

STRATEGIC (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

20th June 2013

PRESENT:

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

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Arnold, Constable and Isaacs.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

No declarations of interest were made.

MINUTES

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor Derrick as present at the 7th February 2013 meeting, the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 7th February 2013 and the 10th April 2013 were taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED: The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 7th February 2013 and the 10th April 2013 be approved as a correct record subject to the amendment as listed.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

As it was the first meeting of the municipal year, the Members received the Terms of Reference for the Committee.

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

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OF ONE YEAR ACTION PLANS

The Committee received a report on the performance outturn of the Services within the remit of Strategic (Overview & Scrutiny) Committee against the District Council's One Year Action Plan 2012/13. It was reported that it was agreed by the Overview & Scrutiny Coordinating Group that performance monitoring reports would be produced to their remit.

Members asked if the outcomes of the Plan for Lichfield District would be reviewed as they could have changed once the Fit for the Future budget reduction project had been completed and it was reported that they would be.

Members asked if the Localisation of Council Tax and how it had been administrated would be reviewed and it was reported that the Committee would receive a report after the first year of coming into effect.

Members asked if dialogue had started with partners to secure a display of part of the Staffordshire Hoard and if this included Parish Councils and it was reported that there had not been active discussions as yet. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure, Tourism and Communications reported that there was a Cathedral Summit organised about the Staffordshire Hoard and Mercian Trail and that it was a priority to ensure all Parishes in Staffordshire would be able to have a temporary display.

Members asked for an update on the Friarsgate project and it was reported that meetings were planned but there was no new information currently to be reported.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

FIT FOR THE FUTURE – PHASE ONE PROPOSALS AND OUTLINE PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report on the proposals to meet the budget reduction for 2014/15 along with outlining the Fit for the Future Programme and the governance structures for the programme.

It was reported that there was a deficit of £1.7m in the budget for 2014/15 and a further £300k shortfall forecast for 2015/16. It was also reported that Phase 1 of the Fit for the Future programme was to meet the immediate financial challenges with the later Phase 2 comprising of a series of service reviews that would be considered by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Members noted that services would be reviewed regardless of whether it was mandatory or not as different ways of delivery could be an option.

Members noted that some of the loss of income had been due to the recession and lower interest rates on investments and lower ground rent collection due to closing businesses.

Members noted that Officers had given suggestions for efficiencies and congratulated staff on the amount and usefulness of the ideas. The Committee were pleased to note that no suggestion had been dismissed and would be investigated but did feel that the exercise could have been carried out some time ago with the savings already in place.

Members asked if the added value of the Garrick Theatre to the community and economy could be investigated and if it was as currently thought as there may be other services that actually added more value. Members also asked why there were no further reductions in subsidy planned after 2016 and it was reported that there would be a review of the contract at that point with new levels of subsidy negotiated.

Members asked if the policy whether to charge for overnight parking and to charge blue badge holders to park could be investigated and it was noted that a full parking review was currently underway.

Members felt that more income could be raised if the services were marketed more effectively especially for off peak leisure facilities and room hire at the Old Mining College.

The Committee then considered the Phase 1 service reviews in more detail and made the following points:

Members felt that prevention of anti social behaviour (ASB) and other issues were key and the effect of stopping the Community Development service in 10-20 years needed to be considered. It was felt Partners should be engaged at the earliest opportunity and more discussions with them should happen before a Cabinet decision.

Members felt that marketing of the Old Mining College facility should be considered and a complete closure should never be an option due to its importance in the community. Members suggested that a Task Group look at options further including external management.

Some Members reported that they received the most representations on the Community Transport service and closure would impact on 77 different groups of people and was considered vital by many. It was noted that there would be some disabled and vulnerable users who would not be able to use taxis as an alternative. The savings suggested in cessation were noted by Members but as the service usually exceeds its target income, it was requested this service be re-evaluated.

The need to charge for the use of public conveniences was accepted but a 20p charge was considered to be a high jump from nothing. Not all conveniences are positioned at tourist destinations so it was requested that a variable charging option be considered. Charging would also potentially lower ASB in conveniences and associated costs of dealing with it e.g. graffiti.

Members accepted the need to charge for the Shopmobility service but were concerned the requirement to register beforehand would put off people visiting the area.

Members felt that rural areas would suffer the most if the mobile leisure service was run from Leisure Centres. Members requested an investigation as to whether Parish Councils could fund further.

Members were concerned that stopping the Positive Futures Programme would cause more cost in the future from dealing with ASB and other problems.

Members requested that joint use contracts for two of the leisure centres be reviewed as soon as possible and the Committee welcomed an early review of fees and charges but understood the need to remain competitive.

The Committee was informed that there was still a commitment to climate change even without a dedicated budget. Members requested that the District Council's own energy efficiencies and costs be investigated and noted all aspects would be in the Asset Management Review. Members requested information as to whether the one off reserve of £37,070 was earmarked for anything.

The Committee accepted that the savings from CCTV would be from a new contract and there would be no change to the level of service.

The Committee felt that regarding Research and Consultation, Members and the emerging Neighbourhood Plans could be used more to gain the views of residents. Members felt some expertise was needed to ensure some focus of the mass of information gathered and equal opportunities for communicating is observed. Request it is investigated how service could be delivered differently.

Members had concerns regarding the equality implications of emailing the Council Tax leaflet to residents next year as many are elderly and it was noted that paper versions would be available on request. It was noted that it was a county wide initiative. Members requested that this matter be considered further at a later date.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted and the points raised be considered by the Cabinet

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 8.20pm)

CHAIRMAN