



## **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 6th FEBRUARY 2025**

**PRESENT:** Councillor S Smith (Chair), Councillors G Coates, M Couchman, H Hadley, M Summers and A Wells

**CABINET** Councillor Carol Dean

The following officers were present: Anica Goodwin (Executive Director Organisation), Joanne Goodfellow (Interim Executive Director Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer), Amerdip Kaur (Assistant Director – Policy and Performance), Christie Tims (Corporate Project Co-ordinator) and Leanne Costello (Senior Scrutiny and Democratic Services Officer)

### **66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Wadrup and B Price.

### **67 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024 were approved as a correct record.

*(Moved by Councillor M Couchman and seconded by Councillor M Summers)*

### **68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest

### **69 CHAIR'S UPDATE**

There was no update

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

There were none.

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

There were none.

**72 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT AND ACTION PLAN**

Report of the Leader of the Council to advise members of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge Report and seek approval for the draft action plan in response to its recommendations and any follow-up actions to complete the challenge in the required timescale.

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council, the Assistant Director, Policy & Performance and the Corporate Project Coordinator.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report confirming that the Council had received a comprehensive and complementary report. The report had been published to comply with the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025 deadline and deadline of the 31<sup>st</sup> March to publish the final version of the action plan and the progress review from the LGA expected in September were highlighted.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. It was acknowledged that the report noted that the Council was doing and that well, it noted the financial situation and that it is being addressed. Officer confirmed that the financial situation was highlighted, and a lot of work was going on to factor in the financial challenges, which is why they are not able to finalise the action plan until this process is completed.
2. Why had it taken so long for the Council to hold a Peer Review following the previous review in 2013?  
Officers confirmed that there had been two changes in Chief Executive since 2013. The review was carried out under one Chief Executive, the Council then had to allow time to work through the development plan. Another review was planned but a number of factors, including the passing of the LGA Member supporting them, followed by a member of staff, as well as timing around political factors. However, the Council continued to engage with the LGA and when the previous Chief Executive announced their retirement the decision was taken for this happen.  
The Chair highlighted that the current Chief Executive had raised the Peer Review in their first conversation.
3. How are we addressing the comments around lack of engagement from some Members.  
Officers confirmed that Member engagement was highlighted in terms of lack of take up of training and learning opportunities, in particular in relation to the Audit and Governance Committee and this something that the Council needed to get to the bottom of, to support Members to access learning meaningfully. There was also limited take up of opportunities for Members to join in during the three-day Peer challenge and that is something that we would want to see improving when they return in

September. It was noted the majority of members attended the member briefing held recently to relay the findings from the report.

4. How are we going to manage our assets to ensure that there is no more burden on the Council and taxpayer? Clarification around the steering group and confirmation that the Asset Management Strategy would be coming back to Corporate Scrutiny Committee?

It was confirmed that this was picked up by Officers prior to the review and discussions were held during the review, at the same time that the Asset Management Strategy was approved. Work now needed to make sure that details plans were in place to close any risks down and maintain assets. It was confirmed that the steering group was currently officer based, made up of Executive and Assistant Directors who meet quarterly, and that the frequency was being increased.

The Committee suggested that following the review that the report needed looking at again and highlighted the importance of the plans being progressed at pace.

5. Concerns around the events of last August and the time taken to respond to support communities, so they know that Council are listening. Clarification around the work around honest conversations and that this was not a holding exercise whilst the Government strategy was being prepared. The importance of an honest conversation amongst themselves, whether with the public or cross-party about why events happened and how the Council should respond and how the Council could ensure that these conversations could be truly honest without respondents feeling they will be judged for their views.

It was confirmed that there were consultants in place carrying out a piece of work which was planned to come to Cabinet in April with an action plan of what was to follow based on the recommendation from the specialists. The Leader confirmed that they had a meeting scheduled with the consultants for an update coming up and they would let Members know as soon as possible what was happening. It was highlighted that it is incumbent on Councillors to continue to make sure they are listening to residents as leaders in our communities. They highlighted that it is important that they find out the reasoning behind the actions of residents and why they are feeling disenfranchised.

6. What 'asset-based community engagement' was?

It was confirmed that this was about recognising the strength, skills and diversity within the community and the Council supporting and facilitating communities to use these tools to support their own development and growth and support each other. Good examples of this could be found via the Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network. [Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network Home Page](#)

7. There are lots of action plans, but how will the Council ensure that they prioritise in terms of delivery, and how will they compromise and try not to do everything and achieve nothing? It was confirmed that Scrutiny would like to review the actions quarterly and understand what can be achieved. Officers confirmed that the Council were trying to focus on what they needed to deliver in the next year and to bring transparency and oversight to those recommendations. Officer oversight would be through the Corporate Management Team performance board and as part of the quarterly cycle this will be brought to Cabinet.

8. Clarification over the Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment as section four seems quite generic?  
Officers confirmed that this is the first cycle of the new style impact assessment which is far more detailed than it was, and that this was not just a one off and as the plan develops would be revisited and will have a contribution from all officers involved in the plan.
9. Clarification around the impact of devolution planning and how the council would manage resourcing and how this will affect delivery of the action plan when all of the policies and structure that the Council have in place would no longer exist?  
The Leader confirmed that they had been at a meeting of the Staffordshire Leaders Board talking about next steps but that for the moment the day job must go on serving the residents and getting Tamworth in the best place it can be for the future.  
It was confirmed that an internal project group has been set up and these matters were being considered. Some key risks have been identified, such as retaining staff, managing budgets and what happens in year three. There are lots of unknowns but that they would come back to the Committee in the future with what they do know and what they are planning but for now they will continue to deliver with what they have.
10. In relation to Future High Street Fund and communication, whether digital notice boards had been considered?  
The Leader confirmed that they had concerns over communications, and this has improved with the hoardings. The communications team have done a lot including making videos to let residents know what is going on. The Leader and Portfolio Holder also went around and spoke to retailer down the middle entry, and they were surprised at the amount of misinformation out there. Digital signs had not been considered.
11. Clarification around the performance management framework and what this is?  
It was confirmed that this is an internal document that was included in the position statement for the LGA and links into the annual Performance Development Reviews for employees.
12. A comment was made in respect to the home/hybrid working that a recent study from nature.com that a hybrid schedule with two days working from home does not damage performance but that more than that could affect productivity.
13. Why the BRAG key was not filled out?  
Officers confirmed that this was a draft and that timings and objectives were still being confirming making it impossible to fill in but that this would be completed for the deadline of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

The Committee acknowledged the committed and hard-working staff and moved a motion to:

Extend thanks to all staff who have presented Tamworth in a positive light during the recent peer review.

*(Moved by Councillor M Couchman and seconded by M Summers)*

**Resolved** that the committee

1. noted the publication of LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report as set out in Appendix 1
2. commented on the draft action plan developed to respond to the recommendations as set out in Appendix 2
3. endorsed the delegation to finalise development of this plan and publish it before the 31 March 2025 deadline
4. endorsed the plans to provide updates on a quarterly basis and identified any further reports it may need as part of the workplan to support this review

*(Moved by Councillor M Couchman and seconded by Councillor G Coates)*

### **73 CORPORATE PLAN 2025 TO 2030**

Report of the Leader of the Council to advise members of the consultation responses that have supported the development of the priorities of the Corporate Plan 2025 to 2030 and advise on the development of the draft Annual Delivery Plan which will support these being achieved.

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council, the Assistant Director, Policy & Performance and the Corporate Project Coordinator.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and highlighted that they felt it was one of the most collaborative and extensive consultation exercises that the Council had undertaken.

The Officers provided the Committee with a presentation.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

- 1) The Committee thanked officers for the presentation as it answers a lot of questions and it was noted that the document was smaller and more streamlined and that this was an improvement on the previous Corporate Plan document.
- 2) The thinking behind the tagline and whether this was set in stone as it did not capture the heritage of Tamworth?  
The Leader confirmed that the tagline needed to be succinct and memorable.
- 3) What the Councils heritage offer would be and how they are going to promote that and their buildings?  
The Leader confirmed that she was looking to move this on and that there were people coming to the town tomorrow (7th February) to look at its

heritage, and that we need to be coordinated in our approach and get the right people together to discuss what is possible.

Members commented that all heritage partners should be included and that this could improve tourism.

- 4) Concerns around the lack of engagement from residents in responding to the survey.

Officers confirmed that whilst they had hoped for more responses, 1200 conversations had taken place and what could not be captured in a survey was the positivity and passion of the residents of the borough.

