

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 second regular report of this new quadrennium and covers the work of the meetings held on 05 September, 03 October and 31 October 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 05 December 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. 05 September 2017

The first item on the agenda was Asset Rationalisation: A Refreshed Approach and County Farms Task & Finish Group. The Committee received a presentation from the Director, Commercial and Business Services and the Head of Corporate Property. The presentation detailed the background to asset disposal and explained the need for a new approach to asset rationalisation.

The Committee heard that the sale of assets had achieved in excess of £33m in capital receipts during the last five financial years. The bulk of this has been

used to support the capital programme, although it can also be used to support transformation.

As part of the refreshed approach, all property assets would be reviewed to determine the business case for disposal, commercial use or strategic retention on a case by case basis through existing decision making structures.

The Head of Corporate Property outlined the principles and benefits of asset rationalisation and shared the short, medium and long-term strategy including a 30 month target of achieving £20m in capital receipts.

In addition, it is proposed to set up a Task & Finish Group to review the sale of county farms. The Committee heard that the previous policy on county farms from 2010 identified a number of holdings retained for future sale because of future development potential. It is the right time to consider this list alongside all other holdings when assessing the options for disposal or retention.

During the debate, it was confirmed that the £33m raised in capital receipts related solely to the sale of property and land.

A Member sought assurance that individual services will be involved with the review and that revenue will also be considered.

Concern was expressed over transparency as there seemed to be a lack of consistency in how the policy has been applied previously, for example, when advantageous rental rates have been granted. It was clarified that the new approach sought to improve accounting transparency by bringing all payments and receipts through a central point, improving visibility and cost control and that reference to transparency within the report did not relate to transparency in terms of freedom of information.

A Member stated that farming is a core industry in this county and needed to be a key consideration of the Council. Concern was raised over selling assets too cheaply in a rush to achieve capital receipt targets. Members were reassured that if it is in the financial interests of the Council to hold assets it will do so.

The Committee debated at length whether the sale of any county farms should be deferred whilst the Task & Finish Group carried out its review. One Member stated that in some cases it would be in the interests of the county to proceed with planned sales. It was confirmed that the council would continue to follow the existing policy using the usual decision-making process until such time as a new policy was agreed.

Following confirmation that the recommendations contained in 2.1 of the report did not relate to county farm land, the Committee agreed to all four recommendations.

The Committee agreed to the recommendations contained in 2.2 of the report with the addition to 2.2.1 that the Task & finish Group should include a review of the rationale and purpose of retaining county farms.

A Member proposed a recommendation that 'all further discussions and sales of county farm lands are suspended until the Task & Finish Group have made their recommendations except by exception and after either the Task & Finish Group

or the Scrutiny Committee have been consulted'. The proposal was seconded and carried following a vote.

The following Members volunteered to form the county farm Task & Finish Group: Cllr Ham, Cllr Napper, Cllr Filmer, Cllr John Hunt and Cllr Wedderkopp. The Chairman stated that the Task & Finish Group review would need to be a short, sharp, in-depth process carried out in a timely manner to prevent unnecessary delay.

The Committee noted the report and asked for a verbal update from the Task & Finish Group at the next committee meeting.

We then received a report from the Strategic Commissioning Manager, Highways and Transport which updated members on strategic roads investment in the county.

Members were informed that funding for strategic roads improvements comes from a number of sources and a number of new funds have emerged since the last update.

The report highlighted that following a consultation on the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester, the preferred route is expected to be announced later this year. There will also be a further supplementary consultation on a section of the A303 following representations made to Highways England including by Somerset County Council.

The Strategic Manager highlighted the Department for Transport proposals for a Major Road Network and explained that this would be good news for the county. A further update will be provided when more detail is available.

The Committee heard that the council received £3.859m from the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) following the application of a funding formula. The indicative funding allocations for this fund were outline din the report. A further tranche of NPIF funding has been announced for 2018/19 and 2019/20 to be allocated by competitive funding bids.

A Member questioned whether there was any further update on the A358 scheme as the local community are very keen to receive an announcement. It was confirmed that more detail should be available following a meeting with Highways England next week.

It was clarified that improvement schemes have to be linked to the criteria for funding which in turn dictates the major schemes funding.

A Member queried whether there was any indication of which funds would be oversubscribed and it was confirmed that The Housing Infrastructure Fund is likely to be very competitive and marginal funding bids may well be more successful.

The Committee noted the report.

Next we received a report from the Parking Services Manager which included progress made within parking services and introduced the revised policy for the introduction of resident parking.

