

## 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 Friday 5 April 2019 at 10.00 am

**Present:** Cllr A Groskop (Chair), Cllr M Lewis (Vice-Chair), Cllr B Filmer, Cllr John Hunt, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr M Keating and Cllr T Munt

**Other Members present:** Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr J Woodman

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr P Ham

### 170 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations of interest.

### 171 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 06 March 2019** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on 06 March 2019 were accepted as being accurate by the Committee.

### 172 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

Nigel Behan asked 2 public questions in relation to Item 8 – Climate Change Strategy:

Q1 The Meteorological Office use a variety of Climate Models including:

“HadCM3: Met Office climate prediction model

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HadCM3 is a coupled climate model that has been used extensively for climate prediction, detection and attribution, and other climate sensitivity studies.

HadCM3 stands for the Hadley Centre Coupled Model version 3.

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/modelling-systems/unified-model/climate-models/hadcm3>

Will the Task and Finish Group utilise the resources of the Met Office, The Environment Agency and other Climate Science bodies (Universities etc) and also consider studying Campaign Organisations’ mobilising methods – for example the “Campaign Against Climate Change” (<https://www.campaigncc.org/>)?

Q2 How will the Task and Finish Group take account of climate change sceptics - see this quote from Campaigncc.org website?

“Those who actively promote climate scepticism are [well networked](#), and have been termed 'deniers' rather than sceptics because many show [scant regard for the facts](#), while seizing avidly on any error in the work of climate scientists. [This article](#) discusses the psychology of climate change denial. To gain an understanding of the level of scientific consensus on climate change, a recent study examined every article on climate change published in [peer-reviewed scientific journals](#) over a 10-year period. Of the 928 articles on climate change the authors found, *not one of them disagreed* with the consensus position that climate change is happening or is human-induced.”

*Response:*

*The Director of Economic & Community Infrastructure Commissioning thanked Mr Behan for his questions and gave assurance that early scoping work will look carefully at definitions to ensure that the work of the group is meaningful. There is a wealth of stakeholders and interested parties. This will need to be carefully considered to include as much knowledge and expertise as possible but in a managed way. The Group will be looking at all reputable sources of information for fact-based data.*

#### 173 **Connecting Devon & Somerset Broadband Update - Agenda Item 5**

The Committee considered this report which provided an update on the CDS programme.

Since the last scrutiny meeting delivery has continued across the region. Progress is being made in Devon working with Airband in Lot 4. The area is also participating in the national Better Broadband Voucher programme which is due to start next month. Plans are also advancing for the first reinvestment of 'Gainshare' funding working with BT which is expected to deliver additional superfast coverage to a further 2,000 homes and businesses in the hardest to reach areas of Devon and Somerset.

The debate then focussed on the Phase 2 Gigaclear contracts which remains in an uncertain position. Gigaclear are continuing to work on providing a robust and credible proposal to take these contracts forward. This is a time-consuming exercise and exact details have not yet been finalised.

CDS, working closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), with support from local authority partners, LEPs and MPs has been seeking a funding extension which is supported as a priority by DCMS. CDS has had a positive response from HM Treasury and is finalising an agreement for an extension with DCMS as part of their spending review process. CDS is agreeing similar support from other funders. Whilst every effort to resolve the situation with Gigaclear is being made, the programme is also working with DCMS and the LEP to consider alternative options and develop a Digital Strategy for the area.

Gigaclear is continuing to develop acceptable plans for each contract area backed by fully costed analysis of the network delivery options. CDS and BDUK require key reassurances particularly regarding capacity and acceleration of deployment. In response, Gigaclear is investigating further options to improve its operations in Devon and Somerset in light of the significant delays the company has incurred. One of the consequences of the delays is that exact details about which communities will be in the next phase of the roll-out have yet to be confirmed. Gigaclear states it will provide updated information for the public and stakeholders about its roll-out timetable on its website.

In the meantime, Gigaclear is continuing to build full fibre networks to 31 community areas in Devon, Somerset and BaNES/ North Somerset for CDS providing ultrafast broadband speeds to 6,000 homes and businesses. In addition, the company is also continuing its commercial build which will serve a further 6,000 premises.