- 5) In reference to appendix C and the consultation responses within Place Shaping, how do we address the issue around people feeling safe.

The Leader confirmed that based on community safety updates residents perceptions were different to what they hear from the police and that perhaps a piece of work needed doing to change those perceptions.

The Committee commented that a recent update from the Inspector was very data driven but that this does not seem to match what they are hearing in terms of anti-social behaviour and that this may be due to the public not reporting crime as they do not think anything will be done, where as they should be encouraged do this and get a crime number for each incident.

Members acknowledged that things had improved with the new area commands.

- 6) The Committee highlighted that the response to priority areas residents felt were missing from the survey, were the County Council's responsibility.

They referred to a recommendation that was made to Cabinet in the previous year around communicating what the Tamworth Borough Council was responsible for and what the County Council was responsible for and that there was a wider problem around communication with some residents not having access to social media. It was asked whether a paper flyer/newsletter could be considered to be sent out to communicate to all residents.

- 7) The Leader confirmed that this was important to them and agreed to look at ways to communicate this to all residents.

**Resolved** that the committee

1. reviewed and commented on the new Corporate Plan 2025-2030 (Appendix A).
2. reviewed and commented on the updated performance management framework and the plan for quarterly reporting going forward. This included the draft template for the Annual Delivery Plan (Appendix B) to be used to develop the framework for assessing the progress to deliver the priorities from the Corporate Plan 2025-2030.
3. noted the outcomes from consultation and engagement set out in Appendix C that have been used in the refinement of the final

Corporate Plan.

*(Moved by Councillor M Summers and seconded by Councillor M Couchman)*

## 74 **QUARTER 3 2024-25 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Report of the Leader of the Council to provide the Committee with an overview of Council performance for the third quarter of the 2024/25 financial year (October to December 2024). It reports the council's position in relation to progress with strategic corporate plan projects and updates on the financial position, corporate risks, audits, information governance, compliments, comments, complaints and health & safety. Cabinet will consider the report on 6th March 2025.

The Executive Director, organisation, interim Executive director, Finance and the Leader of the Council attended for this report.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and ran through the highlights adding that the county boundary review was now complete, and the local review was now underway.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

- 1) At the last meeting the Committee commented that it would be concerned if the outturn variance rose again, and it had now risen to 0.971 million. Did they expect this to exceed a million and for planning purpose what we you assuming it will be?  
Officers confirmed that this was monitored on a monthly basis and that the figures could change as there may be additional grant money received and the potential for use of reserved and retained fund, so it is difficult to say. For planning purposes, they were working on this figure.
- 2) Whether an update had been provided on the recovery proposals for key items requested at the last meeting as well as whether there was any update on the piece of work being carried out around the assembly rooms?  
It was confirmed that commentary was provided at 3.2 around recovery of the key items and that a piece of work was being done around the Assembly Rooms and that this would be going to Cabinet and would be brought to the Committee first.
- 3) Clarification around the figure for stage one complaint responses which appear to have gotten worse?  
Officers confirmed that the figures were disappointing considering work that had been done in this area. A number of meetings had taken place, and a number of actions were underway and they were looking at ways to address this including additional resourcing and improvements to processes.
- 4) The Committee requested more detail in respect of housing around the number of evictions and hardship payments made.

**Resolved** that the committee

1. endorsed the contents of this report for consideration by Cabinet.

*(Moved by Councillor M Couchman and seconded by Councillor G Coates)*

## **75 WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

There were no working groups.

## **76 FORWARD PLAN**

The Chair confirmed that the Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution report has been added to the Forward plan for April and it has been suggested that this be considered by the committee first. The Committee agreed for this to be added to the work plan.

## **77 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN**

The Chair confirmed that the next meeting was on the 18<sup>th</sup> March when they would consider the devolution paper.

The Chair asked that the Asset Management Strategy be added to the next meeting. A discussion was held on this as it was highlighted that the strategy was considered at Infrastructure, Safety and Growth Scrutiny meeting in November as agreed by the Chairs and constitutionally the same report should only be considered at one meeting. Following the discussion, it was agreed that they would like to see the Asset Management Strategy Plans. The Chair agreed to complete a work planning proposal form and circulate this with sufficient time for this to be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

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Chair