

Scrutiny Chair Report to Council

Since the last report to you at January's Full Council, the Scrutiny Committee met on 8th February, 6th March and 3rd April.

At its February meeting, the Committee received a report on the Strategic Plan 2024/25, which set out a clear vision for the future: one that is evidence based, shared by all units of the Council, and is in tune with the aspirations of local people. There are no changes to the commitments from 2023/24, however during 2024, the Executive is planning to conduct a more detailed review of the Strategic Plan priorities and will present a new strategy for 2025/26 and beyond.

The Committee also considered a report on Multi-use Games Areas which provided a detailed overview of the current position, and proposed a way forward, regarding the provision, condition and work needed for improvement of the Council's Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAs) stock. Concerns were raised in relation to MUGAs not being gender equitable, but reassurance was given that work to improve inclusion was being done and consideration given to a document is called, 'Safer Parks - Improving Access for women and girls'.

Consideration was also given to the Quarter 3 finance reports, along with the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2028/29; Treasury Management Strategy and 2024/25 - 2026/27; Revenue Budget 2024/25; Capital Budget for 2024/25 and Capital Investment Programme 2024-29; . Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 and 2025/26 & Empty Homes Premium Policy; and the - Statutory Report of the Chief Financial Officer.

The Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 was submitted which is required to be published prior to the end of March each year.

At the March meeting the Committee considered a report that enabled the Council to meet its aim of minimising the carbon impact of its business operations. It requested the Executive approve the Road Map to Net Zero Report as a working document to be reviewed and updated periodically. The Road Map to Net Zero report had been produced to allow informed decision-making around the order in which the Council could take climate action and achieve net zero at the earliest possible date. The document outlined potential costs and timeframes for each action, allowing priorities to be established and a realistic and appropriate timeline to be set. The document allowed the Council to work through climate actions over time, with costs spread out between now and 2050. This allowed for strategic planning and prioritisation within appropriate timescales and resources.

Consideration was also given to the Selective Licensing consultation on future proposals. The report requested the Executive approve the consultation and evidence gathering for the proposal to designate six areas for selective licensing. The draft case proposal document set out the Council's reasons for proposing to designate Trinity; Queensgate; Gannow; Daneshouse and Stoneyholme; Padiham; and Lyndhurst Road areas for Selective Licensing.

The Committee received the report from the Climate Change Scrutiny Review Group. The main areas of discussion by the group were climate change action plan prioritisation; electric bus funding (ZEBRA2); electric/hybrid taxis; homeworking action; and resources. Overall Members concluded that they felt more certain of the climate change actions and the work being undertaken. There was overall interest in the climate change agenda and the need to drive forward actions.

Finally, at the April meeting the Committee considered a report which sought approval to accept the additional £134,800 from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ('DLUHC') to deliver a further two homes for continued use as temporary accommodation.

The Committee also considered a report on Article 4 Direction: Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The purpose of the report was to update the Executive with the results of the consultation on the proposed Article 4 Direction, undertaken in October/November 2023; and seek Executive approval to confirm the Article 4 Direction which removed the permitted development rights for the change of use from Use Class C3 (dwelling houses) to Use Class C4 (Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) in the nine wards of the Borough, as illustrated on the plan accompanying the Direction. The Direction will become effective on 14 October 2024.

Cllr Gail Barton