governance Committee's consideration of the project's risk register he had taken feedback to the project board meeting

and some lessons would be learnt to ensure that the correct level of detail and the appropriate Officers would be made available at the Audit & Governance meeting. Clarification on what the CRF3 referred to in the report was sought and the Leader confirmed that this referred to the Cultural Recovery Fund and whilst the Council had been successful in rounds 1 and 2, the criteria for round 3 was significantly different. The Leader agreed to circulate further details regarding round 3 requirements.

- The Customer Portal - given the proximity of the planned project due date of 30 November 2021, the Committee sought confirmation on whether this was expected to be achieved. The Leader agreed to provide an update.
- Customer services – the Committee sought further details on the extent to which and how customer reception services could be accessed face-to-face, where it was reported that these services were available through the Assembly Rooms. However, it was noted that there was currently no sign-posting at Marmion House to the front reception services being available at the Assembly Rooms.
- Staff vacancies – clarification was sought on the nature and extent of staff vacancies, as highlighted towards the end of the report, and why these appeared particularly to be in the public facing roles; for example, in areas such as the pleasure grounds, public spaces and community wardens. The Committee felt consideration could be given to whether there was any interaction between staff vacancies and savings.
- Solway project - whether it was an appropriate time to review and revisit the Solway project and whether to proceed with it, given that restricted progress had been made and limited officer time was available to progress it. An updated was expected to the March 2022 meeting of this Committee.
- Gungate – clarification was sought on the status of this project, including the payments reported to be due from NCP. The Leader reported that work continued with the County Council to redevelop that area of the town and that both the County and the Borough Council shared a vision for Gungate and the zoning of areas. It was recognised that the plan for this area was likely to be revisited following the pandemic. Clarification was sought on the green status for this project and the fact that this remained on track and in control, where the Leader responded that the areas of the town being discussed were never intended to be owned by the Council and therefore whilst the ownership of the properties could change, our aim to develop this area for mixed use, including a residential, commercial, leisure set of offers, remained. However, it remained appropriate to review the plan in light of the pandemic.
- Write Offs – Housing – where clarity was sought on the figure of £67,000 which was proposed to be written off.
- Managed underspend - there was a reported £313,000 managed underspend, details of what this related to (and what we were not spending money on) were requested. The Leader agreed to provide a list of the areas.
- Net Zero Carbon – clarification on whether the consultant had been appointed was requested, where the Leader reported that he believed that

to be the case and further reported that he had met the County Council Climate Change Board Chair and discussed the challenges faced by different local authorities, including those such as Tamworth with council housing stock.

- Investments / Treasury Management – clarification over the investment by Tamworth Borough Council in Thurrock Council and whether instead the Council should be looking at alternative funds, such as the Local Authority Property Fund. The Committee discussed the Council's investment strategy and sought further details of the property funds the Council invested in and accordingly an item was added to the Committee's work plan for an Investment Review.
- Leisure Strategy – confirmation on whether the tender submissions had been received was sought and on the use of the s106 funding. In terms of the s106 contribution this would be from the general use element of the s106 funding.

**RESOLVED** that the report be endorsed.

*(Moved by Councillor S Goodall and seconded by Councillor A Cooper)*

The Leader then left the meeting.

### **39 FORWARD PLAN**

No further items were identified for this Committee's consideration.

### **40 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN**

The Committee considered its work plan and updated it as follows:

#### **Corporate Scrutiny Work Plan**

<b>Work Plan 2021 – 2022</b>		
<b>TARGET MEETING DATE</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>MEETING WHEN ITEM ADDED TO WORK PLAN</b>
9 December 2021	Reset & Recovery	
9 December 2021	Customer Portal - post implementation review	November 2020
1 February 2022	Asset Management update	December 2019
1 February 2022	Quarter Three 2021/22 Performance Report	
10 March 2022	Solway Trading Company Update	
<b>Dates to be agreed</b>		
TBC	Update on corporate prioritisation	August 2020
July 2022 (tbc)	Market Contract – post implementation review	November 2021
TBC	Parking Toolkit review – working group to be formed (Cllr S Goodall)	October 2019
Bi-annual updates (March & September)	Solway Trading Company Update	December 2019
TBC	Gungate Masterplan	January 2020
TBC	Joint Waste contract update	June 2021
TBC	Reset & Recovery Workstreams	
TBC	Investment Review	

<b>Upcoming Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meetings</b>
9 December 2021
1 February 2022 (Q3 QPR)
10 March 2022

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Chair

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