

Scrutiny Committee

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since 16 November 2017. The committee met on 5 December 2017 and 2 January 2018 to consider:

5 December 2017

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7 December 2017

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 7 December 2017 and made the following comments:

Somerset Waste Partnership Annual report and Draft Business Plan 2018-2023

- Page 24 – Core services contract review – members noted Viridor had many such contracts nationally and queried if there are likely to be other alternative providers.
- Page 5 – Purpose of the report refers to an agreement not being reached with the contractors, Kier, regarding the delivery plan and implementation of Recycle More. Members were concerned if similar issues may arise with alternative contractors. (although were reassured by the Officer and Portfolio Holder why this would be unlikely)
- Members noted the same report has gone, or will be going, to the other authorities within the Somerset Waste Partnership, and queried where we were in that process. i.e. first or last authority to consider the report.

Community Infrastructure Levy - Guidance and Governance

- Rec B – Scrutiny queried if there would be a timeline associated with the Infrastructure Business Plan.
- Page 29 - Members sought clarification that the table at the top of the page did not take into account the parish or town councils that may be eligible to receive 25% of CIL receipts (i.e. those with Neighbourhood Plans).
- Members sought clarification that SSDC were continuing to encourage parishes to do Neighbourhood Plans.
- Members also queried if a parish has a need for a specific project but no Neighbourhood Plan, was there scope for the parish to bid for, or receive more than 15%. (Dave Norris did clarify the situation in response to this and provided examples of the 123 list)

SSDC Review of Operational Office Accommodation

- Members supported the structured approach and more feasibility work being undertaken.
- Scrutiny queried the potential for losing car parking spaces in some of the proposals for development/relocation and what impact this would have and the cost implications.
- Members sought reassurance that that SSDC owned the freehold of all the properties concerned, and queried if there were any ground rents due on properties, and also that penalties associated with any leases would also be taken into consideration.
- Some members noted the Locality Working Group had met 3 or 4 times, but only now had the aspect of operational accommodation been added to the scope for the group.

Members felt things could have been done in a different way as concerns had been raised previously, and it now felt like the issue was being rushed.

- One member requested reassurance around the commitment to the redevelopment of Chard given the changes in Officer roles.
- Members requested that regeneration groups were consulted as part of the feasibility work.
- Committee members requested more frequent Communications to keep members informed at each stage.

The Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan Referendum

- Members acknowledged much work had been done to get to this stage, and endorsed the recommendations.
- Members queried which other parishes were also going through the process, and what obligations SSDC had for costs of the process.

Corporate Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report 2017/18: 2nd Quarter

- Members commented that the summary of progress for each priority in the Council Plan was useful.
- Page 149 - Regarding priority 5, some members raised queries about the Superfast Broadband, and in particular if it was known if the SSDC area had lost out on any delivery as a result of not putting in our £640k?

Purchase of Land Adjoining Boden Street Car Park, Chard

- It was noted the site was in the Chard Holyrood Ward – and hence report should refer to the ward member being Cllr Jason Baker not Cllr Dave Bulmer.
- Members queried which budget the money would be allocated from, and how much would remain in that budget after this purchase.

Yeovil Refresh – Delivery Arrangements

- Some members commented that funding for quick-win projects to be delivered in the Old Station area of town was needed and would be welcomed.
- Page 161 – Rec C – It was queried if the Programme Manager would be a contractor or an officer employed by SSDC, and for how many years?
- Page 162 – para 9 – Scrutiny noted that Appendix A had been published as a confidential document, however the report did not indicate it was confidential which may be confusing for the public.
- Page 167 – the table – members sought clarification regarding the ownership of Foundry House.

Westlands Revised Business Plan

- Members queried what assumptions had been used in order to generate the revised Business Plan?
- It was also noted that some tenants had re-located from other SSDC premises to Westlands, and it was acknowledged that while this had improved the business at Westlands it may have had a knock on effect at other venues such as the Innovation Centre.