Members were made aware that since June 2012, the County Council has been responsible for on street parking enforcement across the entire county (apart from the M5, the A303 and private roads). The Committee were updated about the changes to service delivery since June 2012 and heard that the service has been able to benefit from increased efficiency and greater accountability.

The Committee heard that the service is now using the customer contact centre and print to post facility successfully. It has increased the number of officers based in County Hall carrying out back office processing and providing operational and strategic guidance to the contractor. These changes to back office processing have been generally well-received by residents. The service has also increased its on-line services. Parking permits can now be managed on-line bringing it in-line with the DVLA and ensuring that permits are immediately up to date.

The Committee then heard that the new residents parking policy is due to be considered by Cabinet in October. The revised policy aims to streamline the process and ensure residents who may be affected by any scheme are fully aware of the features and benefits of a resident parking scheme. It will help to identify and prioritise schemes requested by residents to ensure they are supported and viable.

The initial request for a resident parking scheme must demonstrate that 60% of the residents support the change. A Member queried whether it was in fact 60% of residents that respond which could result in a scheme going ahead with as little as around 30% of residents in favour. It was clarified that if a resident makes no response to a proposal it is seen as consenting as long as the proposal has been sufficiently advertised. It was also clarified that the 60% relates to households with one vote per house. A Member commented that some communities are put off by the 60% rate and are reluctant to canvass residents to gain support. Whilst this is understood by the service, it is important that there is some level of consensus achieved to avoid community disputes.

Members commented that more enforcement is needed out of hours, particularly in the evenings and that the mobility of enforcement officers needed to be addressed. It was explained that enforcement officers do have access to vehicles and that where necessary enforcement will take place in the evening.

It was confirmed that Area Traffic Engineers should be contacted to discuss making changes to parking time limits.

Members questioned whether the service is cost neutral. It was confirmed that the service currently has a surplus which is used towards other traffic management services. Members questioned how the use of surplus is scrutinised and were informed that any surplus is ring-fenced within operational services. An update on the use of surplus could be provided at a future meeting.

It was confirmed that when the on-line reporting process is used this is passed to the relevant traffic manager or to the enforcement team depending on the nature of the report.

The Committee noted the report and asked for an update in six months time to include data on the use of surplus.

The Committee then received a presentation from the Interim Director, Economic & Community Infrastructure Operations and was joined by the Business Director, Skanska regarding the new Highways Terms Maintenance Contract.

The Committee heard that the letting of the new contract is due to be considered by Cabinet on 18th October. The presentation updated members as to the reasons for letting a new contract and the financial and non-financial benefits of doing so. The total cost of the new contract is estimated to be lower than extending the previous contract and re-procuring in 2020. The contract will provide for increased integration and collaborative working.

The new contract includes 23 key Performance Indicators and 28 Quality Undertakings which aim to ensure good performance, added value and reduced costs and these are all contractually binding. The development of a Community Engagement & Social Value Plan is embedded within the contract. This has been submitted by the contractor and is currently being considered by the Council.

Members questioned whether revisits are made to inspect surfaces that have been disturbed by utility companies. It was confirmed that the Council inspects both the contractor and utilities work and if the standard or notices about work are not up to standard then action is taken. Members were encouraged to report any incidences if they were made aware of them.

Members commented that more work could be done to work with Parish Councils and volunteers. The difficulty in applying for speed indicators and finger posts was raised as an example of this. Concerns were also raised about signs becoming covered by overgrowth. It was clarified that the Council is working with the contractor to use their expertise to improve these issues. After an initial challenge, the finger posts are working well. The contract contains a commitment to work with local communities and improve this. Members were asked to report any verge cutting issues and informed that it can be possible for local communities to either purchase additional services or to take on services themselves. Members commented that it is important to keep Parish Councils informed and a Member suggested that it would be useful to provide a report to Parish council to suggest things that they could consider and signpost them to the relevant contact. It was confirmed that a Community and Member briefing sheet was currently being written and would be sent shortly.

It was clarified that more collaboration with Devon County Council could be possible as both authorities are using the same contractor. Collaboration will increase as the contract is embedded and a possible area to look at in the future may be the Winter Salting Programme.

It was clarified that the Council is statutory bound to present diversion routes which are suitable for all vehicles. This may result in routes which are longer. Multiple diversions are sometimes required when significant works are taking place in one area but this is planned for as best as possible.

Members were encouraged to report if roadwork signage is not removed or if road lines need to be re-painted and were reassured that the choice of asphalt recipe is well considered to ensure both cost effectiveness and cohesion with neighbouring counties.

The Committee noted the report and asked for an update in March or April after the winter period.

