

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES AND PLACE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee held in the Taunton Library Meeting Room, on Tuesday 13 November 2018 at 9.30 am

Present: Cllr M Lewis (Vice-Chair), Cllr P Ham, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr John Hunt, Cllr J Thorne, Cllr G Noel, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr A Groskop (Chair) and Cllr T Munt

Other Members present: Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr J Clarke, Cllr D Hall, Cllr M Pullin and Cllr L Redman

Apologies for absence: Cllr N Bloomfield

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

There were no declarations of interest.

136 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 24 October 2018** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting on 24 October 2018 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee.

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

Maurice Stanbury asked a public question in relation to Item 6. Mr Stanbury was representing Stawley Parish Council and raised concerns about the very poor broadband service in his parish. He stated that broadband provision is critical for both residents and for the development of businesses in Stawley. The Parish had been previously reassured that Gigaclear would be able to meet its published deadlines and was disappointed to hear this was no longer the case. He questioned the efficiency of the contractor and suggested that a review should be carried out. He volunteered Stawley Parish to take part in a study or pilot.

Mr Stanbury received a verbal response and it was clarified that previous reassurances had been given in good faith based on information provided to the Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) team at that time. He was reassured that the new owners of the contractor had introduced a senior consultancy team and that concerns have been raised at a senior level within the organisation. As a result of challenge, the CDS team is now seeing actions not previously seen and clear expectations have been set. It is not possible to give an indication at this time as to when Stawley will receive broadband provision. The idea of using Stawley as a pilot will be put forward to the provider to consider.

138 **Revenue Budget Monitoring Update** - Agenda Item 5

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.

139 **Connecting Devon & Somerset Broadband Programme Update** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee considered this report which provided 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. Following a vote, the Committee agreed to the following recommendation:

The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee recommends that the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning & Community Infrastructure writes to both BDUK and the CDS Board to express the Committee's concern and disappointment with the poor performance of the Gigaclear contracts for Lots 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6.

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 noted the report and asked for an update as soon as is appropriate.

140 **Reduction in the Use of Single Use Plastics: A Strategy for Somerset County Council - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee then considered the Council's Strategy for the Reduction in the Use of Single Use Plastics (SUP). 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.

141 **Rights of Way Service - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee considered this report which provided 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.

142 The Committee noted the report and asked to be kept informed of progress.
Community Leisure Services - Agenda Item 9

The Committee considered this report which outlined 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.

144 The Committee noted the report
Scrutiny for Policies & Place Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 11

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

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

- Add a CDS update once more information is known

The Committee turned down a request to add an item regarding the 'Westbury Pig' as the position of Somerset County Council and the South West Heritage Trust on this matter has already been established and scrutinised by the Committee.

The Committee agreed to consider further a suggestion of forming a joint focus group to scrutinise overspend in Children's Services to agree an approach and avoid duplication at meetings.

145 **Any Other Urgent Items of Business** - Agenda Item 12

There was no other urgent items of business.

(The meeting ended at 2.01 pm)

CHAIRMAN