

**REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF STRATEGIC (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE**

**PRESENT:**

Councillors Strachan (Chairman) Tittley (Vice-Chairman) Mrs Barnett, Constable, Drinkwater, Miss Hassall, Marshall, Powell, White, and Mrs Woodward.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors Eadie, Fisher, Greatorex, Pritchard, Pullen, Smith and Wilcox attended the meeting)

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were received from Councillors Bamborough, Humphreys and Matthews.

At the meeting of the Strategic (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee held on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2015 the following matters were considered:

<b>1</b>	<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>
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- 1.1 Members were reminded of the Terms of Reference for the Strategic (Overview & Scrutiny) Committee.

<b>2</b>	<b>END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW 2014/15 FOR THE FINANCE, REVENUES &amp; BENEFITS AND DEMOCRATIC &amp; LEGAL DIRECTORATES</b>
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- 2.1 The Committee received a report on the progress against the relevant activities and projects set out in the District Council's One Year Action Plan for 14/15. Targets for proposed activity and performance indicators for 2015/16 were also reported.
- 2.2 Members asked why a minimum target for enforcement notices had been set as it could imply that enforcement activity could stop when that target was met. Officers reported that it did not mean that a minimum target encouraged no more activity to take place after the target had been met. It was then asked if the level of enforcement action potentially showed an issue with not communicating Planning Law to residents effectively, however it was explained that enforcement notices were only used as a last resort after all other avenues to resolve the problems had been exhausted. It did not point to a lack of communication on planning requirements. The Committee suggested that a range in the number of notices to be issued could be a target instead of a fixed minimum number taking into account benchmarking against other authorities. It was noted that in the future, targets would be more focused on quality and not quantity.
- 2.3 Members noted that there had been 35 Section 106 agreements completed and that this rise was due to the economic market picking up.
- 2.4 Members asked how savings from Civic Expenses had been achieved and it was reported that it was due to a number of factors. It was reported and noted that figures could be misleading as it is based on the municipal calendar which overlaps the financial year. It was hoped however that there may be capacity to offer permanent savings.
- 2.5 When asked, it was noted that currently there were less than 1.5% of the population not on the electoral register.

2.6 The report and comments made were noted.

### **3 COMBINED AUTHORITIES**

- 3.1 The Committee received an urgent update on Combined Authorities (CA) and the options and risks to Lichfield District Council. It was reported that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Wilcox, had been invited to a meeting with the Chancellor and the Department for Communities and Local Government along with the Leaders of the seven Metropolitan Councils for Birmingham and the Black Country along with Solihull and Coventry to discuss emerging proposals for devolution into a CA. It was noted that Lichfield District Council was the only District Council to be invited to the meeting and the purpose was to hear the discussions and remain informed but not to take part as such. Members noted that unfortunately, after the meeting, a press release was circulated that made the assumption that Lichfield District Council had signed up to a CA with the other Metropolitan Councils even though this was not the case. Members also noted that the Leader of the Council did challenge this press release and a corrected one was issued but not used.
- 3.2 It was reported that work had also been taking place between the 10 Staffordshire Councils as to what devolution options for the county could be. It was noted that it had been made clear to the Staffordshire Councils that contrary to the initial press release, Lichfield District Council had not committed to a CA with the Met Councils. It was reported that no decisions would be made regarding any CA until further information was received. Members noted the Leader's assurance that a correct process would be a full Council decision.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive reported that there was currently a lack of clarity regarding the link between CAs and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) and as the Council was a member of two LEPs for very valid reasons, assessing the benefits of potential CA's was vital. It was also reported that currently District Councils could not be a member of a CA but legislation was in the process of being changed which may alter this.
- 3.4 The Committee welcomed the item and the opportunity to discuss initial thoughts. Members felt that Government funding would drive the need and agenda for CA.
- 3.5 Members then discussed their preferences as to potentially joining a CA and it was agreed that the geography of Lichfield led to blurred boundaries with both Staffordshire and the West Midlands. Councillor White expressed the view that Birmingham would grow regardless of Lichfield's involvement and could exhaust Lichfield's resources but not give any benefits to residents. Members also felt that residents desired to remain as part of Staffordshire and that Staffordshire Councils should consider how they could work more effectively together as soon as possible as there was a risk of them being absorbed into other areas.
- 3.6 The Committee noted that meetings were taking place with the GBSLEP and separately with Staffordshire Councils to discuss the matter. It was agreed that due to the speed that the subject was moving forward, the Chairman and Councillors Tittley and Mrs Woodward be initial contacts for the Leader and Chief Executive to forward information on if required and a further report be brought to the Committee in September or as necessary.
- 3.7 The information received was noted.

