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7 December 2022

Dear Councillor,

**Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee**  
**6:00pm, Thursday 15 December 2022**  
**Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Cannock**

You are invited to attend this meeting for consideration of the matters itemised in the following Agenda.

Yours sincerely,

**T. Clegg**  
**Chief Executive**

To: Councillors:

McMahon, J.B. (Chair)  
Johnson, T.B. (Vice-Chair)  
Arduino, L.            Muckley, A.M.  
Frew, C.L.             Prestwood, J.  
Hoare, M.W.A.        Theodorou, P.C.  
Jones, P.G.C.          Wilson, L.J.  
Kraujalis, J.T.        Woodhead, P.E.  
Molineux, G.N.

# Agenda

## Part 1

### 1. Apologies

### 2. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

- (i) To declare any personal, pecuniary, or disclosable pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct and any possible contraventions under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (ii) To receive any Party Whip declarations.

### 3. Minutes

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2022 (enclosed).

### 4. Responsible Council Priority Delivery Plan Q1 and Q2 2022/23 Performance Update

To receive the latest performance information for the Responsible Council Priority Delivery Plan 2022/23 (Item 4.1 - 4.7).

### 5. Work Programme Update

Verbal update from the Head of Governance and Corporate Services and the Head of Economic Prosperity.

The scoping documents for the Committee's agreed task & finish reviews are enclosed as follows:

- Review of Customer Contact (Item 5.1 - 5.2)
- New Civic Hub Facilities (Item 5.3 - 5.4)

**Cannock Chase Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of the**  
**Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee**  
**Held on Monday 10 October 2022 at 6:00pm**  
**In the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Cannock**

**Part 1**

**Present:** Councillors

McMahon, J.B. (Chair)  
Johnson, T.B. (Vice-Chair)  
Arduino, L      Muckley, A.M.  
Frew, C.L.      Theodorou, P.C.  
Hoare, M.W.A.   Wilson, L.J.  
Kraujalis, J.T.   Woodhead, P.E.

**Also in Attendance:** Councillor R.J. Hughes, Innovation and Resources  
Portfolio Leader (*invitee*)

**8. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were submitted for Councillors J. Fletcher, P.G.C. Jones, and G.N. Molineux.

Councillor T.B. Johnson advised he would need to leave by 7:00pm.

**9. Declarations of Interest of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations**

No declarations of interests or party whip declarations were received.

**10. Minutes**

***Minute number 5 - End of Year Performance Report 2021-22***

In response to a query from the Chair regarding progress with the proposed report on virtual / hybrid meetings and whether the requirements for meetings to be held in person or virtually had changed, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised that public facing meetings still had to be held in person, although it was understood other local authorities had been operating hybrid meetings. In respect of the report, quotes had been received to install the required technology in the Council Chamber for broadcasting meetings, but the costs involved were a six-figure sum. Lower cost solutions were being sought that would help to improve the sound quality of live streamed meetings. It had not been possible to bring the report forward yet due to staffing issues and other priorities within the Democratic Services team.

Members of the Committee raised support for virtual / hybrid meetings, noting that it was easier for councillors with caring responsibilities to attend meetings in this way and more people watched the meetings online than attended in person.

The Chair noted concern that proper relationships could not be established without having face to face meetings, and uncertainty about whether participants were always fully engaged when attending meetings remotely.

**Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the Financially Resilient Council Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28 June 2022 be approved.

**11. Responsible Council Priority Delivery Plan 2022-26**

Consideration was given to the Responsible Council Priority Delivery Plan 2022-26 (Item 4.1 - 4.2) *(presented by the Innovation and resources Portfolio Leader)*.

After the Portfolio Leader introducing this item, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services raised the following points:

- Ordinarily, the first quarter performance update for the year would have been presented to this meeting, but instead, a half-year update would be given at the December meeting.
- In respect of the shared services business case this would be presented to Members at an Extraordinary Council meeting scheduled for 7 December.
- The development of the digital strategy and workforce plan would be guided by the decision at the Council meeting on the future of shared services.
- Projects marked in the priority delivery plan as 'operational' would be reported on annually rather than quarterly.

In response to a query from a Member as to whether the project 'improve our customers' access to services' would be covered by the 'Call Handling and Customer First Contact' task & finish group, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised there may be an overlap, but this would depend on the agreed review scope.

