

STRATEGIC (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

26th NOVEMBER 2012

PRESENT:

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

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

Councillor Strachan also attended the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Apologies were received from Councillor Wilson

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

No declarations of interest were made.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th August 2012 were taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED: The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th August 2012 be approved as a correct record.

RETIREMENT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE – MS NINA DAWES OBE

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman presented the Chief Executive, Ms Nina Dawes OBE, a bouquet of flowers, as it was her last Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting before her retirement. He thanked her for all the work and guidance she had given the Committee and wished her all the best in the future.

HALF YEAR REPORT ON TREASURY MANAGEMENT SERVICES AND PROJECTED PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2012/13

The Committee received a report covering the Treasury activity and actual Prudential Indicators for 2012/13. 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 reported that there had not been movement in interest rates and therefore it was projected that the District Council receive £95k in net investment. It was also reported that there had been no external borrowing undertaken.

It was reported that the District Council was compliant with its approved Prudential Indicators however it was also reported that a contribution of £1.9m towards the Friary Outer Development was due and it was expected to be funded by the receipt of £2.3m from the Friarsgate Development however that development had not proceeded as planned and the sum would not be expected in 2012/13. The Leader of the Council reassured the Committee that although there were no sufficient capital resources to fund the contribution, work was being carried out to find the best solution.

It was also reported that in June 2012 there was a wide scale banking problem of a technological nature affecting a number of banks, including NatWest and RBS, and due to this, Moody's credit reference agency downgraded the credit rating of an institution where the Council had money invested. The computer problems meant that the invested funds could not be withdrawn and therefore breached the District Council's approved treasury management strategy. It was noted that this only lasted one working day and the money was quickly reinvested elsewhere.

The Committee asked what the impact would be if external borrowing was required to fund the contribution for the Friary Outer development and it was reported that although the rates were currently good, no decision had been made and a report would be brought back to the Committee as soon as possible. It was agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairmen be consulted with as soon as possible.

The Committee then asked that in light of the banking problems, if the District Council should consider changing the institutions it used and it was reported that Officers were monitoring the banks but were also confident in the independent assurances received.

The Committee asked how the Chasewater Dam liability, which would be shared with Staffordshire County Council, would be funded and it was noted that the exact amount was unknown and negotiations were ongoing.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

HALF YEAR REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2012/13

The Committee received a report on the District Council's financial performance to 30th September 2012. It was reported that the Budget Reduction Programme 2011 had identified savings totaling £4.456m. It was also reported that a total of £972k had been estimated from reserves to support services for the financial year but this still left reserves of £2.10m including the required minimum of £1m. It was then reported that the District Council was waiting for the settlement grant amount from the Government as this would indicate what further savings were required.

It was asked if the changes in Planning regulations and the lesser requirements for planning applications had contributed to loss in income and it was reported that it had not been directly investigated but had possibly been a factor.

The Committee asked for an update of the local MP's involvement after requesting their help to become a special case. It was reported that this would be looked into and reported back.

The Committee asked if sinking funds for the Leisure Centre had been reviewed and were adequate. It was reported that in the medium term the funds would become low as it was now being used for maintenance. It was asked if there was a formula and it was reported that the fund was invested in for a number of years and then opened for withdrawals.

The Committee then asked if there was a strategy for car parking over the Christmas period and it was reported that there would be a promotion for the Christmas lights event and a competition to have one car park fee refunded to the driver each day in December.

It was noted that the Localisation of Council Tax would have an impact on residents and it was reminded that there would be a Members Briefing on the subject. It was requested that a briefing paper be sent to the Members that could not attend and this was agreed.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

ONE YEAR ACTION PLAN - MID YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT 12/13

The Committee received a report giving an update on progress achieved against activities and projects set out in the District Council's 2012/13 One Year Action Plan. It was reported that there were no longer KPI's and no compulsory targets. It was also reported that the report now had comparative data where available as requested by Members.

The Committee commented on the new layout of the report and considered it to be easy to understand and with more detail. The Committee did request that there be links and signposts to background papers where available on activities to aid research.

The Committee then considered the Half Year Performance Overview document in detail.

The Committee asked if details for repeat victims were available and it was reported that it was difficult to define repeat victim and an example of how long to wait between crimes was given.

The Committee asked if all Members would be involved in potential Asset Transfers and it was reported that sales of land were discussed with Ward Members and also the Asset Strategy Group had further details.

The Committee asked why the Sustainable Travel Plan had not been started and it was reported that it was an employee plan and had not begun due to reduced resources.

The Committee then asked if the priority for recycling was to maintain or improve the service and it was reported and agreed by Members that the priority should be residual waste and a new target that would monitored this. It was asked if the cycle of black bins could be investigated and it was reported that the need for collecting nappies needed to be considered and would be difficult to leave for more that two weeks. It was noted that it was expensive to recycle nappies.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the Work Programme and Forward Plan.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan be noted and the Work Programme be noted and amended as necessary.

(The Meeting finished at 7.30pm)

CHAIRMAN