## **4 FIT FOR THE FUTURE (F4F) PROGRAMME**

- 4.1 The Committee received a report on the progress to date of the Fit for the Future (F4F) Programme, the Council's transformation programme. The Committee noted planned next steps including the programme of reviews and projects, and the proposed changes to the programme governance arrangements. It was reported that the F4F programme had delivered significant financial savings of £1.815m to date, and has helped to put the Council on a sounder financial footing in the short term. However, given the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015-18 projects an £818,190 funding gap by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017, there is need to continue with the F4F programme as a means of identifying further savings and cost reduction.
- 4.2 It was reported that whilst Phase 1 and 2 of the Programme had focussed heavily on efficiency savings, the next phase would need to focus more on reforming and modernising the Council, to enable it operate more productively and corporately, and able to deliver its strategic priorities and outcomes with a smaller budget.
- 4.3 A key project within this phase would be the 'Creating a Corporate Council' Project designed to address some of the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge in September 2014, including the need to strengthen the corporate culture and ethos of the organisation so it operates in a more consistent manner based on clear values and good governance. The Committee were welcomed the opportunity to comment on the Project Initiation Document (PID) and agreed that the review of the Overview & Scrutiny function would lead to more effective member involvement in policy development. Members also felt that the project would help to bring a change in culture at the Authority and that refreshed codes of conduct and training for Officers and Members would help embed this change.
- 4.4 Members reinforced the importance of F4F service reviews linking to the Strategic Plan to ensure that services critical to delivering strategic priorities and outcomes are not cut. It was reported that this is being taken into account. It was suggested that the Council could still have a long term vision and be able to consider how priorities and outcomes might be delivered in a different and more efficient way.
- 4.5 Members accepted that the Top 10 approach was more manageable but felt it needed to be ensured it was strategy led not opportunity led. Members also sought reassurance that the Cabinet Member for Finance, Democratic and Legal was confident in delivering the high number of priorities and it was reported that he was confident as he had been involved in the development of the plan and had confidence in the Directors and staff.
- 4.6 The following was agreed
- (1) That the progress and continuation of the F4F Programme to date be noted including contribution it has made to identifying and implementing significant financial savings; and
  - (2) That further development of the F4F Programme and the schedule of further reviews – including the 'Creating a Corporate Council project - and proposed changes to the programme governance arrangements be noted.

## **5 RESPONDING TO THE LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE**

- 5.1 The Committee received a report updating them on how the Council was using the feedback from the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge in September 2014. The Committee were reminded that they had considered the formal feedback letter that followed the Peer Challenge at their meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2014.

- 5.2 It was reported that since then the Peer Challenge feedback had been considered in depth and work had begun to address several of the key recommendations, including those relating to the Strategic Plan, F4F Programme and a review of the Overview & Scrutiny function. In terms of the latter, discussion was already underway, informed by recent training by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. This had reinforced the importance of the role of the Chairman and suggested triangulation meetings with Cabinet Members be introduced to discuss what items would be coming forward in the future as this would help allow Committees to be only considering significant items and not necessarily every item.
- 5.3 Members requested that there be more training with the inclusion of practical tools to help Members conduct effective scrutiny including questioning skills. It was noted that Overview & Scrutiny should not be adversarial.
- 5.4 The action taken and planned was noted.

## **6 STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-20**

- 6.1 Consideration was given to a report on proposals to develop the District Council's next Strategic Plan. It was reported that the Council produced a Strategic Plan every four years to coincide with the electoral cycle and also takes account of the plans and priorities of partner organisations to secure the maximum value for money for residents.
- 6.2 The Committee welcomed the report and expressed a wish for "buzz words" and jargon to be avoided. Members also felt that any vision should be distinctive to Lichfield District and not sound like it could apply to any other Local Authority. Members felt that it could be useful to produce a stripped down version of the new Strategic Plan (a Plan on a Page) which would be easier for people to digest. It was then suggested that a small A5 leaflet on the plan and what so far had been achieved could be included in the council tax bills members were reminded that Council Tax leaflets used to be sent with Council Tax bills but this was stopped in 2013. Information was available online.
- 6.3 The Committee noted that this Strategic Plan would have a long term vision as suggested by the Peer Challenge feedback and also incorporate the day to day work of the Council to allow Officers to relate to it more and mitigate the risk of staff not feeling the Plan is relevant to them.
- 6.4 Members asked how the Plan would be implemented and it was noted that it would be through Annual Action Plans, Service Plans and Performance and Development Reviews for staff.
- 6.5 The proposed approach to the Council's next Corporate Plan was noted.

## **7 ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHAIRMAN'S CAR**

- 7.1 The Committee received a report on the current lease arrangements for the Chairman's Car which was due to expire in March 2015. It was reported that due to the elections, the lease was temporarily extended in order to enable the new Council to take a decision on the arrangements for transport of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for this term of office.
- 7.2 The Committee noted that although the Council was required to have a Chairman to conduct the business of the Full Council, this report could be a springboard to consider the Civic function as a whole and it was agreed to set up a Member Task Group to do so.

- 7.3 The Committee commented that the budget for the Civic function was £50k and so it should be investigated whether the role in its current format gave any community value for the District. Some Members felt the Civic role was a costly tradition however others expressed a view that the role brought the Council closer to the community.
- 7.4 Members then discussed options for transport and it was felt that there was currently not enough information to make a recommendation including how many miles were covered in the vehicle and what other Authorities did. Members noted that the Task Group could consider other options for transport. The Committee agreed for the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive to make an interim decision to extend the current arrangements until the Task Group had concluded its work.
- 7.5 It was agreed that a Member Task Group comprising of Councillors Miss Hassel, Powell, Tittley and Mrs Woodward be created to investigate the Civic function and options for transport of the Chairman.

## **8 FORWARD PLAN AND WORK PROGRAMME**

- 8.1 Consideration was given to the Forward Plan and Work Programme. It was noted that the use of triangulation meetings between the Chairman and Cabinet Members would help inform the work programme. The Chairman agreed to consider adding a review of how the locality commissioning board operates once the triangulation meetings had taken place

R. Strachan  
Chairman  
Strategic (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee