



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 17th NOVEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Councillor T Jay (Chair), Councillors D Cook, M Cook, A Cooper, J Harper, S Peale, S Smith and R Ford

CABINET Councillor Jeremy Oates
Councillor Alex Farrell

GUEST Mick Warner (Consultant)

The following officers were present: Tina Mustafa (Assistant Director Neighbourhoods), Zoe Wolicki (Assistant Director People), Lee Birch (Head of Neighbourhood Services) and Jo Hutchison (Senior Scrutiny and Democratic Services Officer)

43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Goodall and Councillor R Ford attended as substitute. Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor C Cooke.

44 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2022 were approved as a correct record

(Moved by Councillor D Cook and seconded by Councillor A Cooper)

45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

46 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair highlighted that he proposed to change the agenda order such that the Forward Plan was considered later in the agenda, ahead of the Work Plan and

Action Log item, and the Update on Assure Project was considered prior to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill preparedness item.

47 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair reported that he had presented the Committee's recommendations regarding Programme Board membership to the Cabinet meeting on 20th October 2022.

The Chair further reported that he had presented the Committee's recommendation to instigate a focussed review of the market strategy as a result of the changes in business conditions to the Cabinet meeting on 20 October 2022. Cabinet agreed to look at this, whilst noting that this Committee could also undertake a deep dive into this.

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

None.

49 QUARTER TWO 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 second quarter of the financial year i.e., July to September 2022. Cabinet would consider the report on 1 December 2022.

Councillor S People joined the meeting at 6.08pm.

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

1. There had been some changes to the format and structure of the report, which was in 10 sections.
2. Recovery and Reset Programme updates provided. 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. The Government's decision on this had been delayed until December 2022. However, decisions on the rationalisation of Marmion House had been taken by Cabinet to limit occupation to the ground floor.
3. Corporation Street (Gateway project) was reported as amber as a full review of the project was required.
4. In terms of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the monitoring of that the report showed the updated forecast at October 2022, which in the General Fund had improved from the position forecast in February 2022, however the Leader highlighted that these figures did not include any policy proposals under discussion nor any projected energy cost increases.

The Committee commented and sought clarifications in the following areas:

1. Whether current rent arrears as a proportion of expected rent were increasing, where it was reported that these were increasing at a higher rate and the Council was working to mitigate that.
2. What the average rent arrears were where it was reported that these were between 5 to 8 weeks of rent. The Assistant Director highlighted the importance of any tenants discussing with the Council any issues over payment of rent, so that early intervention and support and signposting to partnership agencies could be provided.
3. Whether any consideration had been given to moving the front desk facilities from the Assembly Rooms to Marmion House given the consolidation into the Ground Floor of Marmion House. The Leader reported that private one-2-one appointments were still available to be booked. The Assistant Director, People reported that the number of visits to the Assembly Rooms had been monitored over the last 12 months and the nature of the enquiries raised. These showed on average 24 visits per month focussed mainly on council tax queries and the team at the Assembly Rooms had dealt with or sign posted the enquiries. In comparison, prior to COVID, the front desk at Marmion House had received around 50,000 visits per year. The Assistant Director, People reported that to re-open a front desk at Marmion House would require more staff which would have a significant cost to the Council.
4. The importance of delivering the services which the Council was obliged to deliver.

The Committee thanked the Officers for preparing the Report.

RESOLVED that the Report be endorsed.

(Moved by Councillor D Cook and seconded by Councillor J Harper)

50 UPDATE ON ASSURE PROJECT

The Chair invited the Assistant Director, People to provide an update on the Assure Project.

The Assistant Director reported that Assure was a product which was an upgrade to our current M3 system which was our Planning, Environmental Health and Land Charges system which provided a back-office process to deliver these services. This new product would be browser based. Once all processes had been moved over it would enable more flexibility in terms of access and for staff and would support the over arching ICT strategy to move to cloud based services where appropriate.

It was reported that this product would be provided by NEC (previously Northgate). It was expected that NEC would be shortly issuing a 12-month de-support notice for M3 platform. As such it would be necessary to upgrade to the new platform. However, it should be noted that in the interim NEC remained committed to supporting the system.

It was reported that a project team had been set up to deliver the project comprising of the Assistant Director, People and the Assistant Director, Growth &

Regeneration, as well as Heads of Service from ICT, Planning and Environmental Health and support staff from all of the teams including Customer Services and Housing. Staff training was required on the document production system and this had been delayed due to an issue within the test system, from NEC's side. This training had been booked for July but was cancelled at short notice and the Head of ICT was in regular contact to seek a resolution however, this was still not resolved. Although NEC were committed to resolving this within the timeframe to enable the Council to complete the project by the end of the de-commissioning period.

Internally, the Planning team continued to work to convert letter templates however the final process moves could not be completed until training had been completed.

In terms of the Environmental Health team there were two areas to the system, in terms of document production, the same issues were faced by the Environmental Team as by the Planning Team. The second side related to licensing, where the project team were currently assessing the options between the licensing options within Assure or the options within the myTamworth portal provided by Civica and which were the best fit for the organisation in terms of cost, customer accessibility, and alignment with the ICT strategy.

The Committee sought and received the following clarifications:

1. The current risk rating for this project, where the Assistant Director, People reported that currently this would be a low risk, however, it could move to a medium risk when the Council received the de-support notice for M3.
2. Whether the preparation work within the Environmental Health team had been progressed, where it was reported that a Licensing Officer had been tasked with this project.
3. The option to use myTamworth portal for licensing activities where it was reported that work continued to investigate which solution would provide the best fit for the organisation.

