

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

**7<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2013**

### **PRESENT:**

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

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Wilson.

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2012 were taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**RESOLVED:** The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2012 be approved as a correct record.

### **EIGHT MONTH REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE AGAINST FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2012-13**

The Committee received a report on the District Council's performance up to the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012 with focus on the higher risk services. It was reported that there had been a reduction in income but no significant change in expenditure. It was also reported that there would be a further £198k contribution from General Reserves on top of what was budgeted.

Members asked what the funding agreements was between the District Council and the Garrick Theatre Trust and it was reported that there was a three year agreement in the region of £665k in the first year, 610k in the second year and reviewed in the third year. Members asked if it was safe to remain banking with the reported institutions and it was reported that the District Council received independent Treasury Management advice on a daily basis and invested accordingly.

Members sought clarification on the required amount of Reserves needed and it was noted that policy stated that a minimum of £1m was required although higher would be strived for.

Members asked if the shortfall in car parking income could be reduced if the charges were reduced, encouraging more people to visit and it was reported that it had not been tried however it was suspected that it would not persuade more people to park. It was hoped however that car parking would rise with the opening of Debenhams. Members also asked if the rent of units in the Three Spires shopping centre could be reduced to encourage occupancy and it was reported that the District Council did not control that shopping centre but all vacant units in Bore Street, which was owned by the District Council, had been let.

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

## **THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (REVENUE & CAPITAL) 2013-16 (MTFS (R&C) 2013-16)**

The Committee received a report on the District Council's three year Medium Term Financial Strategy (Revenue & Capital) 2013-16. It was reported that there had been a cumulative reduction of £1.939m in Government funding over three years. It was also reported that Council would be recommended to increase Council Tax by 1.8% which would equate to a 5p a week increase for an average property. It was then reported that the reduction in Government funding and grants, there would be a total funding gap of £3.664m over the three year period.

Members asked how the estimate of 1.1% for non collection of Council Tax was created and it was reported that it was difficult to predict the amount of non-payment as it was a new Council Tax scheme however it was based on advice of the Revenues department and the estimates of other Local Authorities. Members also asked if the 1.1% non collection rate was realistic as many people who had not needed to pay previously may not know they need to pay Council Tax or not be inclined to do so or vulnerable people who do not understand. It was reported that the collection rate in the District was usually high and a lot of communications would be sent out to make it clear that Council Tax bills would need paying.

Members asked why in the Capital Programme, expenditure was high in Information Technology and it was reported that there were many internal systems that needed maintaining and upgrading license purchasing.

Members asked if there was an end date for the Venture regeneration project and it was reported that some schemes including Friarsgate was still ongoing but an exit strategy was being devised.

Members asked how the New Homes Bonus was estimated and it was reported that the Finance and Planning departments would look at the likely new home developments that would occur and calculate from there. It was noted that the estimate was a prudent one.

The Committee had some concern that Disabled Facilities Grants would reduce but it was noted that all budgets had been looked at for reductions.

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

## **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REPORT 2013-16**

The Committee received a report on the District Council's Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators. It was noted that the introduction of charges to make payments by credit cards was in the departmental Service Plan.

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

## **2013/14 ACTION PLAN TO ACHIEVE THE PLAN FOR LICHFIELD DISTRICT 2012-16**

The Committee received a report on the draft Action Plan for 2013/14 and how the outcomes in the Plan for the District 2012-2016 would be progressed during the next financial year.

It was reported that the Action Plan was for the second year of the Plan for Lichfield District and it was noted that due to financial challenges, would be reviewed and where appropriate, revised in the autumn.

It was reported that the layout of the Action Plan followed the same themes and the Plan for Lichfield District and also included which Overview & Scrutiny Committee was relevant to each activity listed.

The Committee then looked at the activities in the Action Plan in more detail. Members asked if there would be comparisons in the performance of the Service Level Agreements (SLA) of voluntary organisations against previous years as funding had been cut. It was noted that performance monitoring and more focused SLA's would help ensure value for money for users of the organisations. It was noted that funding of voluntary organisations were considered by a Task Group of the Community, Housing and Health (Overview & Scrutiny) Committee.