It was clarified that Gigaclear is a private limited company. Members questioned how the Gigaclear situation compares with other rural areas and it was confirmed that a number of other areas across the country are struggling to provide broadband infrastructure. This includes Gigaclear and other providers. Nonetheless, the CDS Board have made it clear to Gigaclear that the current situation is unacceptable and more certainty is required in the very near future.

It was confirmed that the voucher scheme has previously been well-received and reasonably successful.

Members questioned how Somerset residents can be clearly informed of what broadband they are going to get, the coverage they can expect and their alternative options. Residents can use the CDS website to locate their property, find their current provision and the alternatives available. It was acknowledged that this is difficult for residents who cannot access the internet but the ability of local government to control the operational choices of a private business is limited.

Members are still concerned that communications is a problem. People need to be kept updated and whilst there has been some improvement with communicating with parishes, this is often sporadic. More details about roadworks and roll-out is needed. It was agreed to feed these comments back to Gigaclear.

Members asked what lessons have been learnt and how we will prevent this situation from happening in the future. It was agreed to provide a written response to this.

Members queried whether Gainshare funding will be targeted at new areas as having multiple companies operating in the same area would be duplicative and a waste of funding. It was confirmed that it is a state aid requirement to undertake an open market review and only areas where there are not already credible commercial plans in place can be targeted. The difficulty is that

commercial providers can change their minds. Members were reassured that Gainshare is targeted at areas with no provision.

Member questioned how long a notice period has been given to Gigaclear and it was clarified that a period of time has been afforded in expectation of sufficient progress. Some assumptions that proposals have been based upon have been incorrect which is why it is taking so long and we can't be precise about dates. All options are being considered.

Member questioned the role of the Cabinet Member in providing challenge and raised the importance of his presence at scrutiny meetings. Members were offered assurance that The CDS Board and the Cabinet Member, as a member of the CDS Board, has been providing robust challenge.

Members queried the number of Somerset residents without connection and that the CDS Board should be reporting this to Scrutiny. The Board is aware of this but the figures will always fluctuate as new premises are built. A link to the most up-to-date information will be sent to Committee Members. Members asked whether the Board works with developers to ensure new properties already have superfast broadband. It was explained that this falls under a planning remit but that there have been conversations about this on a national level.

Members asked whether the CDS Board provides information about other service providers. It was clarified that the Board has to consult with all providers as part of undertaking an open market review and BDUK has to be satisfied of full analysis. However, it is not part of the Board's function to introduce the public to other providers.

It was confirmed that a stakeholder briefing was circulated at the end of March.

The Committee requested the following;

- A summary of the learning which has arisen from the current contract processes.
- Feedback to Gigaclear that better communication is required with communities to explain what is happening and that it may be necessary to go back to communities several times.
- A link to details of the number of premises in Somerset which remained without service and reassurance that the CDS Board also has this information available to them.
- That the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Planning & Community Infrastructure attends future Scrutiny meetings when CDS is being considered. The Committee were made aware that the Cabinet Member will shortly be attending the next CDS Board meeting. The Committee hoped that more information would be available following this and they invited the Cabinet Member to attend the next Scrutiny meeting to outline the next steps for the CDS programme.

The committee noted the report.

## 174 **Revenue Budget Monitoring Month 10 Report - Agenda Item 6**

The Committee considered this report which outlined the projected revenue outturn for 2019/19 based on actual spending to the end of January 2019 (month 10).

The Committee heard that there has been a continuation of the projected underspend forecast at £1.385m. There has been a small reduction in the uncommitted contingency fund.

Controlling the 2018/19 budget has been a priority of the Council since a projected overspend became apparent in early 2018. The robust control is now producing a more optimistic landscape for the Council, with this projected underspend laying the foundations for a resilient budget and improved reserves for 2019/20. In light of this, opportunity has been taken to review the strategic risk, ORG0043, to reduce both the likelihood and impact ratings. It has been judged that the risk can be reduced marginally as although the scores remain red (high risk) it is moving in the right direction.

Members thanked officers for the clarity of the report and offered their assistance with regard to Dillington House. Dillington House has a negative reserve attached to it and the Cabinet Member is very focussed on this issue.

Members queried whether the underspend was real and this was confirmed. Multiple things have contributed to this but there may be some requests to carry forward some sums and this will be visible in the report in June. Members questioned whether Councillors could request that some of the underspend be spent on services that have been cut and it was clarified that any carry forward will not be for new projects but for existing projects where there may have been a service delay across financial years.

