

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 4 July 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr T Lock (Chairman), Cllr M Lewis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr P Ham, Cllr John Hunt, Cllr D Ruddle, Cllr J Thorne, Cllr A Wedderkopp and Cllr A Bown

Other Members present: Cllr S Coles, Cllr J Lock, and Cllr F Purbrick.

Apologies for absence: Cllr B Filmer and Cllr T Napper

11 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

Cllr A Bown, Cllr S Coles, Cllr P Ham, Cllr M Lewis, Cllr T Lock, Cllr T Napper, Cllr D Ruddle, Cllr J Thorne, all declared a personal interest as a District and/or City/Town, Parish Councillor.

12 Minutes from the previous meeting held on - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2017 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee, provided Cllr Healey was shown as substituting for Cllr Lewis, and they were signed by the Chairman.

13 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no questions.

14 Council Performance Monitoring Report - Q4 2016/17 - Agenda Item 5

The Committee considered this 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.

Attention turned to the details of particular interest to the Committee and the performance summary up to 31 March and information contained in Appendix A and A1. The report also contained an update on the current status of the Core Council Programme and focussed on financial benefits achieved and those expected.

There was a brief discussion of the overall position of the Council's finances, during consideration of target C4 – Managing our business and it was noted that 'balances below acceptable ranges' meant a figure below £15m and it was noted that the Council's projected overspend continued to reduce and the current figure represented 2.26% of the overall budget. There was also a brief discussion of the 'collection fund surplus' and this was noted as being late

money collected from Council Tax receipts and had been included in calculating the £7.049m overspend a figure which continued to reduce.

During discussion of the report it was noted that work was underway to align the reporting of the Vision Volunteer projects with the Corporate Performance report, and these would be considered later during the meeting. It was noted that overall 67% of objectives were judged as green and on target; 8% were amber and at risk of missing target with 25% judged as missing target and shown as red.

There was also a question about P1, P3 and C4 as these were the only objectives/targets that were red and missing target. The Strategic Manager – Performance noted that each area had made considerable improvements however these would not be changed until both external and internal assessments and judgements agreed it would be appropriate to do so.

The Committee 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.

15 **Connecting Devon & Somerset update** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee received a thorough overview of the report from the Service Manager – Economy which explained that 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.

The report also updated the Committee on the progress made so far with Phase 1 of the CDS programme, the Phase 2 Connecting Dartmoor and Exmoor project and the procurement for the remainder of the Phase 2 extension programme and how the voucher scheme was progressing.

The Committee heard that the contract for Phase 1 of the CDS programme had been awarded to BT in 2013 and the target of providing 278,000 homes and businesses with access to superfast broadband speeds in excess of 24Mbps had been reached last March. In addition a further 42,000 properties now had access to an improved broadband connection meaning a total of 320,000 homes and businesses had better broadband.

There was a brief discussion about how BT had extended its existing fibre network across the region and this had taken fibre from the telephone exchange to a local cabinet “Fibre to the Cabinet” (FTTC) from which the final connection to the premise was via the existing copper network. Only in a few suitable areas fibre was taken directly to the premise – fibre to the Premise (FTTP). It was noted that although FTTC had produced a significant rise in superfast and improved delivery to premises which are within 1 km of the cabinet this approach resulted in speeds reducing at a further distance. In response to a question it was acknowledged that this can mean that although a cabinet has been fibre enabled not every premise attached to that cabinet can receive a

Superfast broadband service and this has caused considerable frustration for some people who find their property is too far from the cabinet to obtain Superfast speeds.

Members heard that last year CDS appointed Airband, a specialist in high speed wireless broadband for rural areas, to roll out the Phase 2 Connecting Dartmoor and Exmoor project. Airband had deployed a fixed wireless network delivering speeds of up to 30Mbps to 5,800 homes and businesses and when complete it would be the largest wireless network in the UK, and the nature of the technology being used would bring wide coverage across both Moors. At the time of writing 3,700 premises are able to take a service (with 1,196 in Somerset) and more will follow.

It was noted that Phase 2 of the extension programme had seen the CDS area made in to 6 Lots for which a number of credible suppliers had bid and it had been possible to award contracts for all 6 Lots which all were assessed to represent a value for money proposal. In response to a question about when the rollout schedule would be known (as the report said July) it was explained the detail was still being worked on but it was envisaged it would be later in the month.

The Committee was also updated on the CDS Broadband Voucher Scheme which to date is the most successful in England. Anyone within the CDS area that currently has a broadband speed of less than 2 Mbps can qualify for a voucher of £500 to go towards the installation cost of a new broadband connection. The Vice Chairman suggested that the deadline for receipt of voucher applications 30 November was highlighted to anyone yet to use their voucher. There were some questions about of the 278,000 homes and businesses to take up superfast broadband what are the % of homes/businesses in Somerset? And also how many homes/businesses in Somerset would not have superfast broadband past 2019? The Officer undertook to respond in writing after the meeting, and the response would be attached to the minutes of the meeting.

The Committee 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.

16 **Trading Standards Update - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee considered this report and received a PowerPoint 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.

