

Chair - Councillor R P Cooke

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

A R G Brown	P W Jones
M G Dodson	W J Kemp
A T A Godfrey	R Kenney
A S Harp	P Roycroft
R A James	

Cabinet Member - Councillor R M Smith - Resources Portfolio
Cabinet Member - Councillor C V Trowbridge - Leisure Portfolio
Cabinet Member - Councillor J M Pert - Community and Health Portfolio

Also present - Councillors A M Loughran and L Nixon

Officers in attendance:-

Mr N Raby	-	Head of Human Resources
Mr I Curran	-	Interim Head of Law and Administration
Mr P Kendrick	-	Head of Technology
Mrs T Redpath	-	Corporate Business and Partnerships Manager
Mr R Simpson	-	Interim Head of Operations
Mr A Bailey	-	Scrutiny Officer

RSC1 Minutes

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 26 March 2019, having been published in Digest No 254, were submitted and signed.

RSC2 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M V Holmes (Substitute W J Kemp), J A Nixon (Substitute P W Jones) and J K Price (Environment and Health Portfolio).

RSC3 Members Items

Councillor A T A Godfrey had submitted the following item under Paragraph 2.8 of the Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules:-

“I would like the committee to look into the apparent cost cutting measures take at this year’s production of Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice at Stafford Castle.

Although the play itself was excellent, the facilities were much reduced when compared to all previous productions.

This event is the highlight of our cultural year. At last year's special scrutiny presentation by Freedom Leisure their senior management reassured us there would be no reduction in the quality of the occasion, this appears not to be the case."

Councillor A T A Godfrey outlined the reasons and rationale behind the Members' Item to the Committee.

In response the Cabinet Member (Leisure Portfolio) made the following comments:-

- This year's production of Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice at Stafford Castle was a wonderful show
- Would not want to see the Shakespeare Festival lost
- Freedom Leisure had a job to do and were required to produce the show within budget
- There were issues at the first show that were resolved in time for the second show
- The toilets were in the wrong place
- Next year would be the 30th Anniversary of the Shakespeare Festival and it would be bigger and better than this year
- It was positive that disabled spectators could feel part of the show
- The roofing was now fully complete
- Always looking for improvement

The Committee then discussed the following aspects of the Members Item with the Cabinet Member (Leisure Portfolio):-

- This years show felt intimate
- There were no negative comments from the second night onwards, just positive comments
- It was important to differentiate between the production, which was excellent and the facilities that were reduced
- Site lines were an issue, but could not be extended due to restrictions imposed by Heritage England
- It would be preferable to have the whole of Stafford Castle as a backdrop for the Shakespeare Festival
- It would be useful to have further information in relation to the outlay by Freedom Leisure for the Festival
- The Council was due to receive an annual update from Freedom Leisure later this year, which could be considered by this Committee

Following the discussion, it was agreed that Freedom Leisure be invited to present their annual update report to a future meeting of this Committee.

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee, Freedom Leisure be invited to present their annual update report to a future meeting of this Committee.

RSC4 Councillor A T A Godfrey had submitted the following item under Paragraph 2.8 of the Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules:-

“I would like the Resources Scrutiny Committee to look into the funding available for the building of social houses by local authorities.

In recent times the Government has become more amenable to councils building their own housing for rent.

It has always been a cornerstone of local government to provide high standard affordable rented accommodation.

In recent times this has been provided by housing associations, but as members will know some local authorities are now building their own housing stock again.

I believe the committee’s time will be well spent looking into this very important social issue.”

Councillor A T A Godfrey outlined the reasons and rationale behind the Members’ Item to the Committee.

