

Minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 12 December 2022

Present: Colin Greatorex (Chair)

Attendance

Charlotte Atkins	Jeremy Pert
Mike Davies	Bob Spencer
Gill Heath (Vice-Chair (Scrutiny))	Samantha Thompson (Vice-Chair (Overview))
Kath Perry, MBE	Mike Worthington

Also in attendance: Councillors Alan White and Victoria Wilson

Officers: Catharine Mann, Kerry Dove, Sarah Getley, Kate Loader, Chris Ebberley, Bethany Edwards and John Tradewell.

Apologies: Tina Clements, John Francis and Bernard Peters

PART ONE

41. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

42. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2022

Resolved: – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. Empowering Our Communities - Developing our Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture introduced the draft Position Statement and the draft Communities Delivery plan 2023 which contained proposals for the long-term development of the Communities Strategy for Staffordshire. The Committee was asked for comments on the documents prior to consideration by Cabinet in February 2023.

It was explained that the 'empowering our communities' was one of the four 'how we work' statements in the Strategic Plan and as such has to be at the heart of everything the Council does. It was stated that the past 18 months had seen a vast amount of work with partners and residents but continued work with communities was vital to help with post pandemic and cost of living issues.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- Coordination of activities between District; Borough; Parish; Town; and County had improved but more still needed to be done to join up effort. Engagement was taking place on each of the programmes in the delivery plan. The Leader's Board was also establishing a District; Borough and County council officers working group to look at cost of living initiatives.
- Work was ongoing with the Staffordshire Parish Councils Association to bring people together, but it was noted that each area had different needs and desires to work with partners.
- The results of pilot schemes, such as Biddulph Town Council, would be shared and would hopefully encourage more participation.
- The County Councils role in helping to signpost and advise communities was acknowledged.
- Capacity in the Community/voluntary sector was stretched and it was felt that it would be unrealistic to expect some groups to take on more work.
- The continuation of the Members fund was welcomed as this was seen as a way of helping community groups get projects off the ground.
- Support Staffordshire and Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS) had informed the Council that the cost-of-living crisis and rising energy costs hadn't yet started to impact on communities in the numbers expected, but they had seen an increase in demand for their services. There may be some flexibility to change contracts if necessary.

The following comments were made by the Committee on the draft Position Statement and the draft Communities Delivery plan 2023:

1. The Plan and the work of the partners and voluntary sector was welcomed.
2. It was felt there were a number of strands of activity and a number of partners all with their own requirements and objectives (e.g. Health, District Council, County Council etc) but only one community. More emphasis should be placed on consulting together, to establish one aim and focus to enable a positive step change.
3. It was felt that the way that outcomes were measured and the results from the activities listed in the plan were not always clear and would benefit from more detail for example the inclusion of costs and SMART measurements and timelines.

Resolved:

- a) That the draft Position Statement including the draft Communities Delivery Plan 2023 be noted.
- b) That the comments made by the Committee, listed above, be reported to the Cabinet in February 2023.

44. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - Progress Update

The Leader of the Council introduced the report which summarised the council's current position on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

The report detailed the principles and objectives from 2021-2023, key highlights and achievements during 2022/23 and proposed areas of focus for 2023/24. A short presentation was provided to the Committee. These slides were available as part of the webcast.

The main issues discussed by members were:

- The formation of the EDI steering group and its focus groups within the authority. It was explained that the groups contained key lead officers, and officers with an interest or motivation within a specific area. External input, in order to share best practice and broaden representation, was being investigated.
- Apprenticeships were offered at all levels within the organisation and covered all areas of diversity. The apprentice levy was being accessed for training up to Masters level and partner organisations were also benefiting from the levy to develop their workforce. The Apprenticeships Strategy was being refreshed. More information on the impact of the levy on diversity and which partners had used it would be sent to the Committee.
- Staff were asked on a regular basis to update personal data such as religious beliefs, through the My HR system.
- The summary of strategies in place, listed in appendix 1 to the report, seemed to lack review dates. The Leader agreed to include this detail in the revised plan.

Resolved:

- a) That the progress made to deliver against the Councils Equality, Diversity and Inclusion principles, objectives and action plan be noted.
- b) The Councils Gender pay gap report and workforce profile be noted.
- c) That the comments made by the Committee, listed above, be reported to Cabinet when the Councils delivery of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion plan was considered.
- d) That the Cabinet member provide a monitoring report to the Committee in 12 months' time.
- e) More information on the impact of the levy and diversity and which partners used be sent to the Committee.

45. Governance of outside bodies/partnerships review - update

The County Solicitor introduced the report which detailed the work undertaken in relation to Local Authorities Trading Companies (LATCos) and the elected member representation on outside bodies. The report also

detailed the way in which the activity had been carried out and the findings or any reviews.

The Committee was informed that organisations which had failed to respond to information requests had been contacted a number of times during the review.

Members felt that some of the outside bodies had changed working practises during the pandemic which may result in what looks like reduce member involvement. An example was given of the local Quarry liaison committees. It was felt that these had been useful in the past and were worth retaining.

It was also suggested that the Members who were appointed to outside bodies and organisations, should feedback to other members periodically. This idea would be included in the next part of the review.

Further separate pieces of work on the LATCos and outside bodies were proposed to gain a complete picture. The LATCos work would be reported to Audit and Standards Committee along with the audit report which was currently underway. It was suggested that the outside bodies work would be reported back to this Committee in spring 2023.

Resolved:

- a) In relation to Limited Companies and Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCos):
 1. The Monitoring Officer should undertake a governance review for the purpose of recommending new governance standards for the operation of LATCos and Limited Companies. This should consider:
 - ii. proposals for the introduction of a company start-up checklist;
 - iii. any conflict that may exist in relation to SCC Members and Officers holding Directorships in Local Authority Trading Companies (LATCos);
 - iv. the operation of indemnities to support Directorships.
 2. The County Solicitor to develop one centralised list of companies.
- b) In relation to Outside Bodies, a further report be presented to the Committee, in April 2023, containing recommendations about which outside bodies should be withdrawn from member representation.

46. Work Programme

The following changes were suggested:

- The Governance review update report – to be scheduled for April 2023.
- The Revised Children’s Transformation Programme item be moved from February to April 2023.
- The Civil Contingencies report added to the April 2023 meeting be noted.

Resolved: That the suggested changes to the Work Programme be agreed.

Chairman