

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 JULY 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors Norman (Chair), Ball, Evans, Hill, Ho, Ray, Woodward and B Yeates

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Leung (Vice-Chair), Checkland, Robertson, Trent, and Warfield.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Simon Fletcher (Chief Executive) declared an interest in item 7 as a director of LWMTS.

12 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Subject to the comments suggested at the July 2024 Full Council, the minutes of the previous meeting, held on the 6th June 2024, were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

13 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN SCRUTINY

The Chair presented his report to the committee. It was agreed that it would be healthy for members of the public to know that they can have an influence on scrutiny at the council. The invitation of members of the public to participate as members and/or witnesses at recent task & finish groups was highlighted as a good example of this involvement.

- *Members asked who would choose which members of the public would be invited to participate in the meeting/task groups.*

The Chair suggested this would be decided by the committee or task group Chairs.

A request was made for a link on the new website that would allow members of the public to submit proposed topics to members for scrutiny.

Members talked about the benefits of having groups such as bus operators involved within the scrutiny process too when transport matters are being scrutinised.

14 SCOPING FOR THE NEW HEALTH TASK GROUP

Members outlined the rationale for a local health priorities forum to tackle specific health issues as they arise. Members believed the Vice-Chair was doing an excellent job representing the districts views but believed local people required a clear way to influence county council. Members suggested the task group could convene on a one-off basis when a local issue requires, rather than being a standing committee with regular meetings. It was confirmed that there were no current issues arising that warranted the convening of such a task group.

The Chair agreed to look at the terms of reference with the Principal Governance Officer.

15 VERBAL DEBRIEF ON THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTION

Christine Lewis (Elections & Democratic Manager – Deputy Acting Returning Officer) gave a verbal update to the committee. It was highlighted that the planning for the general election was completed within five weeks whilst the preparation time for a regular pre-planned election such as Local Elections or Police Fire & Crime Commissioner Elections, would have a lead in time of multiple months.

The timetable for the election was presented to members, including the deadlines for candidate briefings, nominations, voter registration, postal vote applications. It was noted that a number of these dates are set in statutory legislation and cannot be moved, further adding to the logistical pressures to organise during a short campaign.

It was clarified that the council does not produce its postal votes internally but instead utilises nationally approved printers alongside other local authorities. The scanning of postal votes has been brought in-house with the last two elections, which has produced greater efficiencies as well as increasing the transparency of the process.

Royal Mail were praised for the establishment of their central helpline to aid resolving issues with postal vote deliveries.

The dedication of those employed to work on elections was highly praised as well as; the clear steer from Leadership Team that this represented the top corporate priority for the council; the introduction of Modern Polling tablets; and the work of Elections Officer Jenny Whitford. Simon Fletcher (Chief Executive – Acting Returning Officer) praised the work of both LDC and LWMTS staff in supporting this election. Members of the committee fully agreed that the way that staff members were willing to be drafted in to ensure the election responsibilities could be done in the short time available to them was a tribute to the new way of working at the Council.

No concerns were reported regarding voter ID and no ballot papers were refused.

- *Members asked whether the government covers the entirety of the election budget.*
Mrs Lewis stated that there was guidance on what the authority could pay staff, which was discussed with other local authorities. It was confirmed LDC is within the approved bands of what can be claimed from the electoral claim unit.
- *Members asked about the details included on poll cards.*
It was confirmed this is set by statutory legislation.
- *Members asked about the registration of voters residing in care homes and how they can access postal votes.*
Mrs Lewis confirmed this would represent a “route 3” property and the authority could include information on this to those residences during the upcoming canvas process. Members agreed and suggested information on proxy votes could be useful.

Members highlighted a lack of understanding about proxy votes and suggested education could be useful on a national basis.

16 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFG): YEAR ONE REVIEW

Lizzie Barton (Director for Resident & Business Services) presented the report to the committee. James Knott (DFG Service Delivery Manager) outlined that the council took on a failing service that required significant work, effectively from a standing start. Millbrook Healthcare provided this service until April 2023, at which point it was brought in-house and placed within the trading company LWMTS. The work done has been considered a success, with increasing levels of the caseloads receiving approved grants in a streamlined system. Mr

Knott stated Lichfield was leading the way amongst authorities that have brought this service in-house.

- *Members asked about the searchlight system.*
Mr Knott confirmed this system can be used to establish an individual's eligibility for a grant.
- *Members asked how long the waiting list was for applications.*
Mr Knott stated he believed this tended to be a matter of days on average, in his experience.
- *Members asked if there had been any complaints with the system*
Mr Knott confirmed only one formal complaint had been received during the establishment of the service, relating to the performance of an individual contractor.
- *Members asked if there had been any problems with contractors.*
Mr Knott confirmed that greater control of the contractors was quickly identified as an area needing focus. A framework has now been set up in LWMTS to properly vet and approve contractors.
- *Members asked what requests were received from non-elderly people requiring adaptations to their properties.*
Mr Knott confirmed cases were received from across all age ranges, though he felt more could be done to promote the support provided by the service to those individuals in need of assistance.
- *Members asked if there was cooperation achieved from other housing associations besides Bromford.*
Mr Knott confirmed that the service supports work from Bromford and charging the equivalent fee that Bromford would have taken on board.
- *Members asked if there were other local authorities or housing associations that were being looked at as potential partners.*
It was confirmed this was the case. Partnering the process the council has, with the framework that it has developed, could be very beneficial in this regard. Bringing in smaller local contractors and diversifying the assessment provider were identified as ways of further improving the service and creating efficiencies.
- *Members asked about the risk on the searchlight system mentioned in the report.*
Lizzie Barton noted this was down to the behaviour of an individual officer who had looked up their own details. Additional safeguards around the token system and level of training required have been introduced since.

RESOLVED: Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the performance of LWMTS to date and comments on the future direction of travel/priorities.

17 UPDATE ON CLIMATE EMERGENCY FROM THE CABINET MEMBER

The Chair thanked the Cabinet member for accepting the invitation to the meeting and asked her to update members on the progress of the Action Plan and the Carbon Reduction Plan.

The Cabinet Member (Cllr Janice Silvester-Hall) confirmed she is taking opportunity to reflect on how prior decisions have been made. The Carbon Dashboard, Carbon Reduction Plan, LDC estate, EV charging, Biodiversity, Fleet Procurement and Recycling were all areas of focus highlighted by the Cabinet member. The end of November 2024 was highlighted as the

target date for the Carbon Dashboard. Whilst March 2025 was confirmed as the projected deadline for the collection of publication of 2024 data.

In addition to the list of works outlined to the committee, the Cabinet Member confirmed she has also met with officers, local experts, and her Shadow Cabinet member.

- *Members asked if the refurbishment works at Burntwood Leisure Centre had been completed.*
It was confirmed that some works were still to be completed.
- *Members asked if the council would undertake a Fleet Procurement for vehicles that could utilise HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) fuel.*
It was confirmed this option was being looked at. The Chief Executive confirmed that all the vehicles being proposed for procurement at Cabinet next week would be capable of using that kind of fuel.
- *Members asked for information about the climate summit*
It was confirmed this was still planned for next year, but the cabinet member also intends to reach out to local groups who may support with this.

The Chair suggested that the Cabinet Member might find the recent report from the independent Climate Change Committee's Progress Report to Parliament very useful.

18 HEALTH MATTERS

The Chair confirmed he attended the meeting of the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Staffordshire County Council on the 17th of July substituting for the Vice-Chair. He raised questions about the deficit, ambulance response times and finance. He had circulated the draft minutes of that meeting to members and said that he was able to attend the next meeting on the 29th of July.

Members stated that if there has been reconsideration of how Better Care Funds are distributed, that would require scrutiny from across the county.

19 WORK PROGRAMME

Members believed there was a role for O&S to oversee some of the decisions and risks taken by the trading company LWMTS. It was suggested this could be done via scrutiny of the business plan or annual accounts. The position of shareholder representative Cllr Andy Smith was highlighted as a key individual to provide assurance to the committee. It was agreed this could come to the October O&S meeting.

Members asked when the briefing paper on the Community Safety Partnership would be ready for the committee and were told that there would be a report provided for the next O&S meeting due to take place in October.

(The Meeting closed at 8.10 pm)

CHAIRMAN