Finally, the Committee received a report and presentation from the Service Manager, Transport Data & Road Safety which detailed the new approach to the Somerset Road Safety Strategy.

The Committee heard that the current Road Safety Strategy was launched in 2013 and it is now appropriate to review it and develop a new approach. Previous road safety work has been successful in reducing the numbers of people killed and injured on the roads of Somerset, however nationally and locally there is evidence that the impact of current road safety initiatives on road casualties is starting to plateau and the pace of reduction is slowing down.

In April 2013, under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, statutory duties for public health were conferred on local authorities; they were made responsible for improving the health of their local population and for public health services. The Public Health Outcomes Framework has several indicators relevant to road safety.

At a stakeholder strategy review meeting in March it was agreed that it was an appropriate time for Somerset to develop a new road safety strategy that adopts a wider-agency approach while continuing to promote evidence based approaches to road safety, health and wellbeing.

The Road Safety, Highways and Transport Commissioning and Public Health Teams are working together with other parts of the County Council, and appropriate external bodies, to explore how this vision could be applied and achieved in Somerset through the development of a cross-directorate road safety strategy.

The strategy is being developed in consultation with internal and external stakeholders. A Somerset County Council strategy steering group was formed with area specific sub-groups to develop the detail of the strategy action plan, and delivery through an Action/Delivery Plan and a Transition document. The strategy embraces work with many partners such as Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, South-west Ambulance Service Trust, Advanced Motoring Groups, and Highways England in seeking to have a maximum impact on reducing the numbers of people killed and seriously injured on Somerset's road network.

It is anticipated that the draft Strategy will be finalised and consulted on in November 2017.

Members were informed that the service runs a number of exhibitions to raise awareness of road safety. It is planned to showcase these to Members in the future and Members are encouraged to contact the service if they are aware of a local event that the service could attend.

The Committee commented that it is clear that this is a strategy which cannot be delivered in isolation. It noted the report and asked to be kept updated as the Strategy develops.

03 October 2017

This meeting began with us considering the Corporate Performance Monitoring Report Q1 (+1) 2017/18. Members were reminded that this was the first performance report using the refreshed metrics and that quarter 1 plus 1 month data had been provided in order to give as up to date information as possible to the Committee. The report summarised that overall performance is stable with three red segments (P1, P3, C4), one segment with a declining performance (P2) and four segments with improving performance (P1, P3, P5, C1).

The Committee discussed those segments which fell under the Committee's remit. They agreed to discuss the projected overspend of £10.054m when it was covered in more detail under Item 6. They queried plans for the significant rise in housing development linked with the development of a garden town, the development of A Block and how the Core Council programme feeds into the performance wheel.

The Committee noted the report.

We then considered the 2017/18 Revenue Budget Month 4. The Committee received a report from the Service Manager, Chief accountant which provided an update on the current Revenue Budget outturn position for the 2017/18 financial year based on the end of July (Month 4).

The Committee heard that the Authority's forecast shows a projected net overspend of £10.054m when compared to the Revenue Budget. This represents 3.22% of base budget. The majority of the overspend lies in the Children's Services budgets. Most other areas of the Council are within reasonable tolerance although some corporate and support budgets are under pressure

Last year, 2016/17, there was a year-end overspend of £7.049m, with the main areas of overspend in Adults and Children's services. The demands upon these services have not reduced in the early part of this financial year and are not likely to over the course of the year. The transformational work under way to improve demand management and simultaneously improve outcomes for vulnerable children and adults is well under way. The additional funding from government alongside the management action in adults is keeping this budget under control. There has been no additional funding for children services and management action is struggling to change patterns of expenditure.

SCC is therefore in a similar position to last year in trying to find mitigating actions across the whole Council as well as in those core care services to off-set the overspend while transformation takes place in line with our MTFP themes. The implication of this early forecast is that Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team will need to take some immediate actions to address the overspend projections. Given last year's position, there are already 5 high priority projects under way (all but one of which are affecting children's services budgets) to identify ways of reducing spending and managing demand. These are having some success in reducing overspend and delivering MTFP savings but are projects that in some cases span last year, this year and next before coming to fruition.

The Committee then considered the forecast overspend in individual budget areas particularly children's services and aged debt analysis. They also

considered the progress of the 2017/18 MTFP savings proposals. The Committee heard that 63% of savings will be delivered as predicted, 7% of savings have been classified as an amber risk meaning delivery is unsure and 30% are no longer deliverable in 2017/18.

The Committee discussed the aged debt, the demand on children's services and the 30% of savings that are no longer deliverable.

The Committee noted the report.