A Member raised concern about performance of some projects only being reported annually, given that the Council had been slow to deliver on several projects in the last few years and other matters had been kicked into the long grass. The proposed timescale for delivery of a new customer portal would be a long wait for those residents who were unable to access the Council's services in person. The aim of the Council should be to strive for accessibility for all.

The Chair agreed with this view but noted that officer capacity was thin on the ground and were doing their best to deliver services in challenging circumstances. If the Committee felt that priorities needed to be reorganised then this view could be put to the Cabinet to consider, whilst bearing in mind other projects would then be delayed.

In response, the same Member queried that if officer capacity was already stretched, how would developing further shared services help address this issue. The Chair noted that it could be a cost cutting exercise and help achieve economies of scale.

Another Member agreed with the views of residents being able to contact the Council and those who struggled to use technology, noting that some people fell through the gap and struggled to seek support when needed. The Head of Governance and

Corporate Services clarified that the aim of developing a new customer portal was to improve the Council's digital offer, but not to exclude residents who preferred face to face help. It was hoped that having a better system in place would give officers more time to provide in-person support to those with complex needs.

In response to a query from the Chair as to whether the stated timetable for development of the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) was as normal or had been delayed by the shared services business case, the Innovation and Resources Portfolio Leader advised it had been delayed due to issues with the new finance system. These issues had been resolved so it was expected the same impact should not occur in future years.

A Member raised that some reports due to be considered by Cabinet in October had been deferred until November, noting the pressure this placed on decisions being made and potential impacts on development of the MTFS and the 2023/24 budget, especially if reports ended up being delayed further.

In response to a query from the Chair as to whether the Council had a full understanding of what its assets were, the Innovation and Resources Portfolio Leader advised it did not, but the position was much clearer than had been in previous years. An agreed process was now in place to provide regular updates and manage assets proactively rather than reactively. The Head of Economic Prosperity supported this view, noting that whilst the Council knew what its main assets were, there may be small parcels of land around the District that officers were unaware of due to title deeds not being available or the land not being registered. The key aims of the review were however to understand if the assets were fit for purpose, met the corporate plan priorities, and supported the MTFS process.

In response to a further query from the Chair as to whether there may be any pieces of land large enough for housing development that the Council was unaware of, the Head of Economic Prosperity advised that officers had previously looked at what the options were, and whilst some sites were already known about, there was only a small number of such sites available. The Innovation and Resources Portfolio Leader further advised there was a need to look at this as an opportunity cost of officers time, given that a comprehensive audit of land availability could use an enormous amount of resource but end up being of little benefit.

In response to a query from a Member as to whether the energy management strategy was still on track to be presented to Cabinet in quarter 2 of this year, the Head of Economic Prosperity advised that production of the strategy had been delayed by the climate change action plan, so it was now likely the report would come through in the second half of the year instead.

In response to a query from the same Member as to what the differences were between the asset management strategy and asset management plans, the Innovation and Resources Portfolio Leader advised that the plans were actions taken away from the asset management group and operational working group undertaking reviews of the non-housing related assets. The Head of Economic Prosperity further advised that the plans were more operational in nature and had a review process in place to help determine whether each individual asset should be maintained, retained, or disposed of.

In response to a query from another Member as to whether the energy management strategy would lead to energy management plans being drawn up, the Head of Economic Prosperity advised such issues would be addressed within the asset management plans as the overarching strategy would look at the energy efficiency of all the Council's assets.

In response to a query from a Member as to whether development of a new civic hub for the town centre was part of the approved Levelling Up Fund (LUF) scheme, the Innovation and Resources Portfolio Leader advised that the LUF could not be used for this purpose as it had to be focused on town centre regeneration, but the scheme presented an opportunity to look at development of a civic hub as part of the additional funding identified separately from the LUF monies, noting that to improve the existing civic centre building could cost in the region of £8 million.

The Chair raised that Cabinet needed to be aware that in respect of climate change / net zero matters, the Committee wanted to see a report come before the November Cabinet meeting, noting it was a complicated and difficult issue to manage, which the Committee would keep asking to be updated on.

## **12. Review of Hybrid Working**

The Committee received an update presentation from the Head of Governance and Corporate Services on the 'Hybrid Working' review that had commenced last year. The presentation covered:

- Scope of review
- Key tasks
- Position pre-pandemic
- Position during the pandemic
- Surveys
- Support tools
- New employees
- Customers
- The future

Questions and comments were raised by Members during the presentation

### ***Position during the pandemic***

A Member gave credit to both Officers and Members of the Council for exemplary service provided during the Covid-19 pandemic, noting that services had been maintained under difficult circumstances.

*(Councillor T.B. Johnson left the meeting during this section of the presentation and did not return.)*

In response to a query from a Member about perceptions from residents that phone calls were not being answered during the pandemic, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised that issues had been experienced with phone calls being answered, primarily related to difficulties with transferring calls through the contact

centre and forwarded calls to those working from home. Work was however underway to improve call handling operations, with the Head of Technology looking to procure a cost-effective system to support this aim. Additionally, some services had taken on extra responsibilities during the pandemic which had affected the ability of officers within those teams to answer calls as normal.

### ***Surveys***

In response to a query from the same Member regarding response rates to the staff surveys, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised that both surveys had achieved circa 90% return, with positive feedback being provided about IT support during the pandemic.

In response to a query from another Member regarding staff feedback on engagement in team meetings, the HR Manager advised there had been some issues experienced within larger teams due to restrictions at the time on the number of people who could meet in person, but this situation had improved in recent months.

In response to a query from another Member as to whether the same questions were asked in both staff surveys, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised some core questions were the same to allow for comparisons to be made, but open-ended questions had also been included so staff could provide detailed feedback on their experiences. Most appreciated the flexibility to work from home in a short turnaround time, whilst others had found it beneficial for their work / life balance and were able to better engage with their colleagues online rather than in person.

### ***Support tools***

In response to a query from another Member as to whether the Council was providing financial support to those working from home owing to increased energy bills, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised this was not the case for those who started to work from home during the pandemic, but it was noted they had been able to claim tax relief via HMRC during that period and had also saved money on travel costs. As the existing arrangements were still a temporary measure, a view on this would need to be taken once a decision was made on what the permanent setup should be.

### ***The future***

The Chair noted he had read research on the impact of home working, with a focus on experiences for those considered to be introverts or extroverts, 'meeting inflation' (i.e., attending more meetings online than in person), working more in the evenings, and impacts on relationships with colleagues (particularly so for new starters and their commitment to the organisation through home working).

In response to a query from the Chair as to whether anything in the trial required whole teams to be present in person on the same day, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised the trial had been designed flexibly so managers could decide how best to arrange physical attendance to support service delivery. The only consistent principle in the trial was the 20%-time allocation.

In response to a query from a Member as to whether there was a 'maximum' limit on in-person attendance, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised there

was not a limit as such, but an officer could work in the building every day if they so wished.

Another Member noted concern about home working based on their own employment experiences, noting that productivity reduced and working relationships suffered, and then queried if the Council made use of any specific technologies to monitor levels of productivity for home workers, and whether there had been complaints from customers about home working. The Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised the Council had not investigated the use of intrusive monitoring systems, noting that teams worked in diverse ways, so in certain services it would be easier to monitor levels of performance and productivity. In respect of complaints, a small number had been received, with more being related to officer contact and support.

In response to a query from another Member as to whether the 20% target was being monitored and if officers would be challenged should they not meet the required level, the Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised that managers had been given the discretion to monitor this, with a decision being taken at corporately not to put formal requirements in place. The aim of the trial was to see how arrangements worked across the Council and what most suited individual services.

Another Member considered that people worked best when trusted to do so, and therefore raised concerns that increased levels of performance monitoring would harm productivity rates.

A Member commented that performance and productivity levels should be monitored but noted hybrid working should be adopted in the long-term as it was convenient for staff and could lead to financial savings for residents.

Another Member queried if checks had been made on the carbon footprint impact of home working, given that not all employees were working in the same building as had been the case pre-pandemic. The Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised this had not been reviewed as a specific piece of work but could be factored into future staff surveys and the business case for the new civic hub. Thoughts had also been raised about whether there would be increased attendance rates in the office over the coming months due to increased energy bills. A Member suggested this could also be asked in the next survey.

### **13. Work Programme Update**

The Head of Governance and Corporate Services advised that meetings of the 'Civic Hub Facilities' and 'Call Handling and Customer First Contact' task & finish groups would be set up as soon as possible.

The meeting closed at 7:37 p.m.

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**Chair**






### Priority Delivery Plan for 2022-23 - Progress Update

#### PRIORITY 4 - RESPONSIBLE COUNCIL “To be a modern, forward thinking and responsible Council”

##### Summary of Progress

			
Action completed	Work on Target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule
1	3	2	0

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
<b>Improve our customers' access to services</b>							
Develop a new customer portal to deliver better access to services online.	Procurement of new system		X			The procurement process is complete. The contract has been awarded. A project plan is being prepared for the implementation of the new system.	
<b>Enhance the use of technology and new ways of working</b>							
Update our digital technology strategy and plan future improvements.	Review of digital strategy and development of action plan				X	A new strategy for 2023-26 is currently being drafted for discussion and feedback; it is anticipated the first draft will be completed for feedback in December.	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
	Future improvements to be prioritised once a decision has been made regarding the shared services business case				X		
<b>Develop our workforce to ensure they are suitably skilled</b>							
Develop and deliver a workforce plan.	Over-arching framework for workforce plan to be developed.  Specific workstreams will be determined once a decision has been made regarding the shared services business case				X		
	Development and trial of hybrid working model		X			Hybrid working trial began in August and will run up to end January. Surveys of managers and employees will be undertaken to gauge progress during quarter 3.	
<b>Be a responsible Council that lives within its means and is accountable for its actions</b>							
Set a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce a draft MTFS for 2023-26 for Cabinet Briefing by end of September that aims to eliminate the use of reserves over the period. Final MTFS to Cabinet in January.</li> </ul>		X			A financial planning paper was presented to Cabinet Briefing in June, however the draft MTFS has been delayed and will be presented in Q3, followed by the final MTFS presented as planned in January.	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of the second stage of the business case for shared services. Further actions will depend on the decision taken by Council in December</li> </ul>			X			
<b>Make the best use of our assets</b>							
Undertake a corporate wide review of our assets and develop a new Asset Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asset and Property Strategy to be approved by Cabinet</li> </ul>	X				Asset Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 16 June.	★
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake a strategic review of the Council's non-HRA land and property assets</li> </ul>		X	X	X	Terms of reference for Corporate Asset Management Group have been developed and agreed; with first meeting to take place in October. Group will agree a work programme for the asset reviews.	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the business case to create a new Civic Hub in Cannock town centre as part of the Levelling Up Fund scheme.</li> </ul>		X	X	X	Initial discussions have taken place to understand the potential for partners to co-locate in a new Hub. The Council has commissioned architects to develop concept plans and designs for a new Hub and to develop an initial cost plan. Further work to be undertaken to refine the Council's requirements.	✓

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
<p>Identify opportunities for funding for green initiatives to improve energy efficiency of our buildings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an Energy Management Strategy</li> </ul>			X	X	<p>Pre-work complete - Asset Strategy agreed and AECOM baseline study now complete, which has had a knock-on delay to the development of the Energy Management Strategy.</p> <p>The strategy is now being developed over latter part Q3/ early Q4.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify `green` funding opportunities to support asset requirements</li> </ul>				X	<p>Funding opportunities require projects to be ready to go, however we don't have the projects prepared due to insufficient staffing resources.</p> <p>We also need the asset reviews to identify properties being retained for putting forward for green funding projects.</p>	

## Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2022/23 - as at end of Quarter 2

### KPIs for Priority 4 - Responsible Council “To be a modern, forward thinking and responsible Council”

Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Symbol	Comments
<b>Local Taxation and Benefits</b>							
Days taken to process new HB/CT Claims	20 days	15.7	14.5			★	
Days taken to process new HB/CT change of circumstances	9 days	7.5	5.7			★	
% of Council Tax collected annually	98% by year end	27.8%	54.1%			✘	Recovery action has been hindered by the team processing COVID-19 related reliefs and Council Tax energy rebates. It had been hoped to achieve around 55.7% in the first half year. The impact of increased cost of living and energy prices is likely to have an impact on collection rates in Q3 and Q4.
% National non-domestic rates (NNDR) collected	98% by year end	24%	56.6%			✔	Recovery action had been hindered due to the team processing COVID-19 grants and reliefs earlier in the year but collections have improved in the second quarter. If this improvement continues it is hoped to achieve the 98% target by the end of the year.

Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Symbol	Comments
<b>Land Charges Searches</b>							
Turnaround time for land charges searches (excluding personal searches) – average no. of working days	10 working days	14.85	24.15			✘	SCC responses to questions are taking longer to complete due to staff shortages which in turn delay CCDC completing a search
<b>Calls, Complaints and FOI requests</b>							
% of calls answered	94%	88.7%	85.1%			✘	Call answer rates for the contact centre are impacted by the speed with which calls can be transferred to relevant officers. Problems continue to be experienced in transferring calls due to technical issues and staff availability/ vacancies. This issue is monitored on an ongoing basis and discussions held with relevant service managers where appropriate.
Average call wait time	2 min	2.36min	3.08min			✘	As above
Complaints received and upheld:							
<u>Total stage 1 complaints</u>	N/A	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>			N/A	
<i>Upheld in full</i>		<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>				
<i>Upheld in part</i>		<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>				

Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Symbol	Comments
<u>Total stage 2 complaints</u>	N/A	3	3			N/A	
<i>Upheld in full</i>		0	1				
<i>Upheld in part</i>		1	2				
FOI requests within time i.e. 20 working days	85%	88%	91%			★	
<b>Finance</b>							
Percentage of invoices paid within 30 Days							Following implementation of the new financial management system, this reporting requirement is still being developed and is planned to be available for the Q4 reporting period.



## SCRUTINY REVIEW TEMPLATE

### REVIEW TITLE

Review of Customer Contact

### SCOPE OF THE REVIEW / TERMS OF REFERENCE

To look at the arrangements for customer service/contact.

The review will cover primarily the work of the following teams:

- Customer Services
- Housing Services
- Revenues & Benefits Service

### REASON FOR SCRUTINY

To ensure customers have access to a range of ways to contact the Council and are not digitally excluded

### MEMBERSHIP OF THE REVIEW GROUP

Chair – Cllr L Wilson

Cllrs M Hoare, T Johnson, PGC Jones, J Kraujalis, J McMahon, P Woodhead

### KEY TASKS / REVIEW PLAN

1. Review of call statistics, in person visitors (footfall), use of on-line forms / customer portals
2. Location for customer contact
3. Support given to customers to complete on-line forms etc
4. Discussions with Citizens Advice / Chase Advice Centre and other agencies who work with our customers e.g., support workers



## SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- Central call statistics from the telephony system, local records of customer contact
- Complaints about customer service

## TIMESCALE

1<sup>st</sup> meeting – scoping of review and background information re Customer Services and channels of contact (held 15 November 2022)

2<sup>nd</sup> meeting - presentations by Housing and Revenues & Benefits

3<sup>rd</sup> meeting - Citizens Advice/ Chase Advice Centre and other relevant agencies

4<sup>th</sup> meeting - discussion of findings and draft report



## Scrutiny Review Template

### Review Title

New Civic Hub facilities

### Scope of the Review / Terms of Reference

To review the requirements for a potential new Civic Hub building, including Civic space and member facilities.

The review will primarily examine the following:

- (i) Potential for partnership working to facilitate a new Civic Hub.
- (ii) Ambitions for the new building including design, functionality, energy efficiency.
- (iii) Principles for Civic space required within the building including Council Chamber, meeting rooms, members space and facilities.

The review will inform and input into the development of a strategic business case currently being prepared by officers to look at the feasibility of developing a new Civic Hub to complement the delivery of the Levelling Up Fund project in Cannock town centre.

### Reason(s) for Scrutiny

To ensure that members can input into the development of a business case for a new Civic Hub, which is identified as a priority project in the 2022-23 Priority Delivery Plan for 'Responsible Council'.

### Membership of the Review Group

Chair - Cllr J. McMahon

Cllrs L. Arduino, C. Frew, M. Hoare, P.G.C. Jones, J. Kraujalis, A. Muckley

### Key Tasks / Review Plan

- 1) Review current position regarding existing Civic Centre issues including cost of backlog maintenance and investment in energy efficiency.
- 2) Understand the opportunity created by the Levelling Up Fund town centre scheme and potentially other sites within the District.
- 3) Understand the current and future accommodation needs of the Council in light of changing working practices post Covid 19.
- 4) Review the opportunities for partnership working to facilitate a new Civic Hub.
- 5) Undertake site visits to other relevant Council offices to capture best practice and obtain ideas that could be applied to a new Civic Hub.
- 6) To identify how the Council could be more accessible to the public via a new Council Civic Hub
- 7) To identify options for member facilities within a new Civic Hub including Council Chamber, meetings rooms, group rooms and other amenities.
- 8) To feed in the outcome of this review to the Business Case that is currently being developed by officers.

### Sources of Evidence

Information to support the review to be provided by officers.  
Site visits to other Council buildings/offices will be arranged.

### Timescale

- (1) Inception meeting
- (2) Visit to South Staffordshire District Council offices (Codsall)
- (3) Visit to Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council offices
- (4) Discussion of findings and draft recommendations