

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES AND PLACE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Tuesday, 21 March 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr T Lock (Chairman), Cllr M Lewis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr D Greene, Cllr P Ham, Cllr G Noel, Cllr A Wedderkopp, Cllr D Yeomans, Cllr H Davies and Cllr C Lawrence

Other Members present:

Apologies for absence: Cllr T Napper and Cllr M Rigby

319 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations of interest.

320 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 21 February 2017** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2017 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee and were signed by the Chairman.

321 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

The Committee heard from Mrs Osborne, the wife of a County Farms tenant. She thought it understandable that at a time when the Government was reducing funding to Local Government that some Council's sought to offload their Farms but that begged the question as to where the next generation of farmers would come from and what it would mean for food production and the sector as whole. Farming always seems to be bottom of the agenda. Despite the concerns expressed by this Committee, at its meeting 24 May 2016, when there were two lists of farms (disposal and retain) the Committee agreed to note the report and asked their concerns to be noted in future considerations.

At the June Cabinet meeting it seems as if the Government had allowed some capital to be used to prop up revenue budgets and there was also a suggestion of an asset sales drive.

We now know there is no longer a retained list and that all County Farms are up for sale - When was that decision made? - Who made that decision? - Was this Scrutiny Committee which had expressed its concerns and wanted to be consulted, was it consulted?

Once sold these valuable assets can never be replaced, it seems very strange we are selling as other areas Devon and Dorset are retaining their farms. Devon had advertised recently.

No evidence has been taken of the impact of such sales, once sold they are never replaced and the impact on a rural community such as Donnyat. Has account been taken of the new valuations to reflect what tenants have put in? The process has not been transparent; there have been huge discrepancies in the way individual farms have been dealt with in terms of the extensions of leases and the terms of leases.

This policy and process has been severely flawed from the outset and I would urge you to as a Committee to review this at its earliest opportunity.

In response the Committee heard from Mr Williams, Commercial and Business Service Director, who undertook to provide a written response to Mrs Osborne.

322 South West Heritage trust Update - Agenda Item 5

The Committee considered this report that provided an update about the South West Heritage Trust (SWHT) following its second year of operation from 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016. Members also benefitted from a presentation from the Chief Executive Officer of the SWHT that provided a colourful insight to the work.

Members were reminded the SWHT came into being on 1 November 2014 as an independent company limited by guarantee with charitable status, and a subsidiary trading company was also formed. The Trust had subsequently delivered the archives and local studies services formally provided by Somerset and Devon County Councils, and Somerset's Museums and Historic Environment Services.

It was reported that the service had enjoyed much success and details were provided including: the high national profile the museums service had enjoyed due to several popular exhibitions; four of the 5 museums retained accreditation under the Arts Council England scheme; the Somerset Archives and Local Studies Service won the Archives and Record Keeping Association's Record Keeping Service of the Year award; and major on-line developments and improvements for the Historic Environment and Estates service and the Learning Service.

Members heard that the collections care and acquisitions team had also 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.

Members welcomed the successful delivery of the agreed activities that had been specified within the grant agreement to ensure that Somerset's rich heritage was better protected, celebrated and made available as well as demonstrating financial savings to the Council. The report was accepted.

323 Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership Update - Agenda Item 6

The Committee considered this report that provided a background to Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HoTSW LEP) and outlined progress with Growth Deals negotiated between the LEP and Central Government.

Members noted that Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were established as part of the 2010 to 2015 Coalition Government's approach to promoting local economic development and growth. LEPs were designed to bring together leaders from the public and private sectors to champion the growth agendas for their local economies.

It was reported that 39 LEPs were created across England and Somerset became part of the Heart of the South West (HoTSW) LEP, an area comprising Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Council areas also. LEPs initially acted in a strategic advisory capacity, making the case to Government about the key economic issues in their areas.

Members noted the HoTSW LEP had received £114 million in Growth Deal 1, £65 million in Growth Deal 2 and £44 million in Growth Deal 3. This £223 million of Growth Deal funds will be received by the LEP from Government under an annual funding profile up to and including the 2020/21 financial year.

In response to a question it was explained that 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.

Members heard that for Somerset the outcome of Growth Deal 3 had been positive in that a significant number of priority schemes were supported within the funding envelope and Somerset had secured a high proportion of the allocation made by the Government to HoTSW LEP. The Government's priorities for the process (particularly on schemes closely aligned to the productivity improvement agenda on large scale schemes with demonstrable strategic impact) meant that Growth Deal investment, including through Growth Deal 3, had tended to focus upon growth areas and larger economic centres. Therefore, the rural economy had seen less direct investment – nevertheless Growth Deal 3 would help ensure significant additional investment in broadband and mobile infrastructure which would benefit businesses and residents in remoter rural areas.

Members welcomed the report and felt overall Somerset had received a good proportion of investment secured by the HoTSW LEP. There was a request that the East and Northern areas of the County not be forgotten and in response the Strategic Commissioning Manager – Economy and Planning reassured members that the area was not a blank canvass, it was more a question of volume and the tone of the colour. The report was accepted.

324 Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 7

The Committee considered and noted the Cabinet Forward Plan of proposed Key Decisions.

The Committee considered its own work programme and the future agenda items listed, and noted that the next meeting would take place after the County Council elections in May.

The Committee agreed to add an agenda item for the next Committee to receive an update on County Farms at either the October or November meeting.

325 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 8

The Chairman, after ascertaining there were no other matters arising, thanked all those present for attending the meeting. He reflected on the work of the Committee over the last 4 years and he thanked all those fellow Members who had served on the Committee during that time and also Officers for the assistance and help they had provided.

In response Cllr Ham, thanked the Chairman on behalf of the rest of the Committee, for the even handed and open way in which he had chaired the Committee seeking the best results for the Council and Somerset residents, stating he had done a brilliant job.

In closing the Director of Commissioning and Lead Commissioner for Economic & Community Infrastructure said she had found working with the Committee to be a pleasure and thanked the Chairman for striking the right balance of questioning and challenge during the last 4 years.

(The meeting ended at Time Not Specified)

CHAIRMAN