

## **STRATEGIC (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE**

**9<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2010**

### **PRESENT:**

Councillors, Smedley (Chairman), Hogan (Vice-Chairman) Jackson (Vice-Chairman) Adams, Bamborough, Brookes, Constable, Derrick, Mrs English, Humphreys, Lewin, Norman and Wilks.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors, Mrs Fisher, Greatorex, Roberts, Mrs Stanhope and Wilcox attended the meeting)

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** was received from Councillor Atkins.

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **HALF YEARLY REPORT ON FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMANCE AGAINST KEY ACTIONS AND INDICATORS FOR 2010/11:**

The Committee received a report notifying them of budget variations forecasted at the half year and performance against actions set out in the Strategic Action Plan and Financial Forecast for 2010/11. The report also showed performance against indicators identified by the Cabinet as relevant and the most severe risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register.

Performance of waste management was debated and it was noted that the increase represented a small increase and it was predicted that recycling that would be at 56% by Christmas. .

With regard to financial performance, the key areas identified in the report were that there had been a lower than expected income level from car parks but it was hoped that the recently reopened multi storey car park would encourage people back to the city centre.

It was also noted that there were increased technical costs associated with the Garrick Theatre, reflecting the increased activity in the venue and generating more income It was noted that the approach to market the conference facilities was in part in preparation for the Friarsgate development being completed. It was asked if this would change the balance of the artistic offer of the venue and it was noted that it the venue had been funded on the basis that it was a theatre and conference centre. It was also noted that consideration was being given to the format of the free music sessions as they had in the main achieved their objective of audience development. Providing the session slots to young talent was being considered as an alternative.

It was noted that at the quarter 2 stage there was an overall funding gap anticipated on the financial position for the Council but account had not yet been taken of the work on the Expenditure Review. There was a question asked about the working balance and reserves and it was confirmed that any shortfall could be met from reserves. It was also reported that we were awaiting the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review which would provide the settlement figure from the government and was expected in early December 2010.

The Committee thanked the Officers for the work undertaken to produce the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### **HALF YEAR REPORT ON TREASURY MANAGEMENT SERVICES AND PROJECTED PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2010/11:**

The Committee received a report covering the Treasury activity during the first half of 2010/11 and actual Prudential Indicators for 2009/10. It was noted that the report was a requirement of both CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

It was noted that due to the credit crunch, the list institutions to invest with was still restrictive. It was also noted that there would be no need to borrow this year.

When asked, it was noted that investments could be made with other Local Authorities as they were deemed AAA rated and the Officers were congratulated for investing well.

It was noted that the Pension Scheme was a long term liability and could go up as well as down but it was required that it is shown on the balance sheet. It was also noted that there would be a re-evaluation in early 2011.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### **FINANCE, REVENUE AND BENEFIT SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT:**

The Committee received a report on the performance of the Finance, Revenue and Benefit services for the year 2009/10. It was reported that the Finance Service had successfully closed the accounts on time and completed the Expenditure Review. In the current year, although there was no longer a need to produce national value for money performance indicators, the service, together with the communication team, would be rolling out the publication of spend over £500 in accordance with new legislation.

The Revenues Service reported that for the year 2009/10, there had been high collection rates and the new debt recovery policy had helped by allowing transparency of what would be and not be acceptable. It was reported that the current year would see direct debit promoted more as the preferred method of payment. It was noted that due to the economic climate, there were many families with a stretched budget and extended payment plans could be used for identified vulnerable and genuine cases.

The Benefits Service reported improved processing time and investigations. It was noted that there had been an increase in overpayments and these needed to be recovered. In the current year, all recipients would be requested to receive payment by BACS. It was also noted that there would be many changes due to new regulations put forward by the Department of Work and Pensions. It was requested that as much promotion of Council Tax benefits as possible be undertaken to help lower income families.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **SHARED SERVICES/SYSTEMS SUMMARY REPORT:**

The Committee received a report giving an update on the current shared services/systems arrangements the Council currently have or are in development. It was noted that during the six months of the previous report, some shared services had been widened to include more partners including the ICT contract. It was asked if integrating management teams with another authority had been considered and it was noted that dialogue would always be open. It was also asked if there were any shared services that had problems and it was noted that the majority of difficult issues are dealt with in the negotiations that take place before the service is approved.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **EQUALITIES TASK GROUP – UPDATE ON FIRST MEETING:**

The Chairman of the Equalities Task Group, Councillor Constable, gave an update of the discussions and actions agreed at their first meeting. It was noted that there would be another meeting to consolidate all the information gathered once the detail of the new Equality Act 2010 is clarified by government..

**RESOLVED:** That the information received be noted.

## **PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP - UPDATE:**

The Chairman of the Partnerships Task Group, Councillor Smedley, gave the Committee an update of their meeting where they reviewed the effectiveness of the Sports Across Staffordshire and Stoke-on Trent County Sports Partnership. It was reported that the partnership had a subscription fee of £10k. It was asked if this represented value for money and it was noted that the Task Group Members felt that it was, and that it would cost the District Council far more for supplying the same services on its own.

**RESOLVED:** That the information received be noted.

## **SERVICE PLANNING MEETING– PROCESS**

The Chairman, Councillor Smedley, advised the Committee of the procedure to look at the Service Plans. It was noted that the meeting date had moved to the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2010. Members were asked to indicate their preferred service area. It was noted that as with last year, the plans would be sent out before the meeting.

**RESOLVED:** That the information received be noted.

## **WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN**

Consideration was given to the Work Programme and Forward Plan. It was asked and confirmed that progress was being made with the proposed Skate Park.

**RESOLVED:** That the Forward Plan be noted and the Work Programme be noted.

**EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS:**

**RESOLVED:** “That as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, which would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972”

**IN PRIVATE**

**MINUTES OF STRATEGIC (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2010 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2010 be approved as a correct record.

(The Meeting finished at 8.20pm)

CHAIRMAN