

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES AND PLACE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Tuesday 31 October 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr T Lock (Chairman), Cllr M Lewis (Vice-Chairman), Cllr P Ham, Cllr T Napper, Cllr A Wedderkopp, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr J Thorne, Cllr G Noel and Cllr H Davies

Other Members present: Cllr C Aparicio Paul, Cllr D Fothergill, Cllr D Hall, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr J Lock, Cllr D Loveridge, Cllr T Munt and Cllr R Williams

Apologies for absence: Cllr John Hunt

41 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

Cllr Hugh Davies declared a personal interest in Item 8 as he had received communications from the public speaker at the last Scrutiny for Policies and Place meeting regarding county farms.

42 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 03 October 2017** - Agenda Item 3

It was clarified that Cllr Bob Filmer had declared an interest as a member of the Sedgemoor Planning Committee.

With this exception, the minutes of the meeting on 03 October were accepted as being accurate by the Committee.

A member requested that the response from the Director of Children's Services regarding the hike in demand for children's services (minute 35, paragraph 8) be sent to the Committee.

43 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

Sue Osborne asked a public question regarding Item 8. She expressed disappointment that the call-in request made last week was not allowed by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee despite being called-in by two county councillors and despite the recommendation made by the Committee on 5th September to suspend the disposal of county farms until the review by the Task & Finish Group is completed. Why did the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee not allow the two county councillors to exercise their legal right to call-in this key decision? She also expressed disappointment that the Chair and Vice-Chair did not respond to her emails regarding the matter and did not acknowledge receipt. She also expressed concern at the length of time it took to provide a written response to the questions she asked at the 03 October meeting. The written response was received on 27 October. What is the normal time scale for producing a written response? The response stated that Cllr Hall was unable to accept the Scrutiny recommendation as this would have been in contravention of council policy. If this is the case why was this not pointed out at the 05 September meeting when property officers were present?

Can you please explain why some of the farms and land on the retain list have been sold - surely this is contrary to policy too? A temporary halt is not a change of policy. It is an appropriate step if you are reviewing a policy. Whilst Scrutiny has no decision making powers, it can make recommendations which carry a material weight. It is either a very wise or very foolish executive which disregards the recommendations of its own scrutiny committee. In light of these events and the written response received, what confidence can I have that Cllr Hall will approach the completed report with an open mind in the event that the Task & Finish Group recommend retention of the remainder of the estate?

It was confirmed that a written response would be sent within ten working days.

44 **Heart of the South West Productivity Strategy - Agenda Item 5**

The Committee received a report and presentation from the Strategic Commissioning Manager, Economy and Planning which updated Members on the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Productivity Strategy.

The Strategy has been prepared in partnership with district, county and unitary authorities, national parks and the HotSW Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), as well as with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), private and third sector partners and central government. It is an overarching strategy document that outlines key priorities and objectives for the HotSW. Specifically, it sets out the aim of narrowing the 'productivity gap' evident in the HotSW LEP area, driving up prosperity and living standards for all, and securing the resources needed to do so.

In short, the Productivity Strategy aims to double the net worth of the HotSW economy from approximately £35 billion to £70 billion of GVA by 2036. Its stated vision is 'for all parts of the HotSW to become more prosperous, enabling people to have a better quality of life and higher living standards'. The Productivity Strategy is structured around the three strategic objective areas of 'Leadership and Knowledge', 'Connectivity and Infrastructure', and 'Working and Learning'.

Productivity is the measure of competitiveness of an economy and provides a technical way to assess how an economy is fairing.

SCC and other partners and stakeholders are now being consulted on the final draft in advance of a 30th November 2017 deadline. There is also a series of public consultation events planned across the HotSW including one in Somerset on 22nd November 2017. SCC's response will be considered by cabinet on 15th Cabinet and the Strategy will receive final sign off by the Joint Committee and LEP Board in January 2018.

The Committee discussed the importance of connectivity especially transport and digital infrastructure, particularly with regard to building the rural economy. Members commented that the business economy and rural economy are linked.

They discussed how the HotSW is ranked and compares with other areas and suggested using this measure to assess the progress of achievement against ambitions. It was commented that Somerset's position within ranking tables will always be challenging because of its geography. Being low in the table demonstrates that there is a lot of opportunity available.

They recognised the importance of having a flexible, over-arching strategy in place but stressed that the detail of its implementation was vital to ensure its success. It is key that the strategy does not only focus on urban businesses or those that don't relate to land.

The Committee noted the report.

