

## **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 regular report covers the work of our meetings held on 22 May, 19 June and 10 July 2018.
- 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 11 September 2018.

### **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. 22 May 2018**

Firstly, the Committee received a report outlining the draft Council’s Draft Business Plan for 2018 which set out what the Council would aim to do over the coming year with its partners and communities to deliver the Council’s Vision in the most efficient way possible for Somerset’s taxpayers.

The Committee also benefited from a presentation of the Business Plan which showed how it would look ‘on-line’ as it would be web-based. It was noted that the Business Plan (attached to the report) was a ‘text’ version rather than a proposed design for a completed Plan.

It was explained that the Business Plan contains 4 'strategic outcomes' that translated the Council Vision. Beneath each strategic outcome were 4 key priorities for the Council and each priority was proposed to be delivered by a range of activities.

Members noted the Business Plan had been designed to provide information to the public, Councillors, partners and stakeholders on the business of the Council. Also it would be useful to staff in service planning, performance management and financial management. The interactive website would allow users to read the Plan but also 'click through' to additional information and resources, showing how priorities and activities link together and provide performance information. It was described as being the equivalent as a Wikipedia for Somerset.

There was a discussion of the report and the following points were made by the Committee:

All of Somerset be included in the Plan/Vision, both geographically and by community through engaging with all Parish/Town/Village Councils;

Consideration be given to ensuring Hubs were available for people to be able to access the Plan, such as Libraries;

Help be available to ensure that all Somerset residents who wished to could access the Plan 'on-line';

It was suggested that the draft website and its contents and navigation were reviewed by people not familiar with the Council to ensure it was user friendly;

Thought be given to listing/naming the Council's various partners, as there were numerous references in the Plan to 'partners';

It was suggested that thought be given to ensure the final Plan/Vision reflected appropriately the Council's parlous financial situation as this appeared toward the end of text version of the Plan.

Next the Committee considered a report which explained the current Passenger Transport Strategy was developed as part of the Local Transport Plan for Somerset (2011-2026) and known as the 'Future Transport Plan'. It was noted that the Plan had been developed to be a living document and updated and reviewed when needed.

The report, with the revised draft Passenger Transport Strategy 2018 to 2026, attached as Appendix A, asked for the Committee's views before the public consultation. Developed at a time of severe financial restraint and economic uncertainty, the draft strategy set out the issues that have influenced the present service and proposed an outline strategy for the future direction of service delivery.

It was explained that it would also provide guidance for developers and assist the Council in assessing various schemes and also be used to inform the Council's funding bids to Central Government, and other relevant funding opportunities and to inform conversations with government departments, operators and other stakeholders about the issues faced in Somerset. Also and importantly it would inform residents of Somerset of the strategic direction for public transport in Somerset.

There was a thorough discussion of the report, with Members making observations about the draft Plan and also asking question to which answers were provided. Cllr Munt asked about changes to Section 19 permits and the

possible impact on Mendip Community Transport and Cllr J Lock asked about the changes to bus subsidies and the level of services provided since 2009 and both were promised written responses.

The Committee accepted the draft report and suggested that it would be important for Officers to ensure that in development areas consideration be given to sustainable transport, particularly with regards to enabling communities to access education, employment and health settings. Members welcomed the draft Plan and noted the difficulties in a County with an aging population and limited resources to ensure a balance between reducing urban congestion and tackling issues related to rurality.

During the next item, the Committee received a very thorough presentation on the Highways Maintenance Contract that had come in to effect from 1 April 2017. It was noted that contract governance meetings were held every month to ensure good progress was maintained and the 23 key performance indicators and the 28 quality performance objectives were being achieved and delivered.

It was noted that over the first year of the contract the following milestones had been reached, through capital funding: Principal resurfacing - £2,700,000 - 35 schemes; Non-Princ - £2,200,000 – 85 schemes; Drainage Schemes - £1,700,000 – 69 schemes; Footway Schemes - £1,500,000 – 50 schemes; Earthworks – £300,000 – 11 schemes; Surface Dressing - £8,000,000; SRA Schemes £392,000; and, Surface Treatments - £250,000.

With regards to routine and environmental maintenance it was stated that the £351,000 planned verge cutting programme had been completed on schedule as had the planned noxious and invasive weed treatment and hedge trimming programmes. With regards to the £392,000 gully cleansing programme it was noted that the 66,000 plus gullies had been cleaned.

It was noted that the Winter Service had also had a higher than normal number of actions totalling 82 which was much higher than the long term average of 65, the previous year had seen only 52 actions. It was also noted, due to the prolonged period of cold weather experienced in Somerset that overall salt usage had exceeded 10,000 tonnes compared the stockpile of 6,850 tonnes.

The Committee responded to the presentation and during the discussion a number of Points were made, issues raised and/or questions asked/answered including: the use of Twitter to provide updates, particularly during the period of bad weather was welcomed and praised; the social value plan and the care leavers programme were also praised and welcomed and it was noted that there potential permanent placements at the end of the programme; the website was praised for the efficient way it allowed for potholes to be reported as was the subsequent swift response to those requests, it was noted that the Somerset River Authority had requested more frequent maintenance work and had paid for this to be completed at the mid-point of the annual work programmed; there would be a reviewed undertaken over the summer months to review the Winter Service so any learning could be used to inform and improve the service provided next year.