In response the Cabinet Member (Community and Health Portfolio) made the following comments:-

- The quality of Stafford and Rural Homes was second to none and the merger was geographically coterminous that would allow the larger organisation to be a Place Shaper
- Although Cannock Chase Council had retained their housing stock, they only built around 125 social houses last year, whereas 200 affordable homes were built in the Borough
- Unless development could happen at significant scale, development and management costs were likely to be disproportionate.
- To develop the housing the Council would need to appoint or commission: -
 - Valuers
 - Surveyors
 - Architects
 - Builders, electricians and plumbers and
 - Project managers
- A key element would be the scale of the development and the ability of the Council to either put in its own land (opportunity cost) or acquire new land
- The Council did not own significant amounts of land and experiences elsewhere in the country revealed potential viability issues due to the additional build costs of smaller sites and competition for those smaller sites from other affordable housing providers

The Committee then discussed the following aspects of the Members Item with the Cabinet Member (Community and Health Portfolio) and Cabinet Member (Resources Portfolio):-

- The Borough currently had sufficient exception sites
- A range of houses had been built across the Borough
- Any financial return from the building of social housing should be re-invested into social housing
- A need for social housing could be demonstrated
- The need to undertake borrowing to build new council houses required a valid business case to exist in terms of financial viability
- In order for the Council to access some grant funding towards new build, they would have to become a development partner with Homes England. This only contributes a small amount of funding to the cost of the build and in Stafford would only support affordable rent and intermediate home ownership products

Following the discussion, it was moved by Councillor A T A Godfrey and seconded by Councillor W J Kemp that a further report be bought back to this Committee outlining the financial viability for the provision of social housing by this Council.

On being put to the vote, the proposal was declared to be lost.

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee:- the Members Items be noted.

RSC5 **Performance Reporting 2018-21**

The Committee considered the performance management details for those areas within the remit of the Committee for the quarter 4 period up to 31 March 2019.

The Committee discussed the following aspects of the report with the Cabinet Member (Resources Portfolio), the Head of Technology and the Corporate Business and Partnerships Manager:-

- 3.1.1.2 - A balanced budget, without the use of reserves is set for the duration of the Medium Term Financial Plan - concern over the potential need for a transfer from working balances during 2021-2022 and the stability of the future New Homes Bonus income
- 3.1.1.3 - Increase in income generated by the service through Fees and Charges in line with the recommendations made as part of the annual budget process - clarification over the proportion of the Council's gross income raised through fees and charges and how this compared with the family group of Authorities
- 3.1.7.2 - Support the specification, procurement and installations of new systems and data security - clarification of the supply of the dual firewalls

- 3.2.1.1 - Procure and implement a new Contact Centre Telephony system to enable a consistent approach to call handling - clarification of the reasons for the slippage
- 3.2.2.5 - Design and use new web based electronic forms - clarification of the reasons for the slippage
- 3.2.2.7 - Encourage and support our residents following the introduction of Universal Credits - an explanation that responsibility for this transferred to the Citizens Advice Bureau on 1 April 2019
- 3.3.1 - Develop customer service standards to inform development of Corporate Customer Charter - clarification of the reasons for the slippage

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee, the performance management data relating to areas of activity within this Committee's remit be noted.

RSC6 **Complaints Monitoring 2018/19**

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Head of Law and Administration (V1 17/7/19) in relation to Corporate Complaints and complaints referred by the Local Government Ombudsman during 2018/19.

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee, the report be noted.

RSC7 **Business Planning Report**

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Head of Law and Administration (V2 17/7/19) which presented Members with a review of the programme of business considered by the Committee in 2018/19.

The Committee noted that during the last year they had considered a wide variety of issues affecting the Resources Portfolio and had completed a Task and Finish Review relating to the Annual Review of the Constitution.

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee, the report be approved and submitted as the Annual Report to the Council.

RSC8 **Work Programme - Resources Scrutiny Committee**

Considered the report of the Interim Head of Law and Administration, which presented the Resources Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme (V2 17/7/19) for the forthcoming meetings up to February 2020.

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee, the Work Programme (V2 17/7/19) be approved, subject to the various amendments made during the meeting.

CHAIR