RESOLVED that a further written briefing be provided to the Committee setting out the status of the project and the risks posed.

(Moved by Councillor D Cook and seconded by Councillor M Cook)

51 SOCIAL HOUSING (REGULATION) BILL PREPAREDNESS'

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Homelessness Prevention and Social Housing, Councillor A Farrell, the Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods, Tina Mustafa, the Head of Housing Management and Neighbourhood Resilience, Lee Birch and Mr Mick Warner (Consultant) for this item.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the Neighbourhoods team had undertaken, with the support of the Consultant, a self-assessment of the Council's preparedness for the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, which would be explained further in this item.

The Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods reported that the Bill represented a fundamental shift in the way Council housing was regulated and managed and was expected to lead to a much more proactive inspection regime. The team had started preparations for this over the last year.

The Consultant explained the review undertaken and the more proactive approach from the regulator which was expected.

It was reported that the exact approach the regulator would take and how the ratings / judgements would be applied by the regulator was unclear as yet, however for the self-assessment, four possible ratings were considered, the top two where compliant and the bottom two, where non-compliant.

In terms of the current assessment undertaken, this was undertaken against four Consumer standards:

- Homes Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Neighbourhood and community Standard; and
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

The assessment identified that for the first 3 standards above the Council met the expected compliance ratings, and it was only in the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard that the expected rating was not achieved, however, it was noted that there was no evidence that the serious detriment threshold had been breached.

The Committee was invited to provide feedback on the Improvement Plan.

The Committee sought and received clarifications in the following areas:

1. In terms of the methodology used in the self-assessment, which councillors had been engaged and how had involved tenants been engaged in the review. Whilst there had been dialogue with the Homelessness Prevention and Social Housing Sub-Committee, in terms of the self-assessment it was Cabinet members who were engaged, as well as members of the Tenants Consultative Group and those on the active database. It was further reported that the self-assessment was an initial process and that there would be a full exercise concurrent to the legislative timetable on the Improvement Plan. The initial work was undertaken to ensure that the organisation had a clear picture of the current position and to enable the submission of tenant satisfaction measures from April 2023.
2. The nature of the self assessment undertaken where it was reported that the approach taken was a reasonable approach which would be expected to be consistent with how the regulator could approach such assessments in future.
3. The nature of the sanctions which could be applied for non-compliance, where it was reported that the precise sanctions were not yet known, however, it was expected that the regulator would look to work with any provider to return to compliance, and that there would also be some reputational risk for any provider if there was non-compliance, and the potential for possible Government intervention. There was also an

expectation from the Housing Ombudsman and the regulator that the Council would have a performance improvement plan in place and the requisite governance in place to deliver it.

4. The work to recognise the diversity of our tenants and it was reported that there was a piece of work required for the Council to understand our tenant base and our demographic so that services could be tailored appropriately and so that there could be improved engagement.
5. The Committee noted that there was significant information in the Action Plan, and that detailed scrutiny was required. It was reported that the activity described in the improvement plan would go to the heart of many council services and needed to be delivered well.
6. The expected cost implications of delivering the improvement plan, noting that the main area appeared to be on tenant engagement. It was reported that there were policy changes over the next two years costing around £100,000 which reflected the costs of delivery around this piece of work, but this figure did not include any repairs / estates improvement work which would become clearer over time.

Councillor M Cook left the meeting at 7.31pm.

7. This self-assessment exercise which had been undertaken by the Council through independent feedback against a set of standards was welcomed by the Committee.
8. The choices which the Council could face with any budget limitations in the HRA business plan which it was reported would be starting a consultation process shortly.

It was agreed that this item would remain on the Committee's work plan for consideration at the February 2023 meeting.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder, Officers, and the Consultant for their report and attendance. The Officers and Consultant then left the meeting.

52 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

The Chair reported that an approach had been proposed to the working group for the Quarterly Performance Review item, following which it was expected that the item would be brought forward onto the February 2023 meeting agenda.

Councillor D Cook reported that he had compiled some questions related to the Leaseholder Charges working group item which would be forwarded to Officers and the Portfolio Holder shortly.

53 FORWARD PLAN

No further items were identified.

54 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN & ACTION LOG

The Committee considered and updated the Work Plan as set out below.

Corporate Scrutiny Work Plan

Work Plan		
TARGET MEETING DATE	SUBJECT	MEETING WHEN ITEM ADDED TO WORK PLAN
8 December 2022	Draft Asset Management Strategy	June 2022
8 February 2023	Quarter 3 2022/23 Performance Report	
8 February 2023	Working group feedback - Review of Quarterly Performance Report	
8 February 2023	Regulation Social housing for the Council's own stock	October 2022
Dates to be agreed		
TBC	Update on corporate prioritisation	August 2020
TBC (February / March 2023)	Update on Assure Project (Environmental Health)	September/ November 2022
Bi-annual updates (March & September)	Solway Trading Company Update	December 2019
TBC (September 2023)	Joint Waste contract update	June 2021
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		
Aiming for 8 February 2023– which meeting Working Group to report back to	Review of Quarterly Performance Report to align with new Corporate Plan 2022-2025 Members: Cllrs T Jay, D Cook, C Cooke, A Cooper	June 2022
TBC – which meeting Working Group to report back to	Review of Leaseholder Charges Communications following referral from full council meeting on	October 2022

	27.09.2022 meeting Members: Cllrs D Cook, M Cook, C Cooke, S Goodall, J Harper, S People	
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Upcoming Corporate Scrutiny Committee Meetings
Meeting dates: 8 December 2022 8 February 2023 9 March 2023

The Committee noted and agreed the Action Plan.

Chair