

Report of the Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place

Cabinet Member: N/A

Division and Local Member: All

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1. Summary

- 1.1.** The Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place is required by the Constitution to make an annual report to the Council and also to provide each other meeting of the Council with a summary progress report and outcomes of scrutiny. This is our first regular report of this new quadrennium and covers the work of our first 2 meetings held on 13 June and 4 July 2017.
- 1.2.** The Committee agreed their work programme would comprise items considered directly at meetings plus other items considered or “commissioned” using flexible arrangements outside of the formal committee structure.
- 1.3.** Members of the Council are reminded that:
 - all Members have been invited to attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committee and to contribute freely on any agenda item;
 - any Member could propose a topic for inclusion on the Committee’s Work Programme;
 - any Member could be asked by the Committee to contribute information and evidence, and to participate in specific scrutiny reviews.
- 1.4.** The Committee has 9 elected Members and we have meetings scheduled approximately for every month. Our next meeting will be held in the Luttrell Room at 10.00am on 5 September 2017.

2. Background

2.1. Scrutiny Work Programme

At each meeting the Committee considers and updates its work programme, having regard to the Cabinet’s forward plan of proposed key decisions. The Committee also agreed to hold themed meetings and Members are looking forward to this approach, in particular the attendance of representatives and/or stakeholders from partner agencies.

2.2. 13 June 2017

Our first meeting began with us hearing questions and statements from members of the public on the Highways England road improvement scheme and the A358 - M5 to Southfields Improvement Response to non-statutory consultation. The Chairman thanked the members of the public that spoke and others who were in attendance to observe and listen and he noted that the concerns and opinions they had expressed were no doubt shared by many people in the local area. We considered the report and received a presentation from the Strategic Commissioning Manager – Highways and Transport. It was explained that HE would be responsible for the design, delivery and operation of the route, and the

Council was a consultee only and the scheme if progressed would be consented through the Development Consent Order mechanism used for nationally significant infrastructure projects. The role of the Council was explained as was the process of the current non-statutory stage of consultation by HE that would be used to help inform choice of a preferred route. It was highlighted that those wishing to make representations about the route were encouraged to contact HE directly. The Chairman thanked all those for attending and contributing to agenda item 5 and sharing their views on this important project and he reminded the Committee that Highways England were consulting on this scheme, not the Council, and therefore that all consultation responses should go to Highways England. The Chairman also reminded those present that the Cabinet Member for Resources and Economic Development, who had spoken on agenda item 5, would be taking a non-key decision (scheduled for 22 June) and comments on the proposed scheme could also be submitted to him to help inform the Council's response on the options consultation. We accepted the update.

Next we received a presentation from the Strategic Commissioning Manager – Community Infrastructure and the Service Manager – Flood Risk Management who together provided an overview and an update on the role and work of the Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). It was noted at the outset that the structure of Flood and Water Management in England was complicated and a diagram was shown of the various local agencies and the roles they each played. The overall aim of the presentation was to highlight the various on-going works undertaken by the Council and in collaboration with others to make a positive difference to Flood risk management in Somerset. It was suggested that the work of the Somerset Rivers Authority be discussed at a future meeting and we accepted the update.

We then received a PowerPoint presentation from the Commercial and Business Services Director on the Council's overall ICT strategy. The main focus of the improvements was to work across 3 themes to increase productivity; resilience and compliance. The update was accepted.

We then had to consider nominating 2 Members for Joint Scrutiny work in Somerset and in respect of the Joint Scrutiny of the Somerset Rivers Authority the Committee agreed to nominate Cllr Ham and Cllr Wedderkopp. In respect of the Joint Scrutiny of the Somerset Waste Board the Committee agreed to nominate Cllr Lock and Cllr Lewis.

4 July

Our July meeting began with us considering a performance monitoring report that provided an overview of the Council's performance across the organisation. The Strategic Manager – Performance began by addressing comments made by the Chairman after he had spoken at the last Cabinet meeting to urge an improvement on the timeliness of the data and information contained in the performance reports. It was noted that one proposal was to send the Chairmen of the 3 Scrutiny Committees an earlier draft performance report prior to publication. We accepted the report and the Chairman sought and received assurances that Officers across the Council were effectively and regularly taking action to improve and manage the budget situation as the Committee remained concerned with the projected overspend and he repeated his frustration at the time delay in the information being reported.

We then received a received a thorough overview of the report from the Service Manager – Economy which explained that Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) was a local government-led partnership that worked to extend superfast broadband infrastructure in areas where commercial providers did not plan to

deliver a Next Generation Access (NGA) broadband service. We accepted and noted the report and the Chairman it was suggested that any Members with specific enquires regarding broadband in their area contact the Officers directly. We then had the benefit of a report and a presentation from the Devon and Somerset Trading Standard Service Manager outlining the performance of the service during 2016/17 and its operational plan for 2017/18. It was reported that the joint service has consistently exceeded its savings target since its creation in 2013 with no significant impact on service delivery. Savings for 2016/17 are on track currently. We welcomed the report and the Chairman commended the officers as this was a good example of collaborative working and showed the benefits of working with neighbouring authorities. We requested an update in 12 months.

Our attention then turned to considering a report and received a verbal overview from the Acting Strategic Manager – Registration and Scientific Services.

Members had the benefit of hearing an overview of the services provided and it was noted that service volumes continued to increase year on year. The service at the same time had continued to achieve a high level of performance, often exceeding regional and national attainment. There was a brief discussion about further expansion and Members heard that the next steps for the service would be to increase service provision by offering services to other authorities.

However, it would be important that the service was able to assure the quality of services currently provided before expanding. The Chairman thanked the officer for the update commended the transformation, congratulated all staff involved and it was agreed that the update was for 12 months

Our final agenda item was to provide us with an update on the County Plan Vision Projects progressed by the vision volunteers. By way of background it was explained that the projects came about following the publication of the County Plan in January 2016 which set out the visions for a University for Somerset, a Garden Town in the County, creation of new Business Parks and a push on Energy Initiatives. The Chairman thanked the Officer for the update and the update was accepted and it was agreed to receive a further update in six months

3. Consultations undertaken

- 3.1. The Committee invites all County Councillors to attend and contribute to every one of its meetings.

4. Implications

- 4.1. The Committee considers carefully, and often asks for further information about the implications as outlined in, the reports considered at its meetings.
- 4.2. For further details of the reports considered by the Committee please contact the author of this report.

5. Background papers

- 5.1. Further information about the Committee including dates of meetings in the new quadrennium, and agendas & reports from previous meetings are available via the Council's website. www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers