

## **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee**

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### **1. Summary**

- 1.1. The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee is required by the Constitution to make an annual report to the Council, and this report builds on the regular Scrutiny reports to Council meetings. A selection of the topics covered by Scrutiny Members during the year is shown in Section 4 of this report.
- 1.2. The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee has discussed a number of strategic and operational issues through the year. The Committee contributed to the Medium Term Financial Plan process and as in previous years held themed meetings on community safety as well as workshop/training sessions.
- 1.3. The Committee has taken a keen interest in the Core Council Performance which monitors the Council's Change Programme and we have considered update and progress reports that covered a wide variety of the Council's business. We have indicated that we wish to continue to receive such reports and have offered to continue to hold afternoon sessions on our scheduled meeting dates to consider relevant reports.
- 1.4. We have used task and finish groups to further explore in depth topics outside of our scheduled Committee meetings and we have found this flexible approach to be productive and interesting.

### **2. Issues for consideration**

- 2.1. This report is for information.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1. The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee has 9 elected Members, appointed by Full Council in accordance with party political representation.
- 3.2. Members agreed their work programme would comprise items considered directly at Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee meetings plus other items considered or "commissioned" using flexible arrangements outside of the formal Committee structure.
- 3.3. Our Committee reviews its work programme at each meeting and Members have tried to select a broad range of topics that cover all aspects of the Council's work. During the year Members were reminded that:

- All Council Members are invited to attend meetings of the Scrutiny for Polices and Place Committee and to contribute freely on any agenda item;
- Any Member can propose a topic for inclusion on the Scrutiny Work Programme;
- Members may be asked by the Scrutiny for Polices and Place Committee to contribute information and evidence from their own division and from their own experience, and to participate in specific Scrutiny reviews.

#### **4. Work Programme**

- 4.1. During the year and already reported to Council, topics considered included:
- Medium Term Financial Plan;
  - Capital Investment Programme;
  - Core Council Programme update reports;
  - Connecting Devon and Somerset updates;
  - Highways projects updates;
  - Smart Office Programme and County Hall campus update reports;
  - Local Enterprise Partnership update;
  - CASA updates and Council ICT planning;
  - Regular Flood and Water Management updates.
- 4.2. Scrutiny Members have endeavoured through the last year of the Committee's meetings to make suggestions and express opinions to Commissioning/Service Directors and Cabinet Members after discussion and debate. The majority of these were accepted and incorporated either into the operations of the Council or the decisions of the Cabinet. The Committee wishes to formally place on record its appreciation to those Cabinet Members that have attended our meetings. This has often proved to be helpful both for the Committee and also the Cabinet Member and Lead Officer.
- 4.3. This Committee has also enjoyed a constructive relationship with our sister Scrutiny Committee (Policies and People) as both Committees have taken care in establishing our respective work programme of future items to avoid duplication and compliment each others work. All Scrutiny Committees considered the same reports on the Council's budget proposals but each Committee focuses its discussion to the proposals relevant to its own specific remit. To avoid duplication and ensure all Committee Members could contribute to the debates, we encourage all our Scrutiny colleagues to attend our meetings.
- 4.4. Since our last regular report to Council, we have held one meeting on 21 March. At our March meeting we considered a report on the achievements of the Heart of the Southwest Local Enterprise Partnership. We learnt that the Growth Deal agreements had enabled a significant number of Somerset priority infrastructure schemes, as identified in the Somerset Growth Plan, to be funded. This included local transport improvements in Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil, Further Education infrastructure at Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil and enterprise and innovation space at Bridgwater, Yeovil, Highbridge and Wiveliscombe to be funded. In addition investment covering a wider area through superfast broadband and mobile infrastructure and in the Somerset flood action plan had also been secured.

Our final report provided us with details and a further update on the progress made by the South West Heritage Trust since its formation in November 2014.

We heard that the collections care and acquisitions team had enjoyed notable achievements including having: the Frome Hoard being the centrepiece of an exhibition at the British Museum; and a review of the fine art collection had been completed, enabling a programme of conservation works to be agreed. It was also noted that a strong volunteer cohort remained central to the success of the SWHT and gave the equivalent of 3,147 working days over the last year.

We were heartened to hear of the progress made and the Committee accepted the report and congratulated Officers for providing a resilient future for the heritage service and so ensuring the economy and cultural life of Somerset's rich heritage was protected and made available for future generations.

## **5. Background papers**

### **5.1. Scrutiny Committee and Panel reports, outcomes and minutes.**