- Members noted that Steve Joel had been referred to by name rather than job title several times in the report, which was unusual and they did not feel it was the correct way to refer to an officer in a report.
- Scrutiny made several comments in confidential session with regard to details in the confidential appendix.

District Executive Forward Plan

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Plan had been on the Forward Plan for December but had now been moved to January.
- Update on Yeovil Crematorium Refurbishment – The Chairman noted she had been surprised that the report had been circulated direct to members by email rather than a report on the District Executive agenda. Members asked when there would be opportunity to ask questions either by them or the public.

Monitoring the SSDC Council Tax Support Scheme - Report and Findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (November 2017)

The Scrutiny Manager presented the report which summarised the monitoring activity and work conducted since the last Council Tax Support Scheme Task and Finish report in December 2016. The report also details recommendations for the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19. Members of the Scrutiny Committee were asked to endorse the report to District Executive.

The Chairman, Task and Finish members and Scrutiny Manager responded to points of detail. Some members queried if it was cost effective to be running the scheme and sought re-assurance of the monitoring of the costs of collection.

At the end of the short discussion, members unanimously agreed to endorse the report of the Task & Finish Group to District Executive.

2nd January 2018

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 4 January 2018

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 4 January 2018 and made comments including:

Heart of the South West (HotSW) – Joint Committee

- Members generally endorsed the concept of progress with a single Joint Committee.
- Members asked if a formal response had been submitted by SSDC to the productivity strategy consultation and if a copy could be circulated to all members.
- Several members were concerned about some of the assumptions that were detailed in the report including:
 - Assumption that Somerset County Council have adequate resources
 - That initial contributions from member authorities for 2018/19 will be adequate (Rec F).
- Regarding the Risk matrix – members queried if the financial risk had been accurately reported in the risk profile matrix ‘after officer recommendation’.

- Para 8 on page 5, second bullet point – members sought reassurance that Economic Development within SSDC had the resources and was strong enough to take this forward.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2018/19

- Scrutiny made no comments as the matter had been thoroughly considered during a Task and Finish Review – the final report of which is included within the appendices for this item.

SSDC Transformation Programme – Progress Report

- It was noted that several times in the past (not necessarily at Scrutiny) members had requested a chart showing people involved with Transformation, including their photos and key responsibilities, but this had still not materialised.
- Scrutiny noted that members had previously been informed that a fortnightly or monthly communication / newsletter would be sent to all members, however this seemed to no longer be happening.
- Scrutiny sought re-assurance that the right level and type of communication was going out to staff.
- The report indicated that the Transformation project is on budget and schedule, however Scrutiny noted the report did not detail the ripple effect on services and any impact on service delivery. Are all services meeting targets?
- Page 34, para 20 – Scrutiny requested that any predicted reductions in service delivery as we progress through Transformation, should be communicated to members and appropriate stakeholders, in order to help manage customer expectations.
- Page 37, Programme status report – Scrutiny noted the table at the top of the page did not define a key and so it looked like a line of ‘number ones’ – it was felt the table needed to be clearer about what it identified.
- Page 39 – under Accommodation, it mentions that the Building Contractor has indicated terminating the contract with SSDC, but the report did not indicate what was being done to address the matter.
- Page 41, Workstream status report – members noted it would be useful if under the ‘Key activities next period’ if the activities could be prioritised or some narrative provided as to the importance of an activity.
- Members queried if there were core posts remaining vacant in the programme, and if so, would it be an additional risk to the programme?
- Page 50 – Members were pleased to note that there will be an external user group. As Scrutiny are commencing a Task and Finish shortly for Customer Accessibility and online services, it was queried if there was an opportunity for some collaborative work?

Annual Review of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)

- Members sought assurance that this would cascade down through the new structure.
- Scrutiny queried if the new GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) would have any impact on the RIPA?

2018/19 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Update

- Members were pleased to note from the Section 151 Officer that the government settlement announced shortly before Christmas slightly improved SSDC’s financial position.

- Members noted that the government were possibly looking to restrict Councils on borrowing for property investment, and queried the implications for SSDC should restrictions be made.
- Members expressed concern that there did not seem to be any in depth reporting of commercial property investments. Scrutiny requested separate more detailed reporting in the future to inform if investments purchased under the Commercial Strategy are performing as per the expected returns detail in the strategy.
- Business Rates Pooling (page 89) – members queried if any of the pilot schemes should go on to become national policy, would it be a positive impact for budgets in future years? Had any assumptions on pooling been made when calculating the forward budget as detailed in the report?
- Para 7, page 83 – members queried if a figure had been set yet regarding the Council Tax premium on empty properties.
- Para 16, page 86 – members queried what the £10k for strategic management events and sponsorship had been for and why it was an unavoidable pressure?
- Para 27, page 87 – it was queried how the figure of £50k had been derived for a Treasury Risk Management Reserve.

Yeovil Street Markets (Agenda item 11)

Scrutiny raised a number of questions and concerns including:

- The income for the Saturday Market is not included in the report, why? Can some indicative figures be provided?
- Will SSDC still get income from the licensing as it's not clear in the report?
- What is the view of the Yeovil Chamber of Commerce with regard to the influence and impact of the Market?
- Has discussion taken place with Yeovil Town Council, and have they been offered the opportunity to manage the market?
- Is there a charter for the Market, would this form part of the performance management part of an agreement with an operator.
- There are not enough safeguards in the proposed arrangement to ensure effective operation and minimisation of risks. Why is the arrangement proposed so loose and open ended?
- Is it wise to be looking to pursue the option when only one provider was interviewed?
- Para 16 of the report mentions that Markets and Events are key to the overall success of the town centre, how will this proposed arrangement ensure this?

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 12)

- Members noted that an item regarding the Council Plan and Annual Action Plan was scheduled for February – members queried if there would be any consultation with members or opportunity for comments prior to the report coming forward?

Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews

Members noted the updates provided by the Scrutiny Manager on each of the Task and Finish Groups currently in progress or commencing in the near future.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2018 – This Task and Finish work was now complete. The report and recommendations are included in this Full Council agenda.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019 – The Task and Finish group had held their second meeting and were progressing with potential options to reduce administration time for the

scheme. At the next meeting members will begin to assess options in detail considering impact.

Homefinder Somerset Plain English Policy - No progress since the last update.

Car Parking Charges – Review to commence once resource allows. Members briefly discussed the subject and noted the car parking strategy was also out of date. There was a general opinion that the Car Parking Strategy in terms of planning future parking provision should be reviewed prior to a Task and Finish review of car parking charges.

Transformation – Customer Accessibility - This review will commence later in January 2018 the Scrutiny Committee have tasked this group to work with the Transformation Team to identify and deliver Best Practice to provide accessible on-line information and services for all. Scrutiny Committee invite members to volunteer to join the group. The group will compile its own project scope and terms of reference, to include meeting times. If you would like to volunteer please contact Jo Gale – Joanna.Gale@southsomerset.gov.uk Specialist Scrutiny.

In addition to the Task and Finish work Scrutiny Committee have been met the Strategy and Commissioning Director and the Performance and People Manager to discuss the current Performance Reporting Arrangements and proposals for a new framework moving forward.

Scrutiny Work Programme

Scrutiny Committee are planning their work for the forthcoming year and welcome suggestions for topics to be reviewed/explored this year. Members particularly encourage suggestions that will:

- Address a matter of local concern.
- Support the delivery of the Council Plan
- Lead to improved value for money
- Will aid the change process as a result of New Government guidance, legislation or other reason for significant change in Strategy, Service policy and delivery, or,
- Respond to an issue, proposed area of development by External Advisors, Stakeholders, Partners, Best Practice etc.
- Improve member understanding and will consequently lead to improved decision making.

Sue Steele
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee