

Scrutiny Committee

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since the election in May and the subsequent formation of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee met on 4 Jun, 2 July, 30 July and 3 September 2019 to:

4 June 2019

Review of Work Practices, Reflecting on Scrutiny Committee Members Training, and Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local & Combined Authorities

Scrutiny Committee members reviewed the good practice referred to in the Scrutiny Committee training on Wednesday 29 May 2019, and the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities, to formulate and agree working practices.

Appointment of Scrutiny Committee Members to Joint Scrutiny Panels

Two members were appointed to the Joint Scrutiny Panels as follows:
Somerset Waste Board Joint Scrutiny Panel - Cllrs Charlie Hull and Brian Hamilton.
Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel - Cllrs Paul Maxwell and Sue Osborne.

2 July 2019

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 4 July 2019

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 4 July 2019 and made comments, as detailed in the minutes (available via this link). <http://modgov.southsomerset.gov.uk/documents/g2516/Printed%20minutes%2002nd-Jul-2019%2013.30%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=1>
Responses to most of the comments were provided at the Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officer or Portfolio Holder who were present at the committee meeting.

Review of Quarterly Performance Reporting

Members considered the content, information and style of the quarterly reports to support the new year's performance reporting, members provided feedback and made suggestions to ensure they can use the reporting to effectively carry out their Scrutiny role with regards to performance.

Review of Work Practices, Reflecting on Scrutiny Committee Members Training, and Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local & Combined Authorities

Members reflected on the key learning points from the Scrutiny training delivered in May and considered proposals for working practices and approaches to inform the work programme.

30 July 2019

Customer Focussed Performance

The Customer Focussed Team Manager provided members with a presentation of the latest performance information for the Customer Focussed team and the different customer access routes to services. The presentation included information about:

- Moving towards a digital council
 - Supporting customers
 - Changes made since January 2018
 - The new technology enabled space for customers at Petters House – Connect
 - Successes so far
 - Current telephone performance – including statistics for wait times and calls dealt with at first point of contact
 - Plans for improvements
 - Targets for the future
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Quarterly Corporate Performance Report 2019-20 – Quarter 1 (Q1)

Members considered the report, some members expressed concern that while figures for some measures showed targets were being met, in reality, in some cases this was not what customers were experiencing, and it was felt a narrative should be provided within the report.

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 August 2019

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 1 August 2019 and made comments as detailed in the minutes (available via this link).

<http://modgov.southsomerset.gov.uk/documents/g2517/Printed%20minutes%2030th-Jul-2019%2013.30%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=1>

Responses to comments were provided at the Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officer or Portfolio Holder.

3 September 2019

Commercial Strategy 2017-2021 Mid-Term Review and Update

Members had received an informative and useful presentation at an informal member workshop prior to the meeting of Scrutiny Committee. Members made the following question comments with regard to the report:

- Regarding the assessment groups (IAG and DAG) – members asked that as the current Monitoring Officer and S.151 Officer were due to leave around the end of the year, if there would be any gap in expertise.
- Members sought reassurance that the S.151 Officer was happy with the level of funding proposed and the proposed increase in delegated powers

- If the Opium project was not fully operational by October – what will the financial implications be?
- Given changes on the High Streets nationally, and that Marks and Spencer has announced store closures etc. – what assurances were there regarding the stability/security of the income stream from the investment in the Yeovil store?
- Members sought reassurance that there is a mix of rental types and dates of leases were staggered, and hence multiple investments were not due to expire at similar times.
- Members asked if all expenditure associated with any predicted void periods are taken account of in financial projections.
- Regarding Elleston, members asked if there was intention for the company to go out to market seeking contracts and tenders and to potential diversify in the future.
- Members queried when all the investment properties/projects had been purchased and finalised, if the costs associated with running the Commercial Services and Income Generation Team would reduce?
- Members asked if there was any intention to work with other local authorities to manage assets and property investments.

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5 September 2019

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 5 September 2019, no comments or questions were made for any items with the exception of those comments and questions detailed above.

Scrutiny Work Programme

Members have agreed Task and Finish Groups for

- Review of Council Tax Support Scheme 19/20 and 20/21
- Environment Strategy

Members are also supporting a countywide Joint Scrutiny of the Climate Change Strategy, councillors Paul Maxwell and Gerard Tucker on the official SSDC Representatives.

Jo Gale - Scrutiny Specialist is currently collecting suggestions for the Scrutiny Overview and Scrutiny Work programme, all members were contacted via e-mail on 5 September 2019, and wider consultation will take place in the coming months.

In addition to work at the committee meetings and Task and Finish groups Scrutiny Committee members reviewed the draft SSDC Environment Strategy on 3 September and provided 'critical friend' challenge and feedback to help progress the strategy towards the final version.

Cllr Crispin Raikes
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee