

Monday, 11 March 2024

Report of the Leader of the Council, Finance and Governance

State of Tamworth Debate

Exempt Information

None

Purpose

To enable Council to undertake the annual State of Tamworth Debate.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Members use the contents of this report as the basis for debate

Executive Summary

The annual State of Tamworth Debate provides members with the opportunity to look back at the work of the council over the last 12 months and discuss plans for the future, whilst considering public feedback gained through consultation exercises.

It gives members the chance to comment on the council's vision and priorities and the work that is ongoing in each of the main areas of focus.

The overriding goal is to make sure our organisation remains fit for the future, while protecting services to the most vulnerable in our community. This approach requires members to put evidence and insight at the heart of decision making to ensure that we are transparent about the rationale for our decisions and plans; it will involve managed risks and will sustain essential services critical in supporting the most vulnerable in our communities at a time when demand is increasing and resources reducing.

The 2024/25 Budget reflects the need to compensate for reduced income levels arising from ongoing uncertain political and economic conditions, and potential significant medium- term reductions in government funding. Members will continue to face difficult decisions when it comes to prioritising services and achieving continuous improvements in delivery.

A longer-term Sustainability Strategy is required in order to avoid significant financial cuts in future years. This will be developed alongside the Productivity Plan that is a requirement of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement. All local authorities

have to prepare and publish this plan by July 2024, to cover the transforming services to make better use of resources, ways to reduce wasteful spending within systems and opportunities to take advantage of technological advances.

Corporate Plan

The council is now approaching the final year of the current [Corporate Plan](#), which covers the period 2022 to 2025.

It brought with it a new vision for the town of 'Tamworth – celebrating our heritage, creating a better future'. It also includes the key mission to 'restore Tamworth town centre as the beating heart of the community, a place that people want to visit, rather than a place they have to visit'.

The plan was brought together by members during member-led workshops and seminars and incorporated feedback given by residents during the Annual Residents Survey.

Good progress continues to be made against the short, medium and long-term projects, and the five corporate priority areas contained within the three-year plan.

These are:

- The environment
- The economy
- Infrastructure
- Living in Tamworth
- The town centre

Annual Residents Survey

Residents, businesses and the voluntary sector are consulted every year on spending and savings options in line with council priorities. People are asked what they think about Tamworth as a place to live and how satisfied they are with council services. This information helps members determine what the priorities are, and to set the budget.

A total of 737 people took part in the 2023 survey, which is on a par with 2022, and above the 500 responses achieved by the first annual residents survey undertaken in 2021.

There was a clear endorsement of the five council priority areas with the majority of respondents agreeing they are all 'very' or 'fairly' important.

The top areas people wanted to spend money on remain the same as in 2022, namely:

- Tackling anti-social behaviour
- Improving the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of Tamworth
- Parks and open spaces

In terms of Tamworth as a place to live and 'problems in the area', the top three issues cited are:

- Rubbish and litter
- People using or dealing drugs
- Vandalism, graffiti or deliberate damage

Respondents were also asked about six immediate areas of focus which were

identified by members in 2023:

- The town centre
- Pride in our area
- Roads and potholes
- Communications
- Marmion House
- New ideas

People agreed that all but Marmion House are important areas of focus, with roads and potholes being the most important, although it was made clear that this is a county council responsibility.

Overall, the main issues and priorities highlighted by respondents in the 2023 survey remain the same as 2022, and are therefore already council priorities.

Please see Appendix 1 for an overview of the corporate priorities and the work that has been achieved/planned against each, which can be used to inform this year's State of Tamworth Debate.

Resource Implications

The Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy report considered by Council on 27 February approved a 2024/25 budget which required the use of £1.1m of general fund reserves to balance the budget. By 2027/28 the budget deficit is expected to increase to £4.8m, at which point there will be insufficient general fund reserves to enable a balanced budget to be set. A sustainability strategy is required in order to avoid significant financial cuts in future years.

The HRA is expected to move to a surplus position in the short to medium term (£1.1m for 2024/25). This will enable balances to be built up in order to meet the long term costs of the capital programme included in the 30 year HRA business plan.

There are no human resource considerations as a direct result of this report

Legal/Risk Implications Background

There are no legal or risk implications as a direct result of this report

Equalities Implications

There are no equality implications as a direct result of this report

Environment and Sustainability Implications (including climate change)

There are no environment or sustainability implications as a direct result of this report

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List of Background Papers

Corporate Vision, Priorities Plan, Budget & Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25

<https://democracy.tamworth.gov.uk/documents/s37602/Corporate%20Vision%20Priorities%20Plan%20Budget%20Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Strategy%20202425.pdf>

<https://democracy.tamworth.gov.uk/documents/s37334/Annual%20residents%20survey%20results.pdf>

Appendices

Appendix 1 - State of Tamworth Debate Table