Joint meeting of the Finance & Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Committees

Minutes of the remote joint meeting of the Finance & Audit and Overview & Scrutiny Committees held on Tuesday 7 July 2020 at 6.00pm, which was broadcast live via the Council's YouTube channel.

Present: Councillors L Bartlett, J Kennedy, I Davison, R Dickson, A Evans, J Grey, G Illingworth, O Jacques, P Kohler, M Luckhurst, R Margrave, A Milton, J Nicholls, M Noone, D Norris, P Redford, D Russell, S Syson, J Tracey and J Weber.

1. **Appointment of Chairman**

It was proposed by Councillor Weber, duly seconded by Councillor Syson and

Resolved that Councillor Nicholls be appointed as Chairman for the meeting.

The Chair explained that he would be asking Councillor Milton to lead debate on the future approach to Scrutiny under Item 4 on the agenda – Annual Report, Work Programme and Forward Plan. Councillor Nicholls would still be chairing the meeting.

2. **Apologies and Substitutes**

(a) An apology for absence was received from Councillor Wright.
(b) Councillor Kennedy substituted for Councillor J Dearing, Councillor Weber substituted for Councillor Cullinan and Councillor Evans substituted for Councillor A Dearing.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

Minute Number 4 – Executive Agenda (Non-Confidential Items and Reports) – Monday 13 July 2020 - Item 7 – Warwick District Leisure Development Programme – Kenilworth Facilities

Councillor Milton declared an interest because as a Member of Kenilworth Town Council he had brought forward a motion concerning the lido but felt he was only predisposed and had an open mind and was happy to listen to discussions at the meeting before reaching any decisions.

Councillors Dickson and Kennedy declared an interest because they were at the same Kenilworth Town Council meeting referred to by Councillor Milton.

Councillor Norris declared an interest because he was a former Member of the Executive. He felt he might have to either abstain or leave the meeting.

Councillor Weber raised a point of order in respect of leaving a meeting when it was being streamed live, which meant that Councillor Norris would still be able to hear the debate. The Democratic Services Manager & Deputy Monitoring Officer provided clarity on the position in respect of leaving a meeting when a prejudicial interest was declared. A councillor could meet the conditions required for this by simply disconnecting from the meeting and they would be invited back in after the discussion and vote was taken. The emphasis of the law was on not being able to have influence over the other Members, but by disconnecting from the meeting, this condition was met. He also pointed out the live broadcasting of meetings had been happening at Councils for many years.

4. **Executive Agenda (Non-Confidential Items and Reports) – Monday 13 July 2020**

The Committees considered the following non-confidential items which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive later on Monday 13 July 2020.

The Chair thanked all Members who had submitted questions on reports to Executive ahead of the meeting and for the answers received. Provided satisfactory responses had been received, then those questions would not be raised at the meeting.

Item 7 – Warwick District Leisure Development Programme – Kenilworth Facilities

With the agreement of the Chair, Ms J Green addressed the Committees on this item.

The Committees noted the recommendations in the report and requested that additional work be undertaken on; vehicle and active transport access to the leisure centres; and on their carbon neutrality.

(Councillors Redford and Grey requested that their support for the recommendations in the report be noted and Councillor Milton requested his objection to the recommendations in the report be noted.)

Item 3 – Review of Local Government Structure in Warwickshire

The Committees supported the recommendations in the report.

They highlighted that the Council needed to keep focused on the overall strategic advantages of working with Stratford and from possible local government reorganisation. Therefore, it should be mindful, on this twin track approach, that the project on working with Stratford did not pre-determine the possible shape of local government reorganisation or preclude possible working with other boroughs and districts where that would be beneficial for residents and provide value for money.

Item 4 – Adoption of Affordable Housing and Developer Contributions SPDs

The Committees were satisfied that the questions posed ahead of the meeting had been satisfactorily answered.

Item 6 – Final Accounts 2019/20

The Committees thanked the Head of Finance and his Team for the work on producing the draft financial statements for 2019/20 so promptly.

The meeting was adjourned at 7.47pm until 8.00pm.

Item 9 – Community Stadium and Associated Developments

The Committees supported the recommendations in the report.

5. **Annual Report, Work Programme and Forward Plan**

The Committees considered a report from the Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer which set out the End of Term reports to the Council on the work of both the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee that had been undertaken during the municipal year 2019/20.

Under Article 6 of the Council's Constitution, Scrutiny Committees were required to provide an end of term report to Council on work they have undertaken during the year.

Resolved that the End of Term reports for 2019/20 for the Finance & Scrutiny Audit Committee and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, as set out in appendices 1 and 2 in the report be recommended to Council.

The Committees did not discuss the Work Programmes or the Forward Plans at the meeting.

The report also asked for the Committees to reflect on their approach to Scrutiny, consider any changes they wished to make for the municipal year and agree on proposals for Council to consider. Back in March 2020, Members were due to reflect on their workload and approach to Scrutiny, with a view to report any variations in approach to Council, as part of its Annual report when this was considered in April. The report detailed what work was to be done and that the Covid19 pandemic had since occurred and how this now gave an opportunity to help change scrutiny at the Council.

Both Scrutiny Chairs had subsequently discussed the potential for an improved approach to Scrutiny and Councillor Milton was asked to lead the discussions. Members were asked to address the challenges faced and ahead of the meeting, four questions had been posed to them, with some Councillors providing responses ahead of the meeting. These would be taken into consideration together with any points raised at the meeting. The Democratic Services Officer & Deputy Monitoring Officer was asked to note points raised prior and at the meeting and provide action points arising from this for a future meeting for debate. These action points would form the minutes for the current meeting.

The four questions that had been raised ahead of the meeting for consideration were:

1. In the context of their terms of reference and the Statutory Scrutiny Guidance and Centre for Public Scrutiny Guidance (specifically that relating to Covid19), what three things could they improve how they conduct scrutiny?
2. How could the Committees ensure that a more strategic and developmental approach is taken to overview and scrutiny without losing their focus on improving shorter-term proposals, on risk, and on audit.
3. How could the Committees take greater account of the views from residents and involve them more in their business?
4. What additional resources, support and training might be helpful to members to ensure they can carry out their roles effectively?

Following debate, the action points raised or points for further discussion were:

1. Need to identify where scrutiny can add the most value (focus and be precise when asking for the information required).
2. Benchmark and scope to include benchmarking of performance against other authorities.
3. Look towards reporting by exemption – welcome the performance management data being developed by Democratic Services need to share with Chair at earliest opportunity.
4. Useful to have a summary of funding stream for each project as well as its status (be able to see things in context).
5. Look to develop dedicated scrutiny training from CfPS.
6. Identify training on local government finance.
7. Seek feedback from senior managers on where they find scrutiny useful (and where not).
8. How can effective scrutiny be promoted to public/ensure councillors are authentic conduits?
9. Executive reports pre questions works.
10. If seeking views from outside look for experts not always interested parties with vested interest. Seek specific involvement from members of the community.
11. Task & Finish Groups work but need focus and resources.
12. Members need training to better understand Finance if serving on F&A.
13. Feed back to electors the questions that are asked.

These would be further considered at a further Joint meeting on 29 July 2020.

(The meeting ended at 8.50pm)

CHAIRS