It was highlighted that the underspend is small in comparison with the overall budget and that the Councils is still in a relatively fragile financial position.

There was consensus between committee Members and officers that regular revenue budget monitoring should continue as the Council will need to keep a tight grip on finances for the foreseeable future.

The Committee acknowledged that not all Members understand the finances of the council and a mechanism is needed to improve this. There is a need for additional member training and face-to-face delivery. All-Member briefings have been held previously. Officers will shortly be planning for the next MTFP and, as part of this, will consider how best to engage with Scrutiny and elected Members.

The Committee noted the report.

## **Draft Scrutiny Task & Finish Group Protocol - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee considered the draft protocol and after debate agreed the following amendments:

- Standardise language for 'members' and 'councillors'.
- Clarify that deciding whether an item has merit for establishing a T&F Group lies ultimately with Committee members as T&F Groups are member-led.
- P38 – pluralise 'committee' and 'organisation'.

With these amendments, the Committee approved the protocol and recommended it to the Constitution & Standards Committee.

**176 Climate Change Strategy Task & Finish Group Scope of Work - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee considered this report which provided an update on the Committee's recommendation to form a task & Finish Group to oversee the development of an SCC Climate Change Strategy.

That report recommended the formation of a Joint Task and Finish Group between Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Mendip District Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset West and Taunton Council. It was proposed that the group be comprised of two members nominated by relevant Scrutiny committees from each of the respective Local Authorities.

Conversations have already been held between Somerset County Council Somerset District Councils. Through these conversations, it has been agreed by all parties that it would be most efficient, effective and economic for SCC and all District Councils to collectively develop a single Somerset-wide Climate change strategy. Nominations have been received from each respective Local Authorities for officers to join an Officer Working Group to develop the strategy.

It was proposed that the Member Task & finish group commences in September 2019 with aim to present its final report in Spring 2020. This commencement date allows the officer working group and for any member arrangements following the District elections to be put in place first.

It was highlighted that SCC has a budget of £25k for development of a strategy only and that there is no agreement for any implementation. This shouldn't, however, define or confine the strategy and it needs to be based on outcomes that we wish to achieve. We want to achieve something that can have a big impact and ensure that climate change is considered in everything the council does. A more stable financial base will also enable us to invest more in climate change initiatives.

Following debate, the Committee recommended two amendments to the scope of work:

- Remove lobbying from scope
- Consider a public-facing name for the Group which does not include the word 'finish' as the Strategy will always be on-going in its nature.

Following a closed, named vote, the Committee elected Cllr Tessa Munt and Cllr Bob Filmer as its nominated representatives on the Joint Task & Finish Group.

The Committee noted the report.

**177 SCC Business Plan 2019/20 Refresh - Agenda Item 9**

The Committee considered this report which presented a refreshed version of the SCC Business Plan approved in 2018.

The Business Plan is a corporate plan, owned by the Chief Executive Officer and translates the County Vision into strategic outcomes.

Two additional priorities have been added to the section of the Business Plan entitled: Meeting the Council's challenges: sustainability, quality and focus:

- Organisational Re-Design
- Reduce demand for high cost services

A Member commented that pages with a portrait orientation were easier to read and it was explained that, once approved, the Plan will be shown through a website making it more accessible and searchable.

Members queried why there was no reference to earned income. It was clarified that this will be included within financial reporting but officers agreed to consider whether this could be made more apparent.

Members questioned how high cost services will be defined. This will link into service plans; high cost services tend to fall within adults and children services. We need to move to be a more preventative council. More information about transformation will be available soon and will include themes such as prevention, digital transformation and helping people to help themselves.

Members discussed the benefits of working in partnership with independent schools in Somerset.

Members questioned how best to scrutinise the Plan when there were no timelines attached to it. It was explained that the Plan is a framework and that every decision taken by the Council must reflect the Vision and Business Plan and contribute to it.

The Committee noted the report.

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

The Committee requested:

- The Hinkley Point C report be kept as short as possible with a focus on community benefit and mitigation of transport/vehicle issues. The

Committee would like a representative from the SCF to attend to answer questions about community benefits.

- A site visit to Hinkley Point C be arranged for Members.

179 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 11

There were no other items of business.

**(The meeting ended at 12.48 pm)**

**CHAIRMAN**