

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 NOVEMBER 2021

PRESENT:

Councillors Leytham (Chair), Norman (Vice-Chair), Eagland, Grange, Robertson, Silvester-Hall, Mrs Tranter and Warburton.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors Cox and Strachan attended the meeting).

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors A. Little, Powell, Parton-Hughes, M. Wilcox and Evans.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

17 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated. It was asked if there had been a response to the query regarding events outside the city area and it was agreed to get this to the Committee as soon as available.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be signed as a correct record.

18 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)

The Committee received a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) updating forecasts from those provided at the meeting in September 2021 and outlining the further developed approach to closing the projected funding gap in the revenue budget.

It was reported that there had been a Spending Review on 27 October 2021 following the last Overview & Scrutiny Committee however no detail had been released as yet on the implications for individual local authorities. It was confirmed that the individual local authority details would be provided in the Provisional Local Government Finance settlement that was expected in December 2021 however the exact date was unknown at this stage.

It was reported that as many options as possible were still open with the views of Members and residents welcomed. This was especially the case regarding Council Tax and it was the Cabinet Member's aspiration to keep any increase as low as possible. In context however, it was noted that the rate of inflation had increased significantly combined with increases in the national living wage and employers national insurance contributions, there were a number of financial pressures coming through. It was reported that the government appeared to still hold Council Tax as the central route for funding for Councils and any return to grant funding was unclear. When asked, it was confirmed that there was not a maximum for a raise per se however the limit before a referendum was required was 1.99% or £5 (whichever is the greater). There was disappointment at the news of the abandonment of the retained 75% business rate but it was hoped that business rate growth could be retained.

The Head of Finance and Procurement reported the current financial situation and reported that known emerging pressures had not been included in the MTFs at this time. The Committee were reminded that a report would come back including their views to the January meeting.

The Committee gave their views and regarding Cabinet priorities, it was asked why there was no reference to the Burntwood Town Deal. It was reported that it was far along enough but would be added as soon as the detail was known.

It was asked whether suspending fees for street trading would have any impact on revenue and it was reported that the decision to do so was an in year decision and therefore not part of the MTFs.

Disabled parking was discussed and whether provision in the centre should be reduced. It was noted that there had been no decisions at this stage and proposals would come forward for Members to consider when possible. More general car parking matter were discussed including the option to charge for Sunday use. It was felt that there would be push back from residents on this which would in turn have an impact on retail in the city centre.

Income from property purchases was discussed and when asked, it was confirmed that the purchases made were through the approved Housing Options Policy and not through the council's company, Lichfield Housing Ltd.

The bus station was then discussed and the option to introduce charges for departures. It was felt it could affect the number of departures and encouragement to use public transport should be a priority especially with due to the declared climate emergency. It was agreed for the Head of Service to share their thinking behind this option with the Committee.

There was some debate around the capital bid for barriers to car parks to prevent travellers entering. It was noted that it was in the Local Plan that pitches would have to be provided if private sites did not come forward.

It was asked why the level of uncertainty and risk remained high and it was reported that it was not restricted to Covid-19 matters but funding streams had not been confirmed and it was not believed that this would change in the near future.

It was confirmed that the increase in the recycling figure to 65% was aspirational but evidence from other authorities showed that a move to dual stream helped give focus on what can and cannot be recycled.

There was much discussion regarding the proposal to remove the civic car and functions. It was noted that there had been a public consultation on a number of services in 2014 and the feedback from residents was to stop the use of a vehicle however after safety concerns, it was agreed to keep it but for one of a lesser value. The Cabinet Member requested that this option be revisited if agreeable.

It was asked for the full cost involved in delivering savings with gross before cost of collection not net figures and this was agreed. It was also asked what had happened to the IT hardware savings and it was noted that it had been re-appropriated into the Being a Better Council project however this would be confirmed.

There was a view that some of the proposals contained in the MTFs contained insufficient detail and used technical terms and therefore were difficult to scrutinise effectively. It was agreed for these point would be considered when producing the final document.

It was agreed that all Cabinet Members be invited to attend the January Committee meeting.

RESOLVED: That the outcome of the Spending Review and the current draft MTFS be noted and the views of the Committee be considered by Cabinet as part of its development.

19 A BETTER COUNCIL

The Committee received a presentation by the Chief Executive on the approved change programme called Being a Better Council (BABC).

The Chief Executive explained that he had been in post for just over three months and in that time he had been in discussion with the Leader and the rest of Cabinet and it was made clear that the priority was to see what the Council could do better or differently. It was noted that through engagement of residents, partners and staff, data had been gathered which showed there were areas the Council should be proud of but other areas that could be improved.

It was then reported that although the funding gap was recognised, it had been made explicit that there should be no cuts in services. It was then reported that due to covid-19, there had been a shift in resident behaviour on how they accessed services which had provided an opportunity to rethink how the council delivered them on a more permanent basis.

It was reported that through the budget consultation, it was found that resident satisfaction was lowering and achieved value for money was also lower which was concerning. Further to this, a staff poll was taken which received a high return but also showed that around a third did not see themselves working for the Council in a year's time and this level of turnover was a big risk to the authority. It was also shown that there was not a high enough level of trust in managers or Leadership Team. It was noted that it was clear that the demand for services was outstripping the resources to deliver them in the current way.

The Head of Corporate Services then introduced the Themes of BABC to the Committee. These were around being resident-centric and looking at ways of being more accessible 24/7 as well as providing more mobile access to services as the data showed this had become the preferred route of engagement. Updates and continuous communications throughout their service experience was noted as a goal of this theme. It was reported that services based on demographics would be investigated with the right services delivered in the right areas and so not a blanket approach.

The other themes were to be commercially minded with a more horizontal structure, financially sustainable, give valued delivery, be accountable and transparent and provide right first time efficient services. It was reported that there would then be an investment in resources and to ensure Officers were given the right skills. It was noted that there would be a move to be more performance driven and use data more for business planning.

The Committee welcomed the plan and agreed with the intended outcomes of the programme. Members also felt that the timeframe of December 2024 was realistic.

There were some concern that there had also been similar programmes in previous Strategic Plans and this process had been seen before. It was reported that the Chief Executive had extensive experience in transformation and ensured this programme was Lichfield District Council focused to ensure a successful outcome.

There were also concerns on the proposed budget for what could be seen as an internal programme especially as there had already been a large investment in the Planning service recently and there were priorities that residents wanted, for example a leisure centre, that could use that money. This was noted and it was reported that the budget set aside would not be spent wholly on staff however some additional interim capacity was required to keep with the speed of the roll out of the programme. It was reported that the majority would be spent

on the delivery of digital services and a break down on intended spend would be provided to the Committee.

It was felt that there was some information missing including how culture change and success would be measured. It was agreed that there should be some milestones or gateways included. It was reported that this was deemed very important to measure this and it would not be done only at the end of the programme to do so. The example was given of not having a people strategy but a new belonging and wellbeing strategy as this would focus on how staff felt valued by their employer and this would have measures within it. It was hoped that Lichfield District Council would become the employer of choice in the area.

IT was discussed further and it was agreed that cybersecurity was a worrying risk for any authority and it was asked that a briefing paper on this subject and the need for investment in security be sent to the Committee. Further to this, it was felt that communications was very important especially the use of social media and would be to the success of this programme. It was asked if this should be a subject for the Committee to consider further separately. It was agreed that IT needed improvement as well as training in the use of IT including for Members.

Performance management was discussed along with data and it was felt that it needed to be in a format that was understandable. Members felt that data gathering and data use to inform the delivery of services was key and requested that proposals on how this would be done be brought forward to the Committee.

It was asked how we respond to external factors ie inflation rates and how that affects matters internally.

The Officers were thanked for their presentation to Committee.

RESOLVED: That the information given be noted and further information as discussed be brought back to Committee.

20 HEALTH MATTERS

The Chairman gave an update on what had been discussed at the Health & Care Scrutiny Committee at Staffordshire County Council. It was reported that that there had been much discussion around Mental Health Care and the NHS on their ambitions for change.

It was asked how the enquiry days would operate and if questions would be permitted and it was requested that this be asked at the next meeting.

It was asked if it could be raised that there were some issues being experienced around where Covid-19 booster jabs were available. It was noted that appointments booked via GPs were offered at the Samuel Johnson hospital however those booked without GP referral eg via online, were sent outside of the district including Tamworth and Norton Canes and this was very difficult for some residents. The Cabinet Member for Community Engagement requested details of these instances so he could raise the issue directly.

There were concerns that there were difficulties getting the second dose jab for the Moderna vaccine and it was asked that this be raised at County level.

It was noted that access to GPs was a County Council issue.

RESOLVED: That the matters discussed be raised at the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee at the County Council.

21 UPDATES FROM TASK GROUPS

Updates from Member Task Groups in the last reporting period were considered. There were general points regarding task groups raised and specifically around whether the meetings or papers should be public. There were concerns on transparency however it was noted that notes of the meetings were made public via these full Committee meeting agendas. It was also noted that final reports of task groups would come to Committee for examination. It was reported that informal meetings, as task groups are deemed, have different statuses in law and therefore different protections granted to Members around the comments they may make and so training would be required around this matter. It was also noted that there may be other external participants to task group meetings who would be uncomfortable in attending if the meeting were to be public or broadcasted. It was agreed that any information and papers would be made public wherever possible.

It was confirmed that the Dual Recycling Member Task Group would not be joint with Tamworth Borough Council at this time as the focus and priority was around communications which was Lichfield specific.

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

22 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was discussed and noted. It was reported that dates for the Climate Change and Dual Recycling Task Group would be sent after the meeting. It was noted that the Councillor Community Fund Task Group would begin as soon as required.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

(The Meeting closed at 8.08 pm)

CHAIRMAN