

# Annual Report of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

## Membership

**Chair – Councillor Thomas Jay**

**Vice-Chair - Councillor Daniel Cook**



Members (2022/23)	Appointed for 2022/23 municipal year	Within retirements	year
Thomas Jay (Chair)	May 2022		
Daniel Cook (Vice-Chair)	May 2022		
Chris Cooke	May 2022		
Simon Goodall	May 2022		
John Harper	May 2022		
Jason Jones		September 2022	
Sam Smith	May 2022		
John Wade		September 2022	
Sheree Peaple	May 2022		
Andrew Cooper	September 2022		
Michelle Cook	September 2022		

## Chair's Overview

The Committee met eight times in the 2022/2023 municipal year, with one other scheduled meeting (28 July 2022) not being required as the business items due to be considered were not ready for presentation.

During the past year, the Committee's main focus has been on the delivery of the Council's corporate plan, its performance, including specifically the financial performance of the Council, policy development and major projects. Spotlighted within this report is the work undertaken regarding the preparation work by officers for the Social Housing Regulation Bill.

Cabinet members and officers were invited to attend meetings of the Committee to provide information and to answer questions on these areas.

The Committee has used the Council's Forward Plan to focus its work and to help identify areas which would either require pre-decision scrutiny and/or post implementation scrutiny.

The Committee also met as a sub-working group to consider an item referred to the Committee from Full Council, in relation to Leaseholder Charges Communications, which led to an excellent and well considered set of recommendations being presented to the Cabinet as well as regular public attendance to committee meetings.

I would like to thank all members of the Committee, officers and other stakeholders who took part in these meetings for their valuable contributions during the year.

**Councillor T Jay**

**Chair**

### **Committee's remit and function (Terms of Reference)**

The Constitution sets out the Committee's remit which can be summarised as to provide effective scrutiny of the achievement of the Council's strategic priorities by scrutinising the performance of the Executive. Particular areas of focus include reviewing and scrutinising matters relating to:-

- Forward Plan
- Quarterly performance reports
- Corporate plan
- Major Council led projects
- Investment Strategy
- HRA function
- Bi-annually review and scrutinise matters relating to the Local Authority Trading Company's activities and performance.

### **Regular activity**

**Quarterly Performance Reporting:** the Committee had also during the year considered the Quarterly Performance Reports. The Committee had received the relevant quarter's draft report and the meetings had normally been attended by senior Officers and/or the Leader. This consideration had been prior to Cabinet's receipt of the report and had enabled the Committee's comments, where relevant, to be taken on board prior to Cabinet's consideration. The following areas received scrutiny through the regular receipt of the QPR reports:

- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Corporate projects and corporate risks

- Financial healthcheck
- Universal credit summary
- Welfare reform
- Recovery & Reset project – programme overview, including key milestones

In terms of the Council's Corporate Projects details of the status of these were included in the Quarterly Performance Reports together with highlight reports and the Committee focused on projects with an amber or red status. Items identified for further scrutiny included the Assure Project, further details are set out below.

During this municipal year officers have responded to feedback on the scope, structure and content of the report, which has continuously developed throughout the year. The Committee currently has a working group in place to feedback to officers on any further improvements it would like to see to the Quarterly Performance Report.

**Forward Plan consideration;** Over the year 2022/2023, there has been regular review of the Forward Plan at all meetings to identify areas which would either require pre decision scrutiny and /or post implementation scrutiny.

Examples of areas which were identified for the Committee's scrutiny, as a result of regular Forward Plan consideration were:

- Regulation of Social Housing
- Gungate Terms of Reference

### **Spotlight item**

In 2022 an item was added to the Committee's workplan to consider the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill preparedness.

The Social Housing Regulation Bill aims to strengthen the regulation of social housing and in order to prepare for the bill Tamworth Borough Council has worked with consultants to undertake an early self-assessment of its preparedness for the introduction of the act.

The Portfolio Holder for Homelessness Prevention and Social Housing, senior officers and the Consultant appointed to carry out the self-assessment attended the November 2022 meeting for this item and reported on the current compliance against the anticipated new standards.

Following scrutiny, the Committee sought clarification on a number of areas including the methodology used for assessment, the nature of the sanctions and the work to recognise the diversity of tenants.

The Committee welcomed the self-assessment exercise the council had undertaken and recognised the significant amount of information in the action plan that needed further scrutiny. It was agreed that the item should remain on the Committee's workplan.

The draft Improvement plan was considered further at a second meeting of the Committee in March 2023 when the Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods attended to update the Committee on the draft improvement plan before it was to be presented to Cabinet in April 2023.

The Committee sought clarification over the presentation of the report, including the use of abbreviations, empty columns causing confusion, the use of a RAG system that was unclear as well as offering no benefit to the colourblind. It was acknowledged that the document needed to be made more accessible and a key attached. The Assistant Director accepted the comments and agreed that these would be taken into consideration to provide a smarter, more accessible document.

The Committee also considered in further depth the following items:

1. **Street Market Update**

As part of the Committee's continued oversight of regeneration in the town centre the Committee received two updates on the town's Street Market to understand how the new contract had operated during its first year of trading. The Committee received details of the current operator's performance contractually. The Committee discussed any future changes as the town centre regeneration work progressed, how the current street market strategy had been developed pre-COVID and whether a review of the strategy could be undertaken, how the relationship with the current operator was progressing, and whether any performance art or music could be included as part of the market offering to attract further footfall.

The Committee recommended to Cabinet that a focussed review of the market strategy be undertaken as a result of the changes in business conditions. More details are set out below.

2. **Draft Asset Management Strategy**

At the June 2022 meeting the Committee received an update on the Asset Management work completed to date and was provided with information on the next steps of the work. At that meeting, it was reported that the draft Asset management strategy was expected to be ready for presentation to Cabinet in November 2022, and that once the strategy was approved there would be a process to categorise properties as red, amber or green, and then develop action plans. It was expected that implementation would take 3-5 years.

The Committee retained this item on its work plan so that the draft strategy could be considered prior to presentation to Cabinet.

At the December 2022 meeting the Committee received the draft Asset Management Strategy and associated documentation which was presented by the Portfolio Holder and the Assistant Director, Assets. The Committee considered matters including; whether the Community Impact Assessment included all relevant stakeholders; whether all relevant associated linked strategies were included; the alignment to the current Vision and the lack of inclusion of references to vulnerability; how the strategy addressed the depreciation of assets; the interactions with the HRA Business Plan; and how the strategy addressed the Council's net zero carbon commitments.

The Committee made a number of recommendations to Cabinet (see below) which Cabinet is currently considering.

3. **Update on Assure project**

At the November 2022 the Committee was provided with an update on the Assure project to upgrade the Council's current M3 system. The Committee requested a further written briefing be provided to consider the risks posed by the project, which was considered at the March 2023 meeting.

At the March 2023 Meeting the Head of Technology presented the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Risk and Customer Services, Portfolio Holder for the Voluntary Sector, Town Centre, Evening economy and Community Safety and Assistant Director, Growth and Regeneration, to give a progress update.

The Committee sought clarification over the tender process, the security of the system and the cost in comparison to the current system.

4. **Gungate regeneration Programme Terms of Reference**

The Committee was provided with an update on the proposed governance for the Gungate Regeneration programme from the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration and the Portfolio Holder.

The Committee considered the proposed arrangements and following discussion, recommended to Cabinet that the Programme Board had a member of the Opposition on it (such member to be agreed by the two leaders of the opposition groups).

5. **Solway (Tamworth) Limited Update.**

The Committee received an update report from the Chief Executive on the trading activity of Solway Tamworth Limited. A Company set up as a tool to generate income when the option arose. After discussion around the annual costs to keep the company running the Committee agreed to recommend that Cabinet wind up the company.

### **Working groups**

**Review of Leaseholder Charges Communications working group;** following the full council meeting in September 2022 a motion was moved and carried for the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to consider the handling of communication with residents, in particular, leaseholders. This was discussed at the October 2022 Committee meeting, and it was agreed that a working group would be set up to further consider the matter. The working group members were Councillors M Cook, D Cook, C Cooke, S Goodall, J Harper and S People.

At that meeting it was highlighted that the following areas were of importance:

1. Analysing what had happened
2. Looking into the language of the communications issued
3. Working quickly and thoroughly.

The working group reported back to the February 2023 meeting. The review had considered information from leaseholders as well as from officers and had looked at the procedure followed and the communications with leaseholders. The working group presented some recommendations to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee which were considered and following consideration the Committee made 7 recommendations to Cabinet (more details are set out below).

At the March meeting the Chair reported that 6 out of the 7 recommendations were agreed, with one recommendation being referred back to Scrutiny for some further consideration.

The Committee agree that the working group would continue and this would be discussed at the June meeting.

### **Recommendations made to and Responses received from Cabinet**

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

<b>Scrutiny meeting item recommendations</b>	<b>Responses received</b>
<p><b>Street Market update</b>  <b>16<sup>th</sup> August 2022</b>            - to ask the Leader of the Council to write formally to the County Council to resolve the issues with the bollards on George Street and Market Street            - to invite Head of Economic Development &amp; Regeneration to attend a future Corporate Committee meeting to discuss the report and update on the quarterly meetings that take place with Market contractor.</p> <p><b>6<sup>th</sup> October 2022</b>            - that the Committee recommend to Cabinet that Cabinet instigate a focussed review of the market strategy as a result of the changes in business conditions.</p>	<p>This action had been superceded and was agreed by the Cabinet to be completed in 17 November 2022</p> <p>Action completed at meeting of 6<sup>th</sup> October 2022</p> <p><b>Cabinet Meeting - 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022</b>            It was reported at the November meeting by the Chair 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 but would encourage Scrutiny Committee to look and do a deep dive into this as well.</p>
<p><b>Gungate Regeneration Project</b>  <b>6<sup>th</sup> October 2022</b>            The Committee recommended to Cabinet that the Programme Board had a member of the Opposition on it (such member to be agreed by the two leaders of the opposition groups).</p>	<p><b>Cabinet Meeting - 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022</b>            The recommendation was presented to Cabinet on 20 October 2022. Cabinet decided to discuss this as part of the full report it would receive at the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022 Cabinet meeting. At the November meeting the recommendation was not moved by Cabinet.</p>
<p><b>Asset Management Strategy</b>  <b>17<sup>th</sup> November 2022</b></p>	<p><b>Cabinet Meeting – 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023</b></p>

<p>The Committee approved the draft Asset Management Strategy and accompanying documents for presentation to Cabinet with the following 8 recommendations from this Committee:</p> <p>The Committee recommended that Cabinet consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Including within the policy a link to the Asset Register</li> <li>2. Adding explicitly within the Strategy how depreciation would be managed</li> <li>3. Adding a section regarding maintenance</li> <li>4. Delaying the implementation of the Asset Management Strategy until the Vision had been revisited</li> <li>5. Adding reference to zero carbon investment into the Asset Management Strategy</li> <li>6. Adding in a glossary of terms within the Strategy and developing “How to” Guides, where relevant, to be included as website resources to support understanding of the Strategy (but not form part of it)</li> <li>7. Including within the strategy that a case-by-case approach be taken for the sale of small purchases of land (with purchasers bearing the legal and administrative costs of the Council in progressing any sale)</li> <li>8. Expanding the stakeholder list to include highway authorities, county council(s), relevant partnerships, voluntary sector, emergency services.</li> </ol>	<p>The recommendations were presented to Cabinet who agreed to report back to The Scrutiny Committee on each individual recommendation.</p> <p>The Committee has retained an item on its work plan to consider the responses once received.</p>
<p><b>Leaseholder Charges Communications working group 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023</b></p> <p>The Committee recommended:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the council look at using an independent assessor for works to confirm costs were correct.</li> <li>2. That an assessment be done for all repairs in advance of leaseholders being asked to contribute to repairs.</li> <li>3. To reinforce the council's communications when residents buy a council house, including what</li> </ol>	<p><b>Cabinet Meeting – 23 February 2023</b></p> <p><b>Resolved: That Cabinet</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agreed to a one-off look for this piece of work, with an independent assessor to assess if the costs are correct</li> <li>2. Agreed that the Portfolio Holder would consider the implications of assessing all repairs in advance of leaseholders being asked to contribute and bring the report back to the next available Cabinet meeting.</li> </ol>



<p>responsibilities and obligations were on the owner occupier.</p> <p>4. That the communications relating to the leaseholder works be reviewed and simplified.</p> <p>5. That the contractor hold at least two face-to-face consultation drop ins to enable residents to understand the process.</p> <p>6. That the specific 44 leaseholder roofs be assessed straight away.</p> <p>7. That the council consider a mechanism such that the affected 44 leaseholders were not faced with increased costs as a result of the delay in works being commenced.</p>	<p>3. Review the council's communications when residents buy a council house, including what responsibilities and obligations are on the owner occupier.</p> <p>4. Review communications and include the information from the whole capital programme in the communications.</p> <p>5. Referred back to Corporate Scrutiny that the Committee look at the process for requesting at least two face to face drop ins with residents before any work commences and Scrutiny should consider whether this is for all works or works over a certain monetary threshold.</p> <p>6. Agreed that if any of the 44 Leaseholders roofs haven't been assessed they will be assessed immediately.</p> <p>7. Agreed that the affected 44 leaseholders would not be faced with increased costs as a result of the delay in works being commenced.</p>
<p><b>March 2023</b>  <b>Solway (Tamworth) Limited Recommended</b>  That the Committee recommended: that Cabinet wind up Solway (Tamworth) Limited.</p>	<p><b>Cabinet Meeting 6<sup>th</sup> April Resolved:</b>  That Cabinet agreed that Solway (Tamworth) Ltd be put into dormancy to release associated savings.</p>

**Members Attendance to be updated**

Member	Number of meetings attended
Thomas Jay (Chair)	7 out of 8
Daniel Cook (Vice-Chair)	7 out of 8
Chris Cooke	6 out of 8
Simon Goodall	6 out of 8
John Harper	8 out of 8
Jason Jones	1 out of 3
Sam Smith	6 out of 8
John Wade	0 out of 3
Sheree People	5 out of 6
Andrew Cooper	5 out of 5 plus 1 substitute
Michelle Cook	5 out of 5

<b>Work Plan</b>		
<b>TARGET MEETING DATE</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>MEETING WHEN ITEM ADDED TO WORK PLAN</b>
June 2023	Working group feedback - Review of Quarterly Performance Report	
June / July 2023	QPR Q4 2022/23	
June 2023	Repairs – Contract Performance Standards	March 2023
June 2023	Leaseholder Charges update	March 2023
<b>Dates to be agreed</b>		
TBC	Update on corporate prioritisation	August 2020
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
TBC	Draft Improvement Plan (Regulation of Social Housing)	March 2023

<b>Working Groups</b>		
<b>Aiming for June 2023</b> – which meeting Working Group to report back to	<b>Review of Quarterly Performance Report</b> to align with new Corporate Plan 2022-2025  Members: Cllrs T Jay, D Cook, C Cooke, A Cooper	<b>June 2022</b>
<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>Review of Leaseholder Charges Communications</b> following referral from full council meeting on 27.09.2022 meeting	<b>October 2022</b>

	Members: Cllrs D Cook, M Cook, C Cooke, S Goodall, J Harper, S People	
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