

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 JANUARY 2022

PRESENT:

Councillors Leytham (Chair), Norman (Vice-Chair), Eagland, Evans, Grange, A Little, Powell, Robertson, Silvester-Hall, Mrs Tranter, Warburton and M Wilcox

Councillor Ball attended for item 11 – Notes of Task Group

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors Cox, Eadie, Lax and Pullen attended the meeting).

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Parton-Hughes.

24 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Leytham declared a non disclosable pecuniary interest in item 6 – Community Infrastructure levy (CIL) Strategic Allocation Fund Assessment as he is the Ward Member for Whittington and Streethay and the matter concerned money that may be given to Streethay Parish Council. The Vice-Chair of the Committee was in the Chair for this item.

25 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting as circulated were agreed as a correct record.

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

26 HEALTH MATTERS

The Committee discussed health matters and what had and was due to be raised at the Staffordshire County Council's Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair gave a brief report on what had happened since the last meeting as the Lichfield representative at the SCC Committee and covered areas including GP Access, Urgent and Emergency Hospital Care and a report on Home Care.

Information was given that the Westgate Practice was ceasing to continue with Covid vaccinations and therefore should be free to deal with other patient matters. It was also reported that there would be walk-in vaccination centre in the Lichfield Fire Station on the 21st January 2022. It was noted that uptake in vaccinations was one of the highest and that had been a reason for not so many walk in centres like other areas.

It was confirmed that the Committee could raise questions to be asked at the Staffordshire County Council's Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee via the Lichfield representative, Councillor Leytham.

RESOLVED: That the information given be noted.

27 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)

The Committee received a report on the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Committee also received the outcome and responses of the Budget Consultation.

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Service for Finance and Procurement outlining the key points and changes since the report was published in the Agenda. It was noted that again, the funding settlement by Government was for one year only and the Committee agreed that this was not helpful for local government. It was reported that there had been reaffirmation that there was a commitment by government to reform funding however the scope of it was currently unknown. Key assumptions on a central scenario were reported and noted by Members especially a modelled council tax increase and the reduced assessment of risk and uncertainty for 2022/23 from high to medium.

The Committee asked questions on the following matters

- New Homes Bonus and the future options.
- If responses to the budget consultation had been different to previous years and it was noted that they were broadly the same and what were deemed high priority for residents eg waste services and street cleaning.
- Why charges had to be justified compared to other similar providers and it was reported that it applied to competitors as well as other authorities and helped highlight any sharp increases eg in core costs that could be investigated further.
- What Annual Core Inflation was and calculated.
- It was confirmed that Council Tax arrears had risen.
- Whether the level of minimum reserves were adequate and if it had been stress tested recently against sharp inflation increases.
- Corporate Fees and Charges Policy.
- An update on the review of Lichfield Housing Ltd.
- Is it known whether central government are considering funding like Levelling Up in more detail as knowing how it would be distributed would help budget effectively.

The Committee gave their views on the following areas

- The level of general reserves there was compared to what was required as it was higher however noted that it was to be prepared for the outcome of the funding reform and the uncertainty it could present to the Council.
- There was disappointment that there was still only a one year funding settlement even though more had been previously promised by Government.
- That it was right to keep Shopmobility and Burntwood public conveniences remained in the budget.
- It was requested that wording be added to the Corporate Fees and Charges Policy to make clear that it related to revenue or net income or costs and on what basis costs were being done as it could give a different as to whether something was profitable. Similar with the Cost Recovery Pricing Policy and again requested wording be reviewed and made clearer. It was also asked that the costs of applying discounts be made clear.
- That a rise in Council Tax should not be considered when the Council has a high level of reserves and residents have been affected financially by Covid. It was noted that there needed to be middle ground and resident needs would be considered however increasing costs to deliver services would be also.
- That hybrid meeting continuation and enhancement be supported, as budgeted for, if legislation was passed to allow it.
- That changes to Car Parking proposals be deferred to allow night time economic recovery due to Covid and Omicron.
- That when looking ahead to the 25 projections on both revenue and capital, there is no mention of any funding set aside for either the Burntwood Town Deal or the emerging Staffordshire County Deal although noted there wasn't anything firm that could be added at this stage.

RESOLVED: That the views of the Committee be considered by Cabinet.

28 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) STRATEGIC ALLOCATION FUNDS ASSESSMENT

The Vice-Chair of the Committee took the Chair for this item as the Chair had declared an Interest.

The Committee received a report on a bidding round of applications on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and it was reported that there had been significant oversubscription against accrued monies available. Due to this, the Committee were asked to give views on whether the current guidance and criteria used by the Strategic Infrastructure Group (SIG) when determining applications should be amended.

The Committee asked questions in the following areas.

- Is five years too long as a timeframe to have the schemes delivered?
- What relevance does the Infrastructure Delivery Plan have to this process and it was noted that it was taken into account.

The Committee gave the following views.

- That retrospective applications should be excluded as the projects have been delivered. It was suggested that an exceptional circumstance option be considered.
- That areas that do not have a neighbourhood plan should still be considered. It was noted that there could be instances that schemes are not in neighbourhood plans as they are referred to in other areas like the district wide Local Plan and therefore should still be deemed valid. It was also noted that those areas with neighbourhood plans already benefited from up to 25% of CIL regardless.
- That projects should be “shovel ready” to ensure delivery and not sit in abeyance whilst other funding was being sourced. However it was noted that there could be instances that securing CIL could open up other funding opportunities making schemes more viable. A “in exceptional circumstances” option could be considered. It was highlighted that the four external bids were not “shovel ready” and that may be due to their smaller organisational nature. It was felt that it should not become a situation where monies are only spent in-house/other authorities.
- That the proposed projects recommended to be allocated CIL be accepted as agreeable by the Committee.
- That any remaining unallocated monies be retained for future bids.
- That areas that are not putting applications in, be encouraged to do so.

RESOLVED: That the views of the Committee be considered by Cabinet.

29 NOTES FROM TASK GROUPS

The Committee received the notes from the first Climate Emergency Task Group. The Chair of the Task Group reported that a further briefing paper had been circulated. It was also reported that a number of organisations and individuals had been identified that could be invited to the next meeting to aid the Task Group in their considerations.

RESOLVED: That the notes be received.

30 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

The work programme and forward plan were considered by the Committee. It was agreed that the Councillor Community Fund Task Group should commence as soon as possible to consider if any process changes would be required before the next round of funding. It was noted that a briefing paper would be circulated shortly and that could aid the Committee as to when the task group would be required.

It was requested that there be a standing agenda item to allow Committee Members to question Cabinet on any item of interest and it was agreed to look at this further.

RESOLVED: That the work programme and forward plan be noted.

31 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

32 NOTES FROM TASK GROUP

The Committee received the notes from the last Lichfield City Masterplan Task Group. The Chair of the Task Group was in attendance to answer queries. This item was held in private as it included confidential information.

RESOLVED: That the notes be received.

33 DELIVERY OF DISABLED GRANTS FACILITIES

The Committee considered delivery options for Disabled Grants Facilities. This item was held in private as it included confidential information.

RESOLVED: That the views of the Committee be considered by Cabinet.

(The Meeting closed at 8.58 pm)

CHAIRMAN