

Scrutiny Committee

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since 15 June 2017

The committee met on 4th July 2017 considered the items on the District Executive 6th July Agenda and provided the comments as listed below:

Westlands Leisure Complex

- Members requested clarification as to who would be the point of contact in the future for updates on the Westlands Leisure Complex.
- Scrutiny noted that the overspend is not quantified and queried if there was an adequate project contingency to cover the amount. An indication of the overspend figure as a percentage would be useful to context.
- Members were concerned that the overspend may have an impact on other projects across the district or even prevent them.
- Some members were concerned by the list of items causing the overspend (para 15) as it was felt most should have been predicted/anticipated or included within the contingency.
- Scrutiny felt the 'requirement creeps' should have been better managed. Several members noted that in the early stages members had been assured that costings had been based on worst case scenarios and professional advice had been sought. Members wished to make it clear they were not critical of the project outcome but had concerns about the management of the project and felt lessons should be learnt.

SSDC Corporate Peer Challenge and Review

- Scrutiny agreed that the activity had been worthwhile and comments of the Peer team were encouraging.
- It was queried if the costs associated with the resourcing and recruitment referred to in the Action Plan were already reflected in future financial planning?
- Members sought reassurance that timeframes for completion of actions in the Action Plan were on target, and if there was any option to bring forward the review of capacity in Economic Development (bottom of page 36).
- Scrutiny asked if there was a need for a Task and Finish Group to look at car parking charges.
- Members were content that the recommendations go forward.

SSDC Transformation Programme – Progress Report

- Members commented that it was good to see a brief, rather than a lengthy report. Clarification was sought about the purpose of the appendix. Members requested that future reports include detailed monitoring of timescales and savings against the table and programme milestones. Another line at the bottom of the table was requested to clearly show the current position in comparison to targets.
- Scrutiny requested reassurance that any slippage could be picked up.

Affordable Housing Development Programme

- Members noted the updates to the report provided by the Corporate Strategic Housing Manager at the Scrutiny meeting.
- With reference to recommendation (e) Scrutiny noted the costs for the cookers and raised concern if it may set a precedence for other schemes. It was also queried if there was a policy or minimum specification of what should be provided or expected in properties for which SSDC provides financial assistance.

2016/17 Capital Budget Outturn Report

- Page 80 – it was queried in the funding allocated for bus shelters would be returned to balances?

2016/17 Revenue Budget Outturn Report

- Page 91 – table in para 6 – Scrutiny asked for a little more detail regarding the adverse variance for Development Control.
- Page 103 – Fraud and Data – some members were concerned about the comment and asked what was being done to address the resourcing issue.

Prevention Charter for Somerset

Scrutiny queried who would be responsible for raising awareness of the Charter across SSDC.

Property Investment Acquisition for Income Generation (Confidential)

Members made a number of comments in confidential session.

Performance Management and Reporting arrangements

In response to a Scrutiny Committee request to review the Performance Management and Reporting arrangements throughout Transformation and moving forward.

The Performance Manager provided a short presentation about performance and key points included:

- A reminder of the five themes in the Council Plan 2016 – 2021
- A list of the current key performance indicators (KPIs)
- Priority projects in the Council Plan
- The structure of the Senior Leadership Team
- The annual cycle for performance monitoring and reporting
- Performance indicators for the Transformation programme to monitor financial and non-financial benefits.

Members were asked to consider the data they would like to see collected and in what form. During discussion several comments were made, members agreed for an Informal meeting to be arranged for Scrutiny members with the Scrutiny Manager to discuss possible future performance indicators.

Appointment of Members to Somerset Waste Board Informal Joint Scrutiny Panel

It was agreed that Councillors Carol Goodall, Martin Wale and Jason Baker be appointed to the Somerset Waste Board Informal Joint Scrutiny Panel. Members did not identify who would be the substitute member, but in the event of a meeting it would be agreed between the three members which two would attend that particular meeting of the Panel.

Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews

Council Tax Support – The Revenues and Benefits Manager had agreed with the Portfolio Holder to identify savings in administration costs rather than changing the scheme for 2018-19. The Task and Finish group would meet with the officers to review the monitoring information by the autumn.

Local Discretionary (Business Rates) Relief Scheme – the role of this group is to consider how best to allocate a limited amount of funding from Central Government to help businesses who as a result of the Business Rate (National Non Domestic Rate) Revaluation 2017 have been adversely affected (Rateable value has increased significantly with effect from 01 April 2017). Two meetings have taken place to date with a third planned later this month.

Homefinder Somerset – there had been no further progress and a response was still awaited from the Housing Team about recommendations made previously.

Local Discretionary (Business Rate) Relief Scheme – Scrutiny Committee members agreed its meeting on 1st June to set up a Task and Finish review group to work with business rate officers to
The outcome of the review will be to produce a Local Discretionary (Business Rate) Relief Scheme.

Transformation – Locality Working - Scrutiny Committee have agreed to prioritise a Task and Finish group to be involved in the locality design and development. The scope for the review has not been agreed as of yet and will be considered at the next meeting.

Rural Allocations Policy – The Disposal of Third Party properties had highlighted issues with the Rural Allocations Policy and some work now needs to be done to review the policy, no start date has been agreed for this.

Councillor Sue Steele
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee