

## 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 19 June 2018 at 9.30 am

**Present:** Cllr M Lewis (Vice-Chair), Cllr B Filmer, Cllr John Hunt, Cllr J Thorne, Cllr G Noel, Cllr S Coles and Cllr L Leyshon

**Other Members present:** Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr H Davies, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr J Lock, Cllr T Munt, Cllr L Vijeh, Cllr A Wedderkopp and Cllr J Woodman

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr P Ham and Cllr A Groskop

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

There were no declarations of interest.

97 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 22 May 2018** - Agenda Item 3

It was agreed that Minute 88 would be amended to reflect that there were members of the public present although no public questions were asked.

With the exception of this change, the minutes of the meeting on 22 May 2018 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee.

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

There were two public questions regarding Item 5.

### **Dr Clive Wall, Stawley Parish Council**

The information provided by CDS and Gigaclear is poor and inconsistent. It lacks clarity and the necessary detail to enable specific householders and businesses to establish if, when and how they will receive faster broadband, including whether it will be via FTTP or another method (e.g. microwave). The situation is made worse by the fact that communication with these two bodies by individual members of the public is virtually impossible and the role of ISP's confusing. Both CDS and Gigaclear must be forced to make themselves and their detailed plans properly available to the public, and in this context I suggest (as a Parish Councillor) that CDS actively makes use of the local council structure to disseminate specific local information. I urge the Scrutiny Committee to ensure that this happens with immediate effect.

### **Maurice Stanbury**

My own experience of attempting to access information on the broadband upgrade programme echoes that of Dr Wall – with broadband speeds of significantly less than 1 mb/s in Kittisford, a hamlet in Stawley parish, the need is great. However, when interrogated the Gigabyte post code checker has provided conflicting information, even now it states the the system is in the design stage, which can mean anything or nothing, and gives no specific dates on installation and commissioning.

However, as a result of recent contact with Katriona Lovelock we have been provided with specific installation and commissioning dates. Clearly the information is there but has not been made generally available. I find it ironic that a programme intended to improve communication fails in meeting it's very own objectives.

I would be pleased to add detail to that statement if requested, outside of this meeting.

A short verbal response was given thanking the members of the public for attending and for their feedback. It was confirmed that a meeting has been arranged to discuss this in more detail and this will then be followed by a formal, written response.

99 **Connecting Devon & Somerset Broadband Programme update - Agenda Item 5**

The Committee considered this 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 questioned whether there are problems with accessing information and it was explained that there are a number of live web pages which may cause confusion to some residents. It is also recognised that residents must have internet access to access the webpages.

A Member commented that it is important to understand whether broadband is expected to be a universal service as this will affect the analysis of whether provision is adequate or not. It was confirmed that the government target is for

95% of residents to have access to broadband. There is aspiration to have broadband provision across the whole country but the issue is funding this. We have to find solutions that offer value for money and this is incredibly challenging in hard to reach, rural areas.

The importance of broadband service to rural businesses and residents was widely recognised and alternative rural solutions were suggested such as using satellite instead of fibre solutions. It was clarified that networks have to be next generation compliant to access public funding.

The Committee noted the report. Disappointment was expressed in the roll out but it was appreciated that time slips have been unavoidable. This is a difficult period when expectation is so high but it is key to communicate clearly when broadband will be available.

#### 100 **South West Heritage Trust Annual Report - Agenda Item 6**

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 queried the decreasing number of children attending events and it was explained that there has been an increase in the number of sessions but a decrease in pupil numbers due to class sizes.

Members queried future funding plans and it was clarified that the Trust is always looking for new income streams. A variety of opportunities will or have already taken place which will increase the resilience of the organisation.

A Member expressed concern by residents at the current use of Castle Green in Taunton and questioned future plans. The Trust still feel that the location was not the best but still believe that it is a site with potential. The site is owned by Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC). We agree that the area needs a boost and will work closely with TDBC to maximise opportunity.

Following a question by a Member, it was confirmed that there is a report which sets out the circumstances of the recent purchase by SCC of the Roman Lead Ingot. The Ingot was purchased using a Bequest Fund not through an SCC grant. SCC does not believe that there is a rationale to share the ownership of this artefact but the Trust has tried to operate in a co-operative manner and has not yet had a response to its offer to loan the artefact to The Wells and Mendip Museum.

101 The Committee noted the report.  
**Revenue Budget Monitoring Report Q4 2017/18 - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee received this 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 questioned levels of reserves and it was confirmed that the forecast for the General Reserve is not significantly different to other years whilst the earmarked reserves are lower.

Members questioned aged debt and it was confirmed that the aged debt position is much improved. SCC will write off debt if they consider it to be unrecoverable but it aims not to do so.

It was confirmed that SCC is lobbying for change to school transport legislation but is not expecting a change in the near future. Policies need to be refreshed and put in front of the LGA.

Members questioned when the new budget for children's services will be in place and where it will come from. Following a recommendation by the recent Peer Review, a consultancy firm called People Too will begin to analyse this tomorrow with a 9-week trajectory to provide a report with recommendations. They will analyse the overspend and benchmark with other authorities. This will then feed into the MTFP for next year.

Members questioned how 3<sup>rd</sup> part spending will be reduced and it was confirmed that SCC has identified measures for a 75% reduction in overspend.

Members queried the freezing and deletion of job posts and whether any of this was covered by agency spend. Members commented that there is need to find better ways to control the budget and retain key staff. It was clarified that there is still a need for agency staff in some places but they need to be used appropriately. It is highly unlikely that any of the deleted job posts would be

replaced by agency staff. SCC needs to plan for the future and not just the in-year position.

It was confirmed that the £4m savings forecast through the Learning Disability service transformation is still the same but has been affected by things like rises in the Living wage and Sleeping-in Allowances. This has reduced some of the saving but the rises would still have happened if the service had remained in-house.

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.

102 **Corporate Performance Monitoring Report Q4 2017/18 - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee considered this 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.

103 **Consultation on Draft Air Quality Strategy - Agenda Item 9**

The Committee considered this 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 queried the impact of traffic flow and it was confirmed that more even flows could potentially improve air quality as stationary cars with engines running do contribute. SCC is looking at trialling a number of schemes to improve traffic flow for example, through Bridgwater for HGV's travelling to Hinkley Point C and in East Street, Taunton.

A Member highlighted the need to provide the infrastructure to support zero emissions vehicles. This is a complex issue and needs to consider what to provide, where to provide it and how to ensure it doesn't interfere with other transport.

A Member questioned how the impact of wood burning stoves was being communicated. It was confirmed that this is area dependent and is usually only an issue in urban areas. There is guidance available on our website but pollution from this is usually localised.

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.

104 **Property Disposals update - Agenda Item 10**

The Committee considered this 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.

105 **Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 11**

The Committee considered and noted the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions.

In considering the forward programme, concern was expressed over the length of future agendas. Following discussion it was agreed that

- the Governance Manager would work with the Chair to re-prioritise planned agenda items
- Officers would be asked to limit the time of their presentations
- Members would email officers outside of the meeting regarding any local or minor queries
- Consideration would be given to adding an additional meeting per year to supplement the august recess

Following debate, the Committee requested the following addition to the work programme:

- CDS update – 13 Nov

106 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 12

The Chair reminded Committee Members that the July meeting will be held in the Taunton Library Meeting Room.

**(The meeting ended at 1.20 pm)**

**CHAIRMAN**