

Scrutiny Committee

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since the last report to Full Council. The committee met on 30 January 2018 to consider:

Update Report on Progress with the Scheme to Develop and Refurbish Yeovil Crematorium

The Portfolio Holder for Area South introduced the report as detailed in the agenda, and was happy to answer any questions members had. The Environmental Health Manager noted the project was all on track and running to schedule and budget. He provided some updates including:

- the project had now gone out to tender for the cremators
- work had commenced on the Bluebell Road access

Comments made by the Portfolio Holder and Environmental Health Manager in response to comments made during a brief discussion included:

- a scale model of the scheme would be available in the near future – it was currently being slightly modified to incorporate some minor changes that had been made.
- Project was on budget and included the small changes being made to the scheme and the new tarmac paths.
- Plans will be available to view online when they are finalised, but members were welcome to view the current plans on request.

Members were pleased to note the progress and thanked the Environmental Health Manager and the Portfolio Holder for the informative report.

Discretionary Housing Payment Policy Update

The Benefits Team Leader presented the report as detailed in the agenda, which provided an update on progress made and analysis of results following the implementation of the new Discretionary Housing Payment Policy in April 2017.

There was a very brief discussion during which members were pleased to note the progress made. No concerns or issues were raised.

Members thanked the Team Leader for her report.

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1st February 2018

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 1st February 2018 and made the following comments:

SSDC Council Action Plan 2018-19 (Agenda item 6)

- Para 2.9 – Members were disappointed that rural businesses, land based businesses and agriculture did not feature more prominently in the Action Plan given that so much of the district is of a rural nature.

- Broadband – several members felt this was more a key performance indicator for County and the LEP, as broadband is something that can be promoted by SSDC rather than administered.
- Scrutiny queried what role SSDC was playing in the iAero project.
- Page 12, priority 1 – regarding satisfaction rates, members queried if dis-satisfaction and complaints would continue to be monitored.
- Members sought reassurance that there will be some directly comparable performance indicators, so that we can benchmark against other appropriate local authorities.
- Members asked if data would be available at a district level or whether, in time, it would be possible to drill down to a lower level such as wards and specific service provision.
- Members also sought reassurance that customer service data will continue to be measured in order to facilitate improvements being made or ensuring adequate capacity. E.g. How long callers waiting, calls abandoned etc.
- It was noted that customers contacting us by telephone now receive a recorded message indicating the time to be connected to an advisor. It is suggested that if a caller chooses to hang up after the message it should be recorded differently to an abandoned call, as the customer has made an informed choice to hang-up.
- Member suggested that a performance monitor was measured for those activities that SSDC is specifically responsible for with regard to anti-social behaviour and make it clear in any reports – what constitutes anti-social behaviour so the measure is more meaningful to residents.

2018/19 Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan (Agenda item 7)

- Members asked for some clarity and further explanation regarding the figures relating to New Homes Bonus within the report.
- With regard to the Government 4 year settlement, Scrutiny queried if there was still doubt about funding for Year 5 onwards?
- Page 21, para 23 – Members found elements of the table difficult to understand. It was suggested a short narrative for sub headings in the table may be useful or possibly to see if there is any alternative way of presenting the information.
- Page 17 - Scrutiny felt the wording of Recommendation 4b was a little confusing as it wasn't clear if the £1.85 for the SRA is part of, or in addition to, the Council Tax increase of £5.
- Scrutiny were content that the recommendations go forward.

2017/18 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Quarter Ending 31 December 2017 (Agenda item 8)

- Scrutiny did not raise any queries, and were content that the recommendations go forward.

2017/18 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Quarter Ending 31 December 2017 (Agenda item 9)

- Scrutiny did not raise any queries, and were content that the recommendations go forward.

District-Wide Strategic Grants – Proposal for Two-Year Funding Agreements With Access for All, CASS and SPARK 2018-2020 (Agenda item 10)

- Scrutiny sought reassurance about how the performance is measured and reviewed for each of the organisations.
- Members endorsed comments made by the Portfolio Holder at the Scrutiny Committee, and noted the role of CASS was crucial and should continue to be supported by SSDC.
- Scrutiny noted the grants to be awarded would be the same as previous years and so effectively the organisations were absorbing inflation, hence effectively year on year we were granting them less.
- Some members sought reassurance that the funding to CASS was appropriate given that they were now helping more clients especially since the roll-out of Universal Credit.

Loan to Somerset Care & Repair Ltd (Agenda item 11)

- Scrutiny were encouraged by the project as it would help to address the challenges of the new Homelessness Reduction Act. It was also noted how the social attributes of the company complimented the aims of SSDC.
- Members did query if once a unit was rented out to someone whether it would be on a permanent basis or for a defined length of time?

Food Hygiene Rating Scheme – Cost Recovery for Requested Re-Inspections (Agenda item 12)

- Scrutiny sought some clarity about the scheme and queried if re-visits were just for the purposes of a business trying to gain a higher rating?
- Members queried how the £115 fee had been derived at, and whether it would be an SSDC figure or one that would be more widely used.

Commercial Property, Land and Development – Performance Management Indicators (PMI) Report (Agenda item 13)

Page 140, PMI 1b – Members acknowledged that estimating the spend required would be a big unknown for some properties.

Members asked for clarification of how information relating to PMIs 1a - 1d would be detailed in the overarching Performance Monitoring.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 14)

- Scrutiny made no comments.

Commercial Services & Income Generation Update (Confidential)

Scrutiny made several comments in confidential session with regard to details in the confidential report.

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 2019 – No further meetings have taken place since the last update.

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

Car Parking Charges – Review to commence once resource allows. Members discussed this review again and agreed this would not take priority or run in parallel with the customer accessibility review detailed below, members agreed they wanted to focus their efforts and resource where outcomes would be achieved.

Transformation – Customer Accessibility - This review has yet to commence, the timing of the work will be scheduled carefully to ensure that it adds value to the Transformation process without delay. 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.

Members also noted that Task and Finish work by the Committee had featured in the Rural Housing Spotlight newsletter because we had identified the disposal policy as an example of failure to rural proof. Other authorities were being asked if they had similar experiences, could this be the catalyst for change?

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
- 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.

Councillor Sue Steele
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee