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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 OCTOBER 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors Ball, Checkland, Evans, Norman (Chair), Hill, Trent, Ray and Woodward

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Leona Leung (Vice Chair) Warfield, Yeates, Ho and Robertson

21 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Simon Fletcher (Chief Executive) declared an interest in item 7 as a director of LWMTS.
Cllr Jamie Checkland declared an interest as Chair of Lichfield Sports Club during item 8.

22 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Cllr Checkland corrected the minutes by highlighting that he was absent from the previous meeting. Following this the minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

23 HEALTH MATTERS

The Chair recently attended the County Council Health Scrutiny committee in place of Cllr Leung and asked for the County Council to include a narrative in their reports to be shared in the future.

He reported that members have detailed areas that could be followed up with regards to defibrillators.

The Chair highlighted the Director of Public Health Annual Report and the impact of an ageing population.

Members stated their concern about the reconfiguration of Primary Care Network.

Members commented on the work programme for Women's Health Working Group, the issue of accessing menopause support, specifically premenopausal services were highlighted as extremely limited in Burntwood and across the district. This was flagged as an issue of importance.

Members stated the County Council are consulting on another Community Strategy but are missing the opportunity to collaborate and combine efforts to provide early support for mental health. The Chair responded saying he will email the Chair of the Committee to further discuss.

24 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Leader (Cllr Pullen) presented the report to the committee on behalf of Cllr Strachan.

- Members raised the issue of high financial risks and the likelihood for changes to policy.

The Leader agreed there is a lot of uncertainty due to challenging times.

Anthony Thomas (Director for Finance, Regulation & Enforcement) stated this years benchmarking as a comparison to neighbouring councils has been included.

- Members asked why Windfall as an unforeseen income is being used to fund things that are included in the capital strategy. *The Leader responded, Windfall although is unexpected, some things are a high likelihood so aren't included in the base budget. The Leader explained, they don't rely on Windfall but when large sums of money arrive, they use it for BAU. Anthony Thomas stated that BAU is budgeted for but at the time the model was produced last year it didn't have enough resource to fund this so the 'Windfall' income is being used to fund the shortfall to avoid borrowing costs to repay.*
- Members asked for figures around Homelessness, e.g what was budgeted and what's been incurred. *Homelessness Pressures, the figures have roughly trebled. Temporary accommodation has increased from roughly 80,000 to 240, 000. Members expressed the desire to have confirmation of these figures. Anthony Thomas on the Homelessness Pressures, reviews are happening to redirect finance from other areas to relieve that pressure. This will likely become an ongoing pressure in the MTFs. The Council have recently responded to the Treasury spending review and highlighted these issues. This has also been communicated to the districts two local MP's.*
- Members asked for an update on Burntwood leisure centre and if funding had been allocated. *The Leader agreed to update members after the meeting. Members stated it is part of the committee's response to allocate funds to redo the Burntwood Leisure Centre.*
- Members also asked the leader for an update on the Burntwood hub and the funding from the SPF for it. *Anthony Thomas on the Burntwood hub, they've not been able to find a location to allocate the fund. There are 2 potential options, but this remains confidential at this time so will be circulated to members via email.*
- Members stated in the forthcoming MTFs for 28/29 that the minimum level of reserves falls below the £2,000,000 level that has previously been set and want to know why and how to avoid this. *The Leader explained that previously the council has prioritised saving over spending for the use of the public and feels spending will generate more revenue to work with. The Leader stated he wishes to invest in growth and an increase in revenue will discourage encroaching on the safety net. Anthony Thomas highlighted that the model is based on the previous governments' schemes, and this is a projection from then also highlighting this is with the assumption there is no mitigation from the council.*
- Members questioned the pay award; the assumption is of 4%. How safe is the assumption? *Anthony Thomas remarks that 4% is a realistic estimation.*

Members praised the ideas for engagement and compliment the videos of councillors.

- Members asked if support for council tax could be increased and if 'Windfall' could be allocated to support this. Members asked if anything more could be done to support

Retail

Business

Rates.

The Leader confirmed council tax support has, is and will always be a priority but is a constantly evolving issue. On business rates, it was identified that it is divided, and the council do not retain 100% of the money so this would need to be considered. Anthony Thomas stated that the County Council would have to be consulted if we were to alter the Council Tax Support if it impacted on them financially.

- Members asked when they could comment on the budget consultation content. *The Leader offered to circulate a draft to the committee prior to it going live.*

RESOLVED: The committee provided views to Cabinet in relation to:

- Revenue Budget and Capital Investment priorities including the approach to using 'windfall' income from the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/26 to fund Business-as-Usual; capital investment in 2028/29.
- The potential level of the District's Council Tax increase for 2025/26.

25 NOTES FROM TASK GROUPS

Councillor Ball highlighted the upcoming meeting for the Masterplan Task Group, the following evening (3/10/24).

Members highlighted the task group shouldn't solely include members of the City Centre Parish and should represent the district as a whole. Members were also encouraged to read the County Council transport review.

The Chair said he would ask for volunteers for the task group but cannot control who volunteers.

Members agreed that the task group should be placed on hold until the next stage of development.

Members discussed locations of taxi ranks in response to the task group notes on the pedestrianisation group. It was explained that 3 sites have been located but members noted that they haven't been proposed to the taxi drivers yet, which needs to happen first.

26 COMPLIMENTS, COMPLAINTS, MP AND FOI ENQUIRIES REPORT 2023/2024

The Leader and Lizzie Barton (Director for Resident & Business Services) presented the report. The Leader expressed that historically complaints and compliments haven't been recorded as thoroughly, which is why the numbers may now seem higher. The leader has asked for feedback on the customer service feedback forms, so residents know their thoughts have been heard and actioned where possible.

Members stated complaints are welcomed as it shows where improvements are required.

- Members asked that percentages also have figures to show the volume they're referring to.

Members complimented the planning department on their improvements.

RESOLVED: O&S committee:

2.1 Commented on the customer feedback annual review 2023/2024 subject to any feedback by committee.

2.2 Noted that final amends and the publication of the customer feedback annual review 2023/2024 will be approved by Leader of the Council in consultation with the director for resident & business services.

2.3 Noted that the customer feedback annual review will also be shared with Cabinet as a briefing note.

27 LOCAL PLAN ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION

Councillor Farrell (Cabinet Member for Housing & Local Plan) presented the report. It was clarified that The Local Plan is an extensive document under deliberation at this time. As part of consultations, the members were asked if they had any feedback.

Members expressed concerns at potential delays of the plan due to upcoming policy changes from central government that could potentially open new grey belt land for development and change what areas can be developed.

Patrick Jervis (Principal Policy and Strategy Officer Officer) stated he doesn't think those changes should delay gathering information for options at this stage. Another consultation can happen in the future.

Chief Executive Simon Fletcher clarified that strategy is the aim, not individual location scouting.

Members stated a Health Policy could be beneficial for Planning to reference in the future, with the aim to limit the number of fast-food outlets.

Members stated Chase Terrace High School is an Academy and this needs amending. They also stated further students than just year 11 Geography should be consulted. Members wanted to ensure any venues they use to consult; must all have disabled access. Members expressed the desire for an executive summary document for future reference. They noted there were two repeated questions. It was then confirmed this will be circulated to Parish Councils.

RESOLVED: The committee:

Noted the progress to date on the new local plan and its associated evidence base.

Noted and provided comments on the draft Local Plan 2043: Issues and Options consultation document (Appendix A) and proposed arrangements for public consultation at paragraphs at 3.14 to 3.16.

Noted the proposal to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Housing & Local Plan in consultation with the Policy and Strategy Manager to make any minor changes to the appearance, format and text of the Issues and Options document in the interests of clarity and accuracy prior to their publication for consultation.

28 INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT

Councillor Farrell (Cabinet Member for Housing & Local Plan) welcomed input on the IFS.

Members praised that smaller and ad hoc applications will be directed to Parish Councils first. Members highlighted the allocation of 10p to Friary Grange and the Cabinet member to clarify if this was a mistake.

- Members expressed confusion at fund allocation and spends. The committee requested this be clearer in the future. Members requested that the section 106 pot allocation needs to be more specific. *Cllr Farrell stated that this is on the Cabinets radar to resolve. Officers agreed to reflect on how the SIL figures are presented in future reports to ensure they are more easily understandable. Officers stated this could be beneficial in the form of a "mission statement".*

Members stated concern with the Strategic Infrastructure Group and how members aren't involved until later when they could provide valuable insight throughout the process.

- Members questioned why the District Council's priorities were things that largely should fall under the NHS/County Council's remit *Officers clarified that the County Council does not collect a SIL pot to fund*

infrastructure so that funding must come from District Council and healthcare and transport are key elements of infrastructure.

- Members stated concern that they aren't seeing anything that will help support Health and Wellbeing for Local Communities under the categories presented. *Cllr Farrell acknowledged there is room for improvement.*

RESOLVED: The committee:

2.1 That the committee noted the contents of the Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/2024 at

Appendix A, including details of CIL and S106 income and expenditure.

2.2 That the committee noted and provided comments on the infrastructure priorities within the proposed Infrastructure List (IL).

29 LWMTS BUSINESS PLAN / ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Councillor Andy Smith (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure & Major Projects) presented the initial report and highlighted that where the trading company makes profits the council receives dividends as the sole shareholder.

- Members asked for information on the future direction for the company and what services the trading company are intending to sell to other organisations. Members expressed this is positive but wish that LDC remains the focus and risks are managed appropriately.
Chief Executive Simon Fletcher stated that this is a two-way mechanism where proposals to transfer a service to the company could be recommended by the council or suggested by the company. In either case, a proposal will have to go through Cabinet . He highlighted the following areas:
- *Landlord services. This could work in the public or private sector but is not a priority currently as the returns wouldn't be massive.*
- *Project management is currently working on a community centre in Streethay, operating and delivering DFG's, but could potentially work for other councils too.*
- *Talent acquisition is currently working with 3 or 4 local authorities and 1 private company which is imminently tradeable.*
- *Communications needs more work, there isn't enough foresight and only dealing with current issues, so it is being brought inhouse as opposed to outsourced to try and resolve it.*
- *Leisure services are growing in terms of membership and revenue. Leisure Services is potentially ready to bid for other councils to apply the community model which is different to the commercial one on offer currently.*
- *HR elements are currently outsourced for LWMTS and for LDC but software is being procured to bring these services in house. In the future this is a service that can be traded.*
- *Planning Consultancy- potentially not enough capacity is a risk. The way to resource this would be to task and finish pieces of work. Additional capacity could be brought in to provide support from other organisations.*
- *Ecology brokerage. A huge amount of money is outsourced to the private sector but the aim is to keep this within the public sector so money could be reinvested in our services.*

Chief Executive, Simon Fletcher stated the areas to focus on would be Ecology Brokerage, Talent acquisition and Planning Consultancy.

- Members asked how staffing and new hires might progress in roughly one years' time. *Chief Executive Simon Fletcher explained that talent acquisition are in a position right now to hire someone full time. Then in one years' time, most likely somebody else so*

the manager can focus on progression whilst the operation is still running. Brokerage will grow slowly but it doesn't need many more people to generate a decent return. Planning consultancy will need to be flexed up and down according to how much work is on.

- Members ask to clarify if there is a cap on how much income is generated from non-council income. *80% of the income must come from the public sector. Currently the term "public sector" is being defined to add clarity. So, the cap is 20% from non-public sector, its currently at 14%. If it gets closer a group structure will need to be assessed for the company.*
- Members asked with regards to conflicts of interest with regards to planning for example. *Currently the Planning consultancy is more of a peer review style. The proposal is an in-depth peer assessment which isn't currently offered.*
- Members stated that in addition to Conservative representation, could there be a member of one of the opposition groups on the board of LWMTS to encourage robust scrutiny and for collegiate working. *It was highlighted that one of the key recommendations from a recent audit was to add non-executive directors to the board to add value to the company. Cllr A. Smith stated that he was open to the suggestions with regards to adding members from different political groups.*
- Members queried that the initial set up of the company was to provide housing for sale, yet housing hasn't been debriefed and asked for an update. *Chief Executive Simon Fletcher states that £2,000,000 has been set aside for social housing and temporary accommodation, this money came from Section 106 and commuted sums- from developers who were unable to provide the social housing. 8 properties have been identified that are to be purchased over the year ranging from 1–5-bedroom houses.*

Members requested that they have a rolling 6-month review of LWMTS.

RESOLVED: The committee:

2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the LWMTS Annual Report 2023/24

30 POLICE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Members attention was drawn to the questions included in the agenda. Members requested to move a vote of thanks to Karen Green for her service and express regret that she must move on.

31 WORK PROGRAMME

Members agreed that the LWM Annual Report would be brought to the committee at 6 monthly intervals.

The report on the Community Safety Partnership was requested for the next meeting.

(The Meeting closed at 8.38 pm)

CHAIR

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