

STRATEGIC (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

21 JUNE 2011

PRESENT:

Councillors Tittley (Chairman), Norman (Vice Chairman), Spruce (Vice Chairman), Mrs Arnold, Mrs Barnett, Isaacs, Pearce, Powell, D. S. Smith and Mrs Woodward.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received.

(In accordance with Council Procedure No.17 Councillors Cox, Greatorex, Mrs Flowith, Mrs Richards, Roberts, Mrs Stanhope and Wilcox also attended the Meeting)

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

There were no declarations of interest.

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

Prior to the start of Meeting the Strategic Director – Organisational Development gave Members a brief verbal presentation introducing them to the Committee.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Strategic (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee held on the 22 March 2011 were taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

As this was the first meeting of the Municipal Year Members received the Terms of Reference for the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Terms of Reference for the Committee be noted.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TOOLKIT

The Chairman introduced the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit to Members and copies of the Toolkit were tabled at the meeting. He commented that although the Toolkit was mechanistic in its approach it was a valuable guide for anyone who had not been involved with overview and scrutiny before and he asked that all Members read the document.

RESOLVED: That the content of the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit be noted.

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR 2010/11

Members scrutinised the District Council's performance against the Strategic Plan Action Plan 2010/11 by reviewing a number of Performance Reports contained within the Agenda.

It was noted that performance for key service areas was reported through service planning and performance monitoring reports, but in reviewing overall performance the focus was on how corporate priorities were being achieved as set out in the District Council's Strategic Plan 2008/12.

The annual one-year Action Plan transformed priority actions into tasks, which needed to be achieved in the current year. Members noted the out-turn of the actions that Cabinet identified as most important for the 2010/11 Strategic Action Plan.

Performance was monitored by the use of Performance Indicators and Members noted the content of Appendix B to the report, which detailed performance by Cabinet portfolio.

It was noted that the Corporate Risk Register was produced by assessing the risk factors that could potentially impact on the District Council's ability to deliver its Strategic Action Plan for 2011/12. This assessment ensured that we had measures in place to control the potential risks to our business objectives. Members noted the content of an update to the Corporate Risk Register.

Risks that currently had the highest overall scores and rated as "Severe" were set out in Appendix C to the report along with a brief description of the measures that were in place to prevent the risk from affecting our ability to deliver our plans. Members noted that quarterly reports, which monitor our approach to risk management, were taken to the Audit Committee to provide assurance that the processes for risk management were sound.

It was reported that 67% of Council Tax payments were made by direct debit and that there was a 98 1/4% collection rate for National Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates), which was the top quartile collection rate in the Country.

In respect of the Waste Transfer Station on page 5 of Appendix A to the report it was reported that the Planning Application for the original site had been withdrawn by the County Council in the face of a lack of local support for the scheme. Work to identify a suitable alternative site was in progress. Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Waste Task Group would keep Members updated regarding progress on this matter.

Mention was made of the Grant Aid Scheme outlined on Page 8 to Appendix A to the report and it was explained that Grant Aid was divided into two categories, small grants which are usually allocations of less than £1,000 and Service Level Agreements which are for much greater sums, up to £100k. It was noted that a Member Task Group had met during 2010, which had considered and updated the criteria for allocating small grants. However, the Community, Housing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has now established a Member Task Group to review the approach to funding voluntary and community sector organisations.

In respect of the heading Improve Health and Wellbeing on Page 14 to Appendix A to the report it was noted that the Aspire Project encouraged younger children to take part in activities and that projects in Mile Oak and Edingale had been particularly successful. It was noted that the Aspire Project was previously funded by the County Council via its Children's Fund and that it was focussed on the provision of Youth

Clubs in North Lichfield, Mile Oak, Edingale and Fazeley. It was noted that there was currently no target for the number of young people involved in this scheme and it was agreed that take-up figures for younger people who engage with the Aspire Project would be provided to Members and that when the Action Plan is updated for 2011/12 a target be set to encourage more young people to become involved with the Project.

It was noted that in respect of the heading Vibrant Towns and Villages on Page 15 to Appendix A to the report that there were numerous initiatives to enhance open spaces planned for all areas of the District.

Members noted that the outcome of the scrutiny of this Committee would be reported to the Operational Services, Leisure Parks and Play (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee on 22 June and to Cabinet on 28 June 2011.

RESOLVED: (1) That Members' comments be reported to Operational Services, Leisure Parks and Play (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee on 22 June and to Cabinet on 28 June 2011;

(2) That the format of the report was understandable and clear and that, at this stage no adjustments to further facilitate scrutiny in the future were necessary.

WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the Work Programme and Forward Plan. The Chairman proposed the creation of a Task Group and the updating of an existing one – the Equalities Task Group which was already in existence would be Chaired by Councillor Norman and the Budget Reduction Task Group would be created, Chaired by Councillor Spruce. Councillors Mrs Barnett, Isaacs, Pearce and Powell volunteered to serve on the Equalities Task Group and Councillors Mrs Arnold, Smith and Mrs Woodward volunteered to serve on the Budget Reduction Task Group.

In respect of the Forward Plan it was noted that, for some items, Column (4) 'Consultation' was either left blank or the word 'none' was entered. It was suggested that the wording on the draft Forward Plan be amended to require an entry in the column, and a brief explanation if no consultation had been undertaken.

Members commented that it would be helpful if Ward Members were alerted to upcoming issues in their areas and the Leader of the Council undertook to do this via his monthly Newsletter to Members. The Leader of the Council also agreed to deliver a 'State of the Union' style address to Members at their next Meeting on the position of the District Council.

RESOLVED: (1) That the content of the Forward Plan and Work Programme be noted.

(2) That an Equalities Task Group and a Budget Reduction Task Group be set up as described above;

(3) That Column (4) of the draft Forward Plan be amended to require a brief explanation if no consultation has been undertaken.

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 item 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

BUDGET REDUCTION PROGRAMME 2011 – WORK IN PROGRESS REPORT

Not for publication by virtue of Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

Members scrutinised the first set of proposals for reducing the District Council's net expenditure over the next three years. It was noted that a report had been submitted to the Committee in January 2011 setting out the need for a Budget Reduction Programme as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2011-14.

It was reported that savings of £1.385m had been taken out of the District Council's Budgets for three years from 2008/09 and £3.391m for three years from 2009/10. In 2010 the budget position was impacted by the recession and resulting loss of income and proposals for further savings of £3.254m were found and scrutinised by this Committee in January 2011.

The two year Provisional Settlement for 2011/12 and 2012/13 identified a severe cut in formula grant for this Council of £4.49m and at the Council meeting on 22 February 2011 it was reported that the District Council was facing a funding gap of £4.744m over a three year period, primarily as a result of the loss of Government Grant and other financial adjustments.

Accordingly the expenditure Review 2010 was ceased at the stage reached in December 2010 and focus has been placed on the Budget Reduction Programme to cover the gap identified within the 2011-14 Medium -Term Financial Forecast.

It was noted that savings were being delivered via a number of different approaches including:

- conventional efficiencies;
- collaborating or sharing services with others – including internal sharing;
- rationalisation to reduce administration costs;
- expansion of income;
- transfer of services or assets;
- the reduction of operational activity.

Members noted the Budget Reduction proposals at Appendix A to the report

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

CHAIRMAN

(The Meeting closed at 8.15 pm)