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# SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES AND PLACE COMMITTEE

## SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

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**5 December 2017**  
(Published on 07 December 2017)

<b>Declarations of Interest - Agenda item 2</b>	<b>Action</b>
There were no declarations of interest.	
<b>Minutes from the previous meeting held on 31 October 2017 - Agenda item 3</b>	<b>Action</b>
The minutes of the meeting on 31 October 2017 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee.	
<b>Public Question Time - Agenda item 4</b>	<b>Action</b>
<p>Sue Osborne asked a question regarding Item 7.</p> <p>I was shocked at how our call-in request was handled particularly the treatment of my elected County Councillor Linda Vjeh whose emails did not seem to be responded to by anyone. No-one to my knowledge explained why the call-in failed to meet the criteria or even what these were. The Task and Finish Group should also know that your Chairman, Cllr Philip Ham, invited me to attend the 1<sup>st</sup> November session only for me to be dis-invited by your Scrutiny Manager on 31<sup>st</sup> October.</p> <p>I was even more distressed to see that Councillor Vjeh's written statement to Scrutiny on 31<sup>st</sup> October was not read out, let alone mentioned by anybody. Why was this? I find it appalling that an elected member is treated in this way. Frankly it is a disgrace. This does though beg the question as to how Member-led this Task &amp; Finish report and its recommendations really are.</p> <p>Turning to the report, I can only conclude that the recommendations amount to business as usual regarding the disposal of land, buildings and farmhouses. The rest is window dressing; there to be spun just to suit the mood in the moment and the political wish. Just like the previous policy was and we soon found out what a sham that was. By retaining very small blocks of bare land, how do you see people progressing on there too? Is the conveyor belt approach really going to grow a long-term business?</p> <p>Farming in scale and nature has changed much since the 2002 review. More revolution than evolution. What are the holding plans for the four farms with leases ending in March 2018? Three of these fall in Cllr Vjeh's division. Has she been consulted over these plans or even been told that there is such a plan. Where did you draw your evidence from that the</p>	

<p>farms are too big? What happened to progression? Why the support for Lifetime tenants? What about Farm Business tenants and their families? Why no support for them?</p>	
<p><b>Council Performance Monitoring Report Q2 2017_18 - Agenda item 5</b></p>	<p><b>Action</b></p>
<p>The Committee considered this report from the Strategic Managers for Performance and for Business Change. The report provided Members with an update on performance across the organisation.</p> <p>The report summarised that overall performance is stable with two red segments (P3, C4). 50% of objectives are green, 33% are amber and 17% are red. The report was positive in that there were no downward arrows. The report was presented to Cabinet on 15 November 2017 and Members were informed that Cabinet had discussed the red segments at length and additional action was agreed with the section 161 officer with regard to addressing the revenue position.</p> <p>The Committee discussed those segments which fell under the Committee's remit. They suggested that the revenue budget be separated from the other elements of the managing our business segment (C4). They questioned the timetable for delivering improvements to segment C4. They discussed the undeliverable in-year savings and raised queries regarding the Connecting Devon &amp; Somerset broadband programme.</p> <p>The Committee noted the report.</p>	
<p><b>Revenue Budget Monitoring Report Q2 2017_18 - Agenda item 6</b></p>	<p><b>Action</b></p>
<p>The Committee received this report from the Director of Finance which provided an update on the current Revenue Budget outturn position for the 2017/18 financial year based on the end of September (Month 6).</p> <p>The Committee were reminded that figures within the report were a projection based on a prediction of the position at year end.</p> <p>The Committee heard that the Authority's forecast shows a projected net overspend of £9.098m when compared to the Revenue Budget. This represents 2.92% of base budget and shows a slight decrease from the previous report. 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. The implication of this forecast is that Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team will need to continue to exercise more stringent control in all areas of council spend to ensure that the final outturn position is much lower than this.</p> <p>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.</p>	

<p>The Committee heard that 61% of savings will be delivered as predicted, 7% of savings have been classified as an amber risk meaning delivery is unsure and 32% are no longer deliverable in 2017/18.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the aged debt, comparison with the financial position of other authorities, children’s placements both within and outside of Somerset and the savings that are no longer considered to be deliverable.</p> <p>The Committee noted the report.</p>	
<p><b>Report from the County Farms Task &amp; Finish Group - Agenda item 7</b></p>	<p><b>Action</b></p>
<p>The Committee received this report which was presented by Cllr Philip Ham, Chair of the Task &amp; Finish Group.</p> <p>Cllr Ham began by thanking all Members and officers that had contributed to the Task &amp; Finish Group.</p> <p>He introduced the report and gave a brief background to the history of county farms and some of the changes experienced since their introduction.</p> <p>He shared the recommendations made by the Task &amp; Finish Group and urged the Committee to support them. The recommendations were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To continue to maintain a County Farms estate, based on land ownership rather than buildings. Existing farmhouses to be sold or let at market valuations as and when they become available, unless there is a strategic business need to retain them. Farm outbuildings and land, if suitable, to be marketed with planning permissions wherever possible, thus maximising financial returns. As part of this the Committee recommends the completion of a comprehensive review of the Council’s lettings policy.</li> <li>2. To ensure there is a sufficient provision of small blocks of bare land (roughly 5 to 20 acres, with a maximum length tenancy possibly 10 years), to provide farming opportunities for genuinely new entrants to agriculture and encourage rural diversification.</li> <li>3. To champion a strong agricultural focus within Taunton and Bridgwater College and the University of Somerset, ensuring sufficient land opportunities are retained to help provide a strong agricultural focus in the county and to facilitate learning, whilst encouraging the development of an innovation centre for agriculture.</li> </ol> <p>The Committee debated the recommendations in depth. They suggested that Members should be involved with any review of the Lettings Policy and agreed that the recommendations were a starting point but that the next steps required experienced and knowledgeable thought.</p>	

<p>The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee proposed that the Committee should accept all of the recommendations. Following a vote this was carried.</p> <p>It was clarified that the recommendations would be submitted to the Cabinet Member Resources and Economic Development for their response. Additionally, it was agreed to offer the support of Members of the Committee should there be a review of the Lettings Policy.</p>	
<p><b>Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Work Programme - Agenda item 8</b></p>	<p><b>Action</b></p>
<p>The Committee considered and noted the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions.</p> <p>A suggestion was made to scrutinise recent changes to the Park &amp; Ride Bus Service but this was rejected following clarification that the decision to withdraw this funding had already been taken.</p> <p>It was clarified that any Member can suggest an item for the agenda. If made outside of a Scrutiny meeting, any suggestion would be referred to the Chairman in the first instance.</p> <p>Following debate, the Committee requested the following addition to the work programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highways England acceptance of the A303 Option 1 Sparkford &amp; Podimore Junction and its impact on local communities (ECI Operations Director to consult Highways England and advise).</li> </ul> <p>The Committee also requested that the response from the Cabinet Member regarding the Task &amp; Finish Group report &amp; recommendations be shared with the Committee.</p>	
<p><b>Any other urgent items of business - Agenda item 9</b></p>	<p><b>Action</b></p>
<p>There were no other items of business.</p>	