The update was accepted and it was suggested that work continue with farmers and those in rural areas to help build on the good relationships.

The Committee then received a report that provided an update on the insourcing of the back office notice processing and associated services, an update on the extension of the Enforcement Services contract with NSL, an update on the Parking Services Budget, an update following the introduction of the revised resident parking policy, and also future initiatives.

It was reported that the parking contract that commenced in June 2012 for an initial period of 5 years to June 2017 contained options for extensions and due to the performance of the appointed contractor NSL, negotiations concluded with an agreement to extend the contract for a further two years. It was noted that the negotiations had resulted in a number of key outcomes: relocation of the Taunton operational base to Taunton library; the agreement of a discounted sum in respect of amortised the original set up costs incurred by NSL; an increase in the level enforcement to improve coverage across the County; and, the recruitment of home deployed civil enforcement officers.

In response to a question it was stated that overall the home deployment had been considered a success and this innovation has been recognised by being shortlisted in the Parking Innovation category of the British Parking Awards 2018. The home deployed CEO's and an increase in annual hours of deployment had resulted in improved coverage across the County with activity remaining in line with expectations.

There was a discussion about the insourcing of back office processing and this had delivered a number of benefits to customers, members of the public and residents. It was noted that although the average length of telephone calls had increased the service provided had improved as had correspondence; whilst the total number of penalties (including bus gates) had increased the trend for correspondence in relation to correspondence levels has decreased. Regular checks of correspondence had identified the standard of correspondence to be at the required level and in accordance with the published guidelines.

It was reported that legislation required that all income was to be used for parking related activities and that any surplus not required for such matters could only be used for traffic or transport related initiatives. The surplus in respect of 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 had been allocated towards traffic management initiatives and reinvested into the service. It was noted that the overall NSL contract cost had not reduced on a "like for like" basis as the extension discussions had agreed the overall level of chargeable enforcement (circa 7,000) would be increased, also the additional enforcement expenditure had been offset by increased revenues during the financial year 2017/2018.

It was stated that following the publication of the revised resident parking policy a number of requests had been received both direct from residents and with consultation with Members and the revised procedures were working smoothly. The update and report were accepted.

### **19 June 2018**

Our June meeting began by the Committee considering a report which provided an update on the Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) Broadband Programme.

The report highlighted that Phase 1 of the Programme has concluded and slightly exceeded its targets. Construction for the Phase 2 Extension Programme for

Exmoor and Dartmoor has now been completed and the number of premises able to connect is expected to meet the contractual targets.

Members were informed that the procurement for the Phase 2 SEP contract is progressing following a delay caused by the receipt of additional funding. There have been other difficulties with the mobilisation of this contract such as the compulsory liquidation of the construction company Carillion, however, additional resource has now been sourced.

The voucher scheme is currently paused whilst changes to contracts are implemented and it is anticipated that this scheme will re-open over the summer.

Whilst there has been significant investment in broadband services there are still premises that do not have a satisfactory broadband service. These premises are generally the more remote and difficult to reach given current technology constraints. Further funding will be required, both capital to build the infrastructure and revenue to pay for technical, project management and officer support. The service is currently lobbying to secure additional funding but also seeking to work with commercial and community partners to find alternative solutions.

The Committee discussed: problems with accessing information; whether it is realistic to expect broadband to be a universal service; the importance of broadband service to rural businesses and residents; and alternative rural solutions such as satellite.

The Committee noted the report.

Next the Committee received a report and presentation which provided an update on the South West Heritage Trust following its third year of operation.

The report highlights the successful delivery of Agreed Activities specified within the Grant Agreement to ensure that Somerset's rich heritage is better protected, celebrated and made available as well as demonstrating financial savings to Somerset County Council.

The Chief Executive of the Trust highlighted that the organisation depends on a large number of volunteers to make the service possible. The Trust is a contemporary organisation that looks to the past to inspire the future and continually strives to ensure that young people engage with its provision.

The Committee discussed: decreasing number of children attending events; future funding; the future plans for Castle Green in Taunton and the recent purchase of the Roman Lead Ingot.

The Committee noted the report.

Following this, the Committee received a report which outlined the actual expenditure (or Outturn) compared with the Revenue Budget for the 2017/18 year, and the consequent effect on the Council's levels of reserves. The report also detailed under or overspend at each service level, individual schools and early years providers balances and the current debt position by service area.

The Authority's outturn shows an overspend of £2.180m when compared to the Revenue Budget which represents 0.70% of budget. In itself this is a significant achievement given the pressures on budgets and the known specific pressure within Children's Social Care. The majority of Council services have, therefore, either stayed within budget or delivered an underspend. However, the large variance in one area (Children's Services) is clearly a key concern and the Peer Review work highlighted what is a number one priority for the Council in addressing the current and future budgets for Children's Social Care. The Council as a whole is focussed on identifying, with the Local Government Association's assistance, the appropriate level of budget for the service at the same time as analysing where we can reduce costs safely.

The Council is working with external support from consultants to assess what the base budget for Children's Services should be.

The Committee discussed: levels of reserves; aged debt; school transport legislation; a new budget for children's services; 3<sup>rd</sup> part spending; and the freezing and deleting of job posts.

The Chair thanked the Director of Finance and Performance for all of his hard work and support for the Committee and wished him success for the future. The Committee noted the report.

Next the Committee considered a report which provided an update on performance across the organisation.

The report summarised that there is one red segment (C4) and one segment with a declining performance (C1). 50% of objectives are green, 42% are amber and 8% are red. The report was presented to Cabinet on 12 February 2018.

The Committee discussed those segments which fell under the Committee's remit. Regarding C1, the Committee were informed that the Contact Centre had previously operated under a corporate commercial process with matching KPI's. The Contact Centre has been transformed to operate in a very different way and these KPI's are now incompatible resulting in the service being judged to be declining in performance. A new set of suitable performance indicators covering quality, satisfaction and timeliness of delivery will be introduced for the new reporting period.

Changes to the blue badge application system were clarified and the Committee noted that that future reports will be presented in a new format which should enable more timely reporting of performance.

The Committee noted the report.

The Committee then considered a report which outlined a proposal for public consultation of a draft Air Quality Strategy for Somerset.

The Strategy has been drafted by the multi-agency Somerset Air Quality Steering Group which includes all five district councils as well as SCC. The document identifies traffic pollution as the only major air quality concern in the county, and in particular in major urban areas. It proposes several measures to address this concern in the context of the current resource constrained environment including:

- Develop a Somerset Air Quality website as a high-quality resource providing information and guidance to all interested parties on addressing air quality, including the public, fleet operators, employers, public authorities, developers, transport operators and the media. The intention here is to provide an authoritative information resource, utilising links to existing third-party websites as much as possible, so as not to duplicate effort.
- Application of EPUK guidance “Land Use and Development Control: Planning for Air Quality” consistently in relation to large developments and cumulative impact. The intention here is to provide consistency in approach across the county, providing a degree of certainty for both planners and developers as to when air quality impact assessments will be required.
- Consider using financial, procurement, and regulatory mechanisms to encourage and enable transition to less polluting vehicle types across all fleets and for employees. This recommendation recognises the need to use business-as-usual mechanisms as an opportunity to influence vehicle choice and fleet composition.
- Bring forward proposals for monitoring PM<sub>2.5</sub>\* particle (black carbon) pollution, in order to gain an understanding of where this is problematic in the county. There is a poor understanding of fine particle pollution due to a lack of monitoring to date. The equipment required is not expected to cost more than £5,000 between the partners, if approved. (\*PM<sub>2.5</sub> is a technical term for very fine particles that can pass from the air breathed into the bloodstream, sometimes called black carbon. These particles can be carried deep into the lungs where they can cause inflammation and a worsening of heart and lung diseases).

It was confirmed that all other areas of Somerset are well below the legal limits and it was clarified that issues such as wood dust, lorry movements and food smells from factories are not covered by the Strategy. Instead these are local nuisance issues that should be addressed through District Councils and the environment Agency.

The Committee discussed: the impact of traffic flow; the need to provide the infrastructure to support zero emissions vehicles; the impact of wood burning stoves.

The Committee noted the report and supported the proposal to commence a public consultation. They recommended that further explanation was added to make it clear that the Air Quality Strategy does not cover issues such as wood dust and food smells.

Finally, the Committee considered a report which provided an update of the Council’s disposal programme to include the sales of parts of the County Farm Estate.

Property disposals in the last financial year amounted to capital receipts of approximately £7.7M. In the last 10 years the Estates team have raised £72M in capital receipts. Once a property is identified as surplus, consideration will be given to the best mode of sale. Many disposals are dealt with each year ranging from relatively simple sales of land to highly complicated developments. Each

disposal is considered to achieve best consideration in the light of market factors. The preferred method of sale is by auction as this sets the time parameters and the basis of which we are prepared to sell. However, there are some properties that are not suited to auction, perhaps because we have identified a special purchaser in which case we would conclude a sale by negotiation/private treaty. It was confirmed that where sales take place via auction, local searches are carried out in advance.

Members heard that SCC have every little investment properties and property rentals are usually from those providing a commissioned service. It was clarified that a list of Council owned assets is available on the SCC website.

It was confirmed that discounted sales have only been granted to tenants with a Farm Tenancy Agreement in place and the maximum discount is 20%. With regard to permitted development rights, it was clarified that SCC aims to ensure it captures any rise in value usually through the use of covenants.

Following a vote, the Committee passed a motion to move into confidential session to discuss Appendix B.

The Committee noted the report.

### **10 July 2018**

At the time of the publication of this report, the Committee were due to consider the following items at its 10 July meeting: Library Service Consultation update; Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership Joint Scrutiny Committee; Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards Service update; Planning Control Service Improvement Plan; Registration Service 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](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers)

**Note:** For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.