The Committee requested assurances that there would be no complacency with help to get unemployed back into work as this should be high priority due to changes in the benefit system.

Members asked what plans were in place to deal with the forthcoming bedroom tax and the impact of universal credit as the risk of arrears and homelessness needed to be minimal. It was reported that communication would be key and Bromford Housing had some resources to help residents understand changes. The Committee asked if there were enough smaller properties available to allow for people to move to smaller homes and it was reported that the data on housing stock and affected residents was available from Registered Social Landlords but it was not easy to say that all those affected could move as some may be vulnerable and need to remain by neighbours and other support networks.

An update was requested on the move of the Police to the District Council Offices and it was reported that the Police still wanted a public facing presence in the City Centre and so the move was still planned. When asked it was also noted that the leasing of Venture House was still on target.

The Committee asked if affordable sports provision was to be affordable to the tax payer for service user and it was reported that facilities should be available for everyone but needed to remain at a competitive price compared to privately run centres.

It was reported that in future, the Action Plan reports would be split into areas and considered by the relevant service Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Members agreed to this.

**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 7.50pm)

CHAIRMAN

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

**10<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2013**

### **PRESENT:**

Councillors, Eadie (Chairman) Norman (Vice-Chairman) Thomas (Vice-Chairman) Mrs Arnold, Mrs Barnett, Derrick, Isaacs, Powell, D. S. Smith, and Wilson.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillor Mrs Stanhope, attended the meeting)

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs Woodward.

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **DRAFT INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL REPORT**

The Committee received a draft report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) outlining their recommendation for Councillors Allowances for 2013-2014.

Members asked what the procedure was for appointing people onto the IRP and it was reported that it included an advert in the local press then a formal interview where the applicant's knowledge of local authorities and any possible conflict of interests can be discovered. It was noted that although the IRP Members were not known by all the Councillors, the Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition had met with them on numerous occasions.

The Committee then considered the IRP's draft report by section.

Members asked why legislation from both 2003 and 2010 was given consideration by the IRP and it was reported that both were still in force.

Members felt the term 'ensuring value for money to the Council Tax Payer' was too general and not easy to measure. It was suggested that during the current Boundary Commission review, Members would be filling in detailed questionnaires giving an indication of the true amount of work, including Ward dealings, which could be passed to the IRP with the Members consent.

The Committee felt that although the IRP receive attendance figures, the data did not take into account the reasons for absences, for example ill health. Members also felt that attendance at meetings did not reflect the input Members had at meetings although it was noted that the quality of a Councillor's work would be judged by the electorate. It was discussed if a 'pay per meeting' system could be used and it was noted that this would not recompense for Ward work carried out by Councillors.

Members felt there was evidence, including Government Select Committee reports, to show that it was difficult to retain Councillors and attract from diverse backgrounds. Some Members also felt that the allowance scheme did not take into account the loss of income for working Councillors especially with the rise in cost of living. The Committee did note however that there were not a high number of by-elections in the District. It was also noted that many Members did not know they would be in receipt of an allowance until after their election.

Members did not agree with the IRP proposal for the Council to retain unspent Technology Fund instead of being paid to Members as currently arranged. The Committee expressed the view that this unspent money was used by Members for maintenance on machines and towards upgrades of hardware and software. It was noted that much IT work carried out by Councillors was for Ward enquires and that this would be more costly if done in-house.

Members asked why only two Vice-Chairmen positions received a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) and not others and requested that a review take place. Members also felt that the SRA for the Chairman of the Lichfield District Arts Partnership should be deleted as it was now more a networking group instead of a Committee.

Members asked what the cost of the IRP was and it was reported that IRP Members could claim an allowance of £250 however, for a number of years this had not been taken. It was also reported that some Officer time was involved but the IRP tried to keep this to a minimum. The Committee noted that an IRP was a statutory requirement.

The Committee thanked the IRP for their work to date.

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

(The Meeting finished at 7.15pm)

CHAIRMAN