45 **Heart of the South West Joint Committee** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee received a report from the Strategic Manager, Governance & Risk on the progress of the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Joint Committee.

Members were first updated on the background of work carried out over the last two years by 19 Devon and Somerset authorities to seek a devolution deal for the area to bring down Government powers, functions and funding to improve productivity for the area. It was confirmed that a clear indication has been given that this could be achieved without the need for an elected mayor.

The HotSW agreed to establish a Joint Committee to progress its productivity strategy and put in place a formal mechanism to take forward negotiations with government on a range of policy agendas with a view to achieving additional benefits for the region. The Joint Committee model was designed to add additional benefit to the constituent authorities and it was stressed that this would not take powers away from the constituent authorities.

A series of recommendations required to establish the Joint Committee will now be taken through the constituent authorities over the autumn period via a template report to ensure consistency with a view to the Joint Committee being established by January 2018. These recommendations will be taken through SCC's Cabinet and Full Council in November 2017.

The template report will be accompanied by an 'Arrangements' document outlining the legal status, purpose, aims and objectives, membership and functions of the Committee. In summary the body established by this process will be a formal joint committee of the 17 councils and two National Park authorities. Each constituent authority will have one 'seat' on the Committee and it is anticipated that these will be filled by Council Leaders. The LEP and the CCGs will have non-voting representation.

The report also detailed the proposed list of functions for the Joint Committee and the draft figures for the Joint Committee budget.

The Committee discussed the challenge of aligning 19 different authorities and were informed that there are only so many democratic structures that can be put in place. The Joint Committee is a mechanism that everyone can agree to. It's an appropriate governance modal for this point in time.

The Committee queried whether government funding and Committee budget figures would be sufficient. There is no separate officer team needed currently for the Joint committee as officer time is being committed on an 'in kind' basis. If this 'in kind' commitment continues then the budgeted figures are realistic. If it was withdrawn then the costs would rise. Funds from central government are negotiated when the Joint Committee presents its business case.

It was clarified that only Local Authorities can form the Joint Committee membership due to limits set by legislation. The national Parks count as Local Authorities under the legislation but the CCG and LEP can only be non-voting partners.

The Committee noted the report.

46 **County Vision - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee received an introduction from the Leader of Council and a report from the Director, Customers and Communities regarding the draft County Vision 2018 -21

In previous Administrations, a detailed County Plan has been approved giving direction and strategic guidance to officers and politicians. It was felt that in some ways the County Plan process was trying to provide a detailed reference point for all the Council's services and with that scope had only a limited success.

The new approach for 2018-21 is to present a Vision instead of a Plan setting high level principles and direction of travel but flexible enough to adapt and change according to national government as well as local pressures and opportunities.

A presentation slide was shared with members which summarised the four key principles of the Vision.

The draft Vision will be shared with the public, partners and stakeholders to give outside bodies a chance to influence the final form. The finalised Vision will be taken to Full Council in February 2018.

The Committee questioned the relationship between the Vision and council policies and it was confirmed that policies would need to underpin the Vision. They discussed the timeframe for the Vision and suggested that a 'stepping stone' guidance be produced detailing how to achieve the aims of the Vision so that progress could be measured. It was confirmed that the timeframe for the Vision would be the course of the present administration.

The Committee noted the report. It was agreed to circulate the presentation slides to the Committee.

47 Verbal Update from County Farms Task & Finish Group - Agenda Item 8

The Chair of the County Farms Task & Finish Group provided a verbal update of the progress of its review.

The Committee heard that the Group had gathered a lot of information at previous meetings which it was currently considering. The Group have consulted with stakeholders, including the National Farmers Union and the Tenant Farmers Association, and are currently considering their views.

The Group was due to meet again the following day when it would consider the views of existing county farm tenants. One further meeting would take place before the Group submitted its report and recommendations at the 05 December meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee.

The Committee noted the update.

48 Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 9

The Committee considered and noted the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions.

Following debate, the Committee requested the following addition to the work programme:

- Budget Monitoring Report Q2
- County Vision (Jan 2018)
- Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband workshop

49 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 10

The Governance Manager updated the Committee that, following consultation with officers, the Chair had agreed to decline the invitation from Devon County Council to join a Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) Task & Finish Group as it was not felt that this would be beneficial.

It was agreed that the Committee would continue to receive regular updates on the CDS programme in order to scrutinise its progress and that a workshop could be arranged to answer questions about particular areas. If Members felt that they required more information in future then this could be reviewed.

It was requested that the next report include an update on Gigaclear.

(The meeting ended at 11.55 am)

CHAIRMAN