Our attention then turned to considering a presentation from the Strategic Commissioning Manager (Community Infrastructure) and the Service Manager, Flood Risk Management. The presentation provided an update on the Lead Local Flood Risk Management Service (LFRMS), the Bridgwater Tidal barrier and the future of the service.

The Committee heard that the LFRMS has restructured all non-highway elements of flood risk management into one team and now has direct control and delivery of strategic objectives and schemes on the ground. The service will now prepare its programme and submit its Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) grant application for 2018/19. It's anticipated that this will be a smaller work programme which will allow the service to focus on the actions in the LFRMS and carry out studies focused on local flooding, its mechanisms and consequences. The committee were also updated on a planned Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) review and SuDS inspector service and the SPONGE2020 project. SPONGE2020 is an EU funded project aimed at encouraging urban areas to soak up more water. Following an innovative mapping approach to identify flood risk areas, this is initially being focused on Taunton but could be taken to other areas in Somerset.

The Committee were then updated on the proposed site for the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier and the proposed vertical lift gate. The estimated cost of the barrier has risen to £60-70m and it is hoped that construction will be completed by 2024. Full design, economic, cost and impact assessments will need to be prepared.

The service plans to carry out a review to deliver improvements to the service in future. The service aims to be less reactive and more strategic in its approach using a 3 year plan. This will include: working with other councils to make the most of SuDS on developments; ensuring a high profile in flood management through its partnerships; pioneering SuDS techniques and developing a high quality developer guide on SuDS for all planning authorities in Somerset to adopt and working with local communities and Members to further build knowledge of local flood issues.

The Committee discussed the need to take a holistic, whole-county approach to flood management, the enforcement of riparian rights, the importance of the upper catchments and the inspection of SuDS.

The Committee noted the report.

Next the Governance Manager provided an update on behalf of the Chair of the County Farms Task & Finish Group.

The Committee heard that the Group had met for the first time last week and that Cllr Philip Ham had been appointed as Chair. Further meeting dates had been set and the Group planned to submit its report to the Committee at its 05 December meeting. Outside stakeholders have been invited by the Group to attend the next meeting and there will be a further verbal update from the Group at the 31 October meeting.

The Committee noted the update.

Our final agenda item was to provide us with an update on the Library Service and its Proposed Strategy. The Committee received a report and presentation from the Director for Economic & Community Infrastructure Commissioning and the Strategic Manager, Community & Traded Services.

The Committee were updated on the progress and performance of the library service, the proposed strategic direction for the service over the next three years and a community engagement exercise that was recently commenced by the service.

The library service is currently performing well and has delivered a number of successful, innovative projects and initiatives which have gained national recognition. Responses from a customer satisfaction survey carried out in June/July 2017 indicate that customers value the service and are overwhelmingly positive about their experience. It has delivered over £1m of savings to date.

In order to put the service on a sustainable financial footing a long term strategy is required. It was outlined that the intention is to keep libraries open wherever possible. As part of looking at the future of the service over the next 3 years an investigation into alternative delivery models has been carried out. Only 4 library services in the country have externalised so there is a limited breadth of evidence to refer to. The service has concluded that it cannot recommend externalising at this time. It would be more appropriate to revisit this in 3 years' time when more evidence will be available.

The Committee heard that the proposed future strategy for the service will have 4 main strands: continuing to deliver a thriving, modern service across a broad spectrum of outcomes; review the libraries network, review the frontline workforce and invest in technology. An informal community engagement process to review the library network has recently begun. This will be supported by a comprehensive needs assessment and an equalities impact assessment before a formal consultation takes place on specific proposals in December 2017 or January 2018. It is planned to bring a further update on this consultation to the Committee in February/March 2018 before a final decision is taken in March/April 2018.

The Committee commented that this was a positive report and commended the service on its performance. It commended the early engagement with the commitment with regard to the network review. The Committee discussed: staff morale; the importance of partnership working; how digital support services could be better promoted and the library's role in supporting lonely and isolated residents.

A proposal was made to set up a Task & Finish Group but it was felt that this would not be appropriate at this stage as the service is currently in the early stages of engagement and gathering information.

A proposal was made to support the conclusion not to pursue an alternative delivery model at this time. Instead we should give our support to the library service to use the 3 year period to develop its service whilst continuing to look at alternative models with a view to the future. This was seconded and carried unanimously following a vote.

The Committee noted the report.

31 October 2017

To begin the Committee received a report and presentation from the Strategic Commissioning Manager, Economy and Planning which updated Members on the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Productivity Strategy.

The Strategy has been prepared in partnership with district, county and unitary authorities, national parks and the HotSW Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), as well as with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), private and third sector partners and central government. It is an overarching strategy document that outlines key priorities and objectives for the HotSW. Specifically, it sets out the aim of narrowing the 'productivity gap' evident in the HotSW LEP area, driving up prosperity and living standards for all, and securing the resources needed to do so.

In short, the Productivity Strategy aims to double the net worth of the HotSW economy from approximately £35 billion to £70 billion of GVA by 2036. Its stated vision is 'for all parts of the HotSW to become more prosperous, enabling people to have a better quality of life and higher living standards'. The Productivity Strategy is structured around the three strategic objective areas of 'Leadership and Knowledge', 'Connectivity and Infrastructure', and 'Working and Learning'.

Productivity is the measure of competitiveness of an economy and provides a technical way to assess how an economy is fairing.

SCC and other partners and stakeholders are now being consulted on the final draft in advance of a 30th November 2017 deadline. There is also a series of public consultation events planned across the HotSW including one in Somerset on 22nd November 2017. SCC's response will be considered by cabinet on 15th Cabinet and the Strategy will receive final sign off by the Joint Committee and LEP Board in January 2018.

The Committee discussed the importance of connectivity especially transport and digital infrastructure, particularly with regard to building the rural economy. They discussed how the HotSW is ranked and compares with other areas and suggested using this measure to assess the progress of achievement against ambitions. They recognised the importance of having a flexible, over-arching strategy in place but stressed that the detail of its implementation was vital to ensure its success.

The Committee noted the report.

Next the Committee received a report from the Strategic Manager, Governance & Risk on the progress of the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Joint Committee. Members were first updated on the background of work carried out over the last two years by 19 Devon and Somerset authorities to seek a devolution deal for the area to bring down Government powers, functions and funding to improve productivity for the area. It was confirmed that a clear indication has been given that this could be achieved without the need for an elected mayor.

The HotSW agreed to establish a Joint Committee to progress its productivity strategy and put in place a formal mechanism to take forward negotiations with government on a range of policy agendas with a view to achieving additional benefits for the region. The Joint Committee model was designed to add additional benefit to the constituent authorities and it was stressed that this would not take powers away from the constituent authorities.

A series of recommendations required to establish the Joint Committee will now be taken through the constituent authorities over the autumn period via a template report to ensure consistency with a view to the Joint Committee being established by January 2018. These recommendations will be taken through SCC's Cabinet and Full Council in November 2017.

The template report will be accompanied by an 'Arrangements' document outlining the legal status, purpose, aims and objectives, membership and functions of the Committee. In summary the body established by this process will be a formal joint committee of the 17 councils and two National Park authorities. Each constituent authority will have one 'seat' on the Committee and it is anticipated that these will be filled by Council Leaders. The LEP and the CCGs will have non-voting representation.

The report also detailed the proposed list of functions for the Joint Committee and the draft figures for the Joint Committee budget.

The Committee discussed the challenge of aligning 19 different authorities and queried whether government funding and Committee budget figures would be sufficient.

The Committee noted the report.

Following this, the Committee received an introduction from the Leader of Council and a report from the Director, Customers and Communities regarding the draft County Vision 2018 -21

In previous Administrations, a detailed County Plan has been approved giving direction and strategic guidance to officers and politicians. It was felt that in some ways the County Plan process was trying to provide a detailed reference point for all the Council's services and with that scope had only a limited success.

The new approach for 2018-21 is to present a Vision instead of a Plan setting high level principles and direction of travel but flexible enough to adapt and change according to national government as well as local pressures and opportunities.

A presentation slide was shared with members which summarised the four key principles of the Vision.

The draft Vision will be shared with the public, partners and stakeholders to give outside bodies a chance to influence the final form. The finalised Vision will be taken to Full Council in February 2018.

The Committee questioned the relationship between the Vision and council policies and it was confirmed that policies would need to underpin the Vision. They discussed the timeframe for the Vision and suggested that a 'stepping stone' guidance be produced detailing how to achieve the aims of the Vision so that progress could be measured.

The Committee noted the report. It was agreed to circulate the presentation slides to the Committee.

Finally the Chair of the County Farms Task & Finish Group provided a verbal update of the progress of its review.

The Committee heard that the Group had gathered a lot of information at previous meetings which it was currently considering. The Group have consulted with stakeholders, including the National Farmers Union and the Tenant Farmers Association, and are currently considering their views.

The Group was due to meet again the following day when it would consider the views of existing county farm tenants. One further meeting would take place before the Group submitted its report and recommendations at the 05 December meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee.

The Committee noted the update.

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