The Committee was informed that the service continues to operate to a high standard, meeting all its Key Performance Indicators except one (recruitment of new members to the Buy with Confidence Scheme). In addition to its planned work, the report detailed a number of additional achievements.

The Devon and Somerset Trading Standards Service Strategic Plan 2017/2021 has been refreshed and a new Annual Operational Plan 2017/18 produced. These have both been agreed by the Joint Services Review Panel. There were no significant changes to the more routine work of the Service. The four priority areas identified were: Doorstep Crime and Scams; The Motor Trade – aimed at reducing the number of complaints about second-hand cars and car servicing; Reducing the Harm Caused by Age Restricted Products – particularly in relation to the underage sale and illicit supply of alcohol and tobacco and Animal Health - increasing rural business support and strengthening links with the farming industry. It was noted that Buy With Confidence would act as a cross-cutting strategy lending support to each of the above initiatives.

Members heard that in 2017/18, the joint service had expanded to include Torbay Council, and that transition had gone smoothly and, although it was anticipated that it would take a few months to fully integrate working practices, the new Service was working to one set of operational plans. Discussions with other local authorities in the Heart of the South West, Local Enterprise Partnership area continue and those included on-going discussions with Plymouth Council.

There was a question about whether there were plans to expand the service to other local authorities and it was stated that the service was open to expansion but to date there had not been much interest from District Councils. The service remained open to managing on different models/structures if this was appropriate.

The Chairman noted the importance of keeping local councillors aware of investigations and their outcomes and it was noted that the service compiled a detailed report on a quarterly basis and a summary report on a monthly basis to the Council and would be happy for this to be circulated to members. The service receives around 16,000 contacts per year and roughly one third of these will be from Somerset residents.

The Committee 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. An update was requested in 12 months.

17 **Registration Service transformation** - Agenda Item 8

The Committee considered 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.

The Committee heard that integration with North Somerset had progressed very smoothly with the successful delivery of agreed activities to provide all of its Registration Services. This had begun in April 2016 and successful delivery of the full range of registration services had been on target. This service

integration has brought a number of benefits including: SCC strategic objectives, improved customer benefits, improved service resilience, sharing of best practice, financial and reputational benefits.

The Committee expressed satisfaction with the financial performance of the service and noted it represented value for money as the income generated from fees and charges were higher than gross expenditure on services. In response to a question about the use of any profit it was explained that any surplus is used to cover wider overheads, for example, the use of council property so no profit is made.

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.

18 **Vision Volunteers Update** - Agenda Item 9

The Committee heard from the Service Manager, Business Change who introduced the report which provided 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.

A call for 'vision volunteers' was made following this and close to two hundred volunteers came forward. Following a launch of workshops the volunteers formed four self-organising project teams to progress the four vision projects. Work had continued across the year with the help of mentors and each of the four areas had made good progress.

The significant contribution the volunteers had made to the vision projects was recognised and members noted the contribution made by all those who had volunteered and welcomed the progress made. Consideration turned to the project proposals and these were reviewed in turn beginning with Business Parks, Energy Initiatives, Garden Town and the University for Somerset.

The following points were made during the debate:

- It was interesting to hear about Energy Initiatives but why didn't the Council consider a Dunball Tidal Scheme and Wind Turbines on the levels as these could help power the pumps in time of a flood;
- Had consideration been given to building a dam at the Galmington/Sherford streams, this water could then be sold to the east of England in times of drought;
- There was a lot of economic growth and related activity in the County and the Council was working hard to encourage local businesses and also attract more inward investment in Somerset;

- The number of vision volunteers had reduced from the initial peak; this was to be expected however the residual core were regarded as being the Council's "brain trust" and were a valuable asset for the Council.

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.

19 Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 10

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 in September and it was requested that the Flood and Water Management update include details on the proposal for a Bridgwater Tidal Barrier.

It was noted that the Cabinet were due to consider a report on Disposal of Surplus Land and Buildings and it was requested if this report could be brought to a future meeting.

The Scrutiny Manager reminded Members that a visit to Hinkley Point had been arranged for the morning of Thursday 13 July, passport or photo ID was required for entry to the site with no exceptions.

20 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 11

The Chairman advised the meeting that following the tragic incident at Grenfell Tower in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea that he had requested an update and sought reassurance, on behalf of the Committee, that all buildings owned by the Council and all schools in Somerset conformed to fire standards.

The Committee heard from the Head of Property who explained that the Council had looked initially at all properties over 4 storeys, of which there were 13 buildings and none of those had the composite aluminium cladding that had been used in London. The Council had also checked newer and more recently built properties (single storey and higher) including Schools and buildings built either by the Council or on behalf of the Council and/or other bodies and none of those had used the type of cladding on Grenfell Tower. The Council would be carefully monitoring new advice, guidance and/or protocols issued as a result of the fire in London and on an on-going basis regularly checked its own existing fire procedures including testing of fire alarms and evacuating buildings.

The Chairman, after ascertaining there were no other matters arising, thanked all those present for attending the meeting.

(The meeting ended at 12.35 pm)

CHAIRMAN