

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 Summary report covers the work of the meetings held on 11 September, 24 October and 13 November 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 Taunton Library Meeting Room at 10.00am on 11 December 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. 11 September 2018

This meeting focused on the 2018/19 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report. The Committee considered the financial pressures faced by the Council and the reasons for the savings proposals put forward. Members heard that the budget was under significant pressure and that reserves are not adequate to support the overspend.

During the debate Members discussed: the use of capital receipts for transformation and capital loans interest payments; confidence in delivering the proposals; levels of reserves; negative earmarked reserves including the reserve for the transfer of the Learning Disability contract.

The Committee then agreed to consider the savings proposals by service area

using the summary in Appendix C1 as a guide.

During the debate on Adults Social Care service proposals Members discussed: the use of the Better Care Fund to support the Discovery negative earmarked reserve; whether the proposal for unpaid leave was fair or achievable; the level of progress with the Discovery contract and what action would be taken if savings were not realised; concern that cuts to Citizens Advice services would create further problems and expense in the future and what support would be given to source funding from other public bodies.

The Committee then agreed the following recommendation:

1. Proposed by Cllr L Leyshon, seconded by Cllr John Hunt

In relation to ASC 03, the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee recommends that the Cabinet considers the possibility of a stepped decrease in funding for Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) services to allow the opportunity for the CAB to undertake their own transformation.

During the debate on Children's Services proposals Members discussed: publication of the People2 report; the impact of the proposals on those most in need; whether cost will be a consideration in placing a child; the need to consult with service users and providers to make the right decision (particularly with regard to early help services, early years activity and young carers); concern that cuts to Get Set services were based on inaccurate data; concern over cuts to young carer services; concern that a reduction in preventative services will result in more children requiring care; concern over support being withdrawn for youth services.

The Committee then agreed the following recommendation:

2. Proposed by Cllr M Lewis, seconded by Cllr John Hunt

With regard to CAF 20, The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee recommends that the Cabinet reconsiders the Young Carers element of the savings proposals until a robust business case has been developed and put forward.

During the debate on Corporate Services proposals Members discussed: the reduction in resource in the commercial and procurement team; sought clarification on the reduced contribution to reserves; sought clarification on the reduced spend by the Chair of Council.

During the debate on Economic & Community Infrastructure proposals Members discussed: the future arrangements for the Park and Ride services; changes to salting and the provision of salt to rural communities; concerns were raised over reductions to jetting services, flood prevention measures and building maintenance; the importance of considering parish council precepting timetables when consulting.

24 October 2018

This meeting began with us considering the Library Service Re-design Recommendations which outlined proposals to change the way that library services are provided.

The Committee considered the list of Libraries (19) that would continue to be operated by the County Council and the 15 libraries where it was proposed to establish a Community Library Partnership with the local community. An explanation was provided of the various types of delivery models for the library service in Somerset.

It was noted that libraries were valued by communities and individuals and recognised for their role in helping to reduce loneliness and social isolation, whilst also attracting younger people to start reading and allowing public internet access and other IT facilities. Officers had made the proposals reflecting changes to population, social need and usage whilst taking care to try to ensure maximum reasonable access.

The Committee noted that a major public and staff consultation exercise was carried out between 29 January and 13 June 2018. A wide range of stakeholder groups were consulted and provided feedback; focus groups were held with children and disabled people; and members of the public and staff provided feedback through separate survey questionnaires. It was reported that over 7000 people and organisations had provided feedback, which had been carefully analysed and thoroughly considered.

During the debate Members discussed: preference of CLP's over mobile/outreach solutions; acknowledged the strong public opposition to changes to library services; measures used to assess 'reasonable access'; the process for expressing and interest in a CLP and the timetable for this and acknowledged the thoroughness of the public consultation.

The Committee agreed to accept the recommendations in the report to Cabinet. In addition to accepting the proposals the Committee agreed 3 additional recommendations:

- a) To ask Officers to revisit the Risk No 4 (page 36) so it might better reflect the various concerns identified regarding possible impacts to the timescale of the Libraries Service Redesign arising from challenges;
- b) To ask Officers to identify where Community Library Partnerships are proposed that a list of partners, including a lead partner, is compiled and presented to the Committee's meeting on 11 December;
- c) To ask Officers to compile a list of the communities where a Community Library Partnership is not possible and to present that list to the Committee's meeting on 11 December.

Next the Committee considered 2018/19 Revenue Budget Monitoring update which presented the projected revenue outturn for 2018/19 based upon actual spending to the end of August 2018. The figures reflected the proposals for change agreed by the Cabinet in September 2018 to be delivered within this financial year.

The Interim Head of Finance noted that the resultant projected outturn was £3.320m over the available budget, while the contingency of £3.400m remained uncommitted at this time. In summary this meant that, should the contingency not be drawn upon, the budget would be balanced overall.

There was a brief discussion and it was confirmed that the figures had applied £8.563m of proposals for change that were agreed last September. The Committee noted that this sum had been reduced for any proposals currently reasonably assessed as “at risk of non-delivery”, but all other proposals were assumed to be deliverable at the maximum possible amount. The Committee agreed to accept the report.

Then the Committee considered the Initial Assessment and Proposed Approach to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2019/20. This report provided details of the initial assessment of the likely gap between budget requirement and funding sources for the years 2019/20 to 2021/22. It was also explained that all identified savings targets had been re-examined for achievability.

It was reported that the initial assessment of the funding gap for 2019/20 was estimated at £19m, which implied that proposals for change of at least that amount will need to be prepared over the autumn period and for consideration and subsequent approvals in early 2019. It was noted that the Children’s Services budget would be ‘reset’ to better ensure the base budget reflected the increasing demands being made on services.

Looking further ahead to subsequent years the initial assessments indicated further gaps of £7m and £2m, although it was noted that additional work would be required to validate those figures and they were likely to vary due to national funding arrangements being unknown.

There was a brief discussion of the report and it was confirmed that in compiling the figures it had been assumed that business rate element would remain the same and council tax would again increase by the maximum amount before a referendum was required. It was explained in response to a question that some of the savings identified in earlier years, for delivery either before or in 2019/20, would not be successfully delivered. This had led to nearly £7.4m of savings being reversed: £5.8m generally and £1.6m in regard of procurement savings.

In addition, the report also highlighted a Cabinet recommendation to Council to expand the capital investment programme to allow for the purchase of waste vehicles for the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) as a better value for money option than requiring the private sector to provide the vehicles. It was reported that the SWP was currently tendering for ‘Recycle More’ – a new method of waste collection that would result in additional materials being collected at kerbside. It was envisaged that this would commence roll-out across the County from April 2020.

As part of the new service would be a requirement for new replacement vehicles, equipment and potentially depots (the recycling fleet is nearing the end of its life in any event). The potential outlay could be £25m. It was explained that most tenderers were interested in an arrangement whereby all the Councils within the Waste Partnership fund the vehicles through Public Works Loan Board borrowing, in return for a discount to the contract price, as a similar arrangement was already in place with the existing collection contractor.

In response to a question it was stated that provided that the contract discount

offered was sufficient to cover the costs of borrowing and other details the arrangement would offer a relatively safe and almost immediate financial benefit to all Councils willing to borrow.

It was noted that update reports on the development of the MTFP would be presented to each meeting of the Cabinet through the period until the Full Council meeting in February 2019 and in addition that the various Scrutiny Committees would also be kept updated. The report was accepted.

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the Single Use Plastic Strategy and the SCC Annual Feedback Report to a future meeting.

13 November 2018

To begin the Committee considered the 2018/19 Revenue Budget Monitoring update which highlighted that good delivery against the overspend had been achieved, bring the projected overspend down to around £3.1m. As reported at the October meeting, it was anticipated that decisions due to be taken by the Somerset Waste Board would bring this figure down further.

An update on the pressures on spending in Children's Services was also provided. The Committee were informed that this is a national issue and were reassured that a number of management actions were monitoring this and bringing spending back in line.

During the debate Members discussed: the direction of the Council towards providing statutory services only; the process for foster carer approvals and advertising campaigns for this; new Ofsted inspection visits; the effects of recent Government budget announcements; school transport overspend and issues associated with this and the balance between permanent and locum social workers.

The Committee noted the report and agreed to consider a suggestion to set up a joint focus group formed from Members of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place and the Scrutiny for Children & Families Committees to specifically consider the overspend in Children's Services and prevent duplication at public meetings.

Next the Committee considered an update on the Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) Broadband Programme.

At its previous meeting in June 2018, the Committee had been informed that the Gigaclear contracts for Lots 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 had fallen behind in build due to a number of factors including the introduction of additional funding which had required a more extensive redesign than had been expected as well as problems resulting from the compulsory liquidation of Carillion.

Despite introducing additional contractor resource, Gigaclear has not succeeded in its planned recovery of the programme and has failed to meet its first contracted dates which were due to be achieved by 30 September 2018. Gigaclear has attended before the Connecting Devon and Somerset board to explain its position. Gigaclear also issued a formal apology to CDS stakeholders on 8 October.

Gigaclear met with Connecting Devon and Somerset to provide its revised plans

on 31 October 2018. At the time of writing this report Gigaclear's new plans have only just been received. CDS will be undertaking some detailed analysis of this over the coming weeks with our funders to ensure that the best option and solutions can be found. Until there is an agreed way forward which is supported and acceptable to CDS funders it will not be possible to confirm the critical information on new deployment dates to communities.

The Committee expressed concern and disappointment at this delay and discussed this issue at length. The Committee also discussed: residents confusion over commercial providers; the lack of financial penalties; priority for areas that are already underway and the use of wireless solutions.

The Committee then moved on to consider the Single Use Plastic Strategy. Following the resolution passed at the February 2018 meeting of Full Council, the Committee were asked to consider the draft Strategy before it was presented to Full Council for adoption at its November 2018 meeting.

The report highlighted the growing concern locally, nationally and globally about the impact single use plastics are having on our environment, and that action is needed to reverse this trend of negative impacts. The Council can act positively in reducing the use of plastics, and can use its position of influence with partners, providers and stakeholders, and the Strategy is designed to provide a framework for this work.

The planned timeline for the Strategy was shared but it was also stressed that the Strategy needs to be ambitious but realistic. It may not be feasible or economical to eliminate the use of Single Use Plastics completely. In addition, the current and future financial framework is extremely challenging.

During the debate Members discussed: how success will be measured; the importance of getting the message to school children; the need for huge behavioural change; the need to focus on commercial waste as well as residential and the need to work with innovators to learn from best practice.

The Committee noted the report and recommended that the Action Plan be amended to include what SCC will do to work with innovators and to also include safety considerations in setting out its timeline for delivery.

Following this, the Committee received an update on the finances and workload of the Rights of Way Service, with a particular focus on the statutory duty to keep the Definitive Map & Statement under continuous review.

The Committee had previously raised concerns in relation to applications to modify the Definitive Map & Statement. The paper sets out the context of the backlog of applications and associated issues. The report also set out the need for the service to update its Statement of Priorities, used to consider non-definitive appeals.

During the debate the Committee discussed: the need for additional resource; cost recovery; implications of a fast track service; staff morale within the service; clarification of right of way applications in relation to Hinkley Point C; and recognised the vital contribution of volunteers.

The put forward suggestions to improve the backlog of applications including: learning from other local authorities; consider taking part in a pilot; and asking multiple applicants to prioritise themselves. The Committee noted the report and asked to be kept informed of progress.

Finally the Committee considered a proposal to decommission Community Leisure Services.

In August 2009, the County Council entered into an agreement with Somerset Leisure Limited (now known as '1610 Limited') to provide community leisure services at dual-use centres on a number of secondary school sites across the county. The contract is due to expire at the end of the 2018/19 financial year. In January 2017, the Cabinet Member for Business, Inward Investment and Policy authorised officers to proceed with a project to review the County Council's future involvement in community leisure provision. The review resulted in the following recommendations:

(1) the Council to cease commissioning community leisure services at the following sites upon expiry of the existing contract with 1610 Ltd on 31 March 2019:

- Mendip – Glastonbury (St. Dunstan's Academy);
- Sedgemoor - Highbridge (The King Alfred School);
- South Somerset - Castle Cary (Caryford at Ansford Academy), Crewkerne (Wadham School), Stoke-sub-Hamdon (Stanchester Academy) and Yeovil (Preston School Academy);
- Taunton Deane - Taunton (The Castle School);
- West Somerset - Minehead (West Somerset College).

(2) Senior officers to negotiate the transfer of the County Council's residual leisure assets to the host schools / academies (where appropriate and where transfer has not already taken place through academisation).

The Committee heard that this action will save around £927k per year in management fees paid by SCC to 1610 Ltd to provide these services. SCC does not receive any income from these contracts and the facilities are integrated so do not have an open market value. It is proposed to transfer ownership of land, buildings and facilities to the schools and there will be no obligation to provide community leisure services placed on schools.

During the debate Members discussed: the implications for 1610 employees; consideration for alternative community provision and why some sites will continue to function without an SCC subsidy.

The Committee noted the report.

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

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