
Report of the Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place

Cabinet Member: N/A

Division and Local Member: All

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1. Summary

- 1.1. The Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place is required by the Constitution to make an annual report to the Council and also to provide each other meeting of the Council with a summary progress report and outcomes of scrutiny. This summary report covers the work of the meetings held on 11 December 2018 and 23 January 2019.
- 1.2. The Committee agreed their work programme would comprise items considered directly at meetings plus other items considered or “commissioned” using flexible arrangements outside of the formal committee structure.
- 1.3. Members of the Council are reminded that:
 - all Members have been invited to attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committee and to contribute freely on any agenda item;
 - any Member could propose a topic for inclusion on the Committee's Work Programme;
 - any Member could be asked by the Committee to contribute information and evidence, and to participate in specific scrutiny reviews.
- 1.4. The Committee has 8 elected Members and we have meetings scheduled approximately for every month. Our next meeting will be held in the Council Chamber, Shire Hall at 10.00am on 06 March 2019.

2. Background

2.1. Scrutiny Work Programme

At each meeting the Committee considers and updates its work programme, having regard to the Cabinet's forward plan of proposed key decisions. The Committee also agreed to hold themed meetings and Members are looking forward to this approach, in particular the attendance of representatives and/or stakeholders from partner agencies.

2.2. 11 December 2018

The first item on the agenda was the Month 6 revenue Budget Monitoring Report. The Committee considered this report which outlined that the Month 6 projected revenue outturn for 2018/19 was £3.158m over the available budget of £317.883m. Good progress has been made in delivering the required savings and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is currently assessing the additional management action and mitigations required to further reduce the current projected overspend. The next detailed, quarterly report will be presented in

February 2019, based on expenditure to the end of December 2018.

In a verbal update, Members were informed that the downward trend of spend is continuing at that the latest outturn position is now forecast at around £2.3m. The contingency in place would, therefore, be enough to meet the overspend currently although measures to address this overspend are still in place.

The Committee discussed: the use of capital receipts; Dillington House; the use of government grant money for highways, particularly potholes; small improvement schemes and the progress of savings proposals which required consultation with the Schools Forum.

The Committee noted the report and asked for an update on the use of the Highways grant and the Small Improvement Scheme. It was agreed to provide this once the analysis had been completed.

Next the Committee considered a report which outlined the proposed Capital Investment Programme for the period 2019/20 to 2022/23 of £225.121m.

It was clarified that this report would be presented to Cabinet in the New Year and that any comments from the Committee would feed in to the decision-making process.

In previous years the Capital Programme has been agreed one year at a time. This creates difficulty in some areas, such as the Colley Lane development in Bridgwater and the A Block refurbishment project, when agreement is reached for the first part of development but not the second. Officers are better able to plan in a considered way if they are able to plan ahead. Therefore, the proposal is to seek approval for an on-going programme which can still be subject to change. Any decision on the capital programme will also have an impact on the revenue budget.

The Committee discussed: the school building programme; minimum revenue position; estimated funding in future years; the use of S106 and CIL funds; borrowing and commercial investments; paying down capital loans and parish council support for small improvement schemes.

Following a vote, the Committee approved the following recommendation:

The Scrutiny for Polices and Place Committee acknowledges the importance of SCC's ability and necessary resources to negotiate the best possible contributions to infrastructure projects from the development of housing in Somerset.

The Committee noted the report.

Following this, the Committee considered a report on the Library Service Re-Design. The report provided an update on progress with establishing Community Library Partnerships, in the early stages of implementing the decision by the County Council's Cabinet to re-design the libraries service.

A summary of the expressions of interest that are being taken forward was provided. The Committee was informed that no expressions of interest were

received for Highbridge and Sunningdale libraries. These libraries will therefore close on 29 December 2018, and library services will be delivered to the surrounding communities through the new Library Outreach Service delivery model, as determined through the Cabinet decision. The committee were also updated on the progress of other areas of work underway as part of the Cabinet decision.

The Committee discussed: mobile library provision; support for Watchet Town Council and provision of legal advice.

The Committee noted the report.

During the next item, the Committee considered a report which provided an update on the council's ongoing progress towards the outcomes laid out in the council's Business Plan. The report provided the latest information available in the period up until 30th September 2018. The new design and format of the report was highlighted to the Committee.

The Committee noted the report and were pleased with the new format.

Next the Committee considered a presentation which provided an update on the A Block Refurbishment project.

The presentation outlined the business case for change and the Cabinet recommendations, the options considered, expected savings and future opportunities, benefits and risks and key next steps for the project.

The Committee discussed: valuations of the county hall site; risks associated with not carrying the enabling works; occupancy studies; parking; financial benefits of freeing up other buildings in Taunton; public perception of the project and the importance of keeping Members updated.

Members raised concerns that so few risks had been presented and it was clarified other risks were identified on the full risk register. Following a vote, the Committee made the following recommendation:

The Scrutiny for Polices and Place Committee recommends that a complete, detailed assessment of all risks associated with the A Block Refurbishment Project, along with a valuation of A, B & C Block should be provided to the Cabinet ahead of their meeting on 19 December 2019.

The Committee noted the report.

Finally the Committee received a Lead Local Flood Authority update. The report updated the Committee on the continued progress by the Flood and Water Management team in 2018/19 and set out the key activities for 2019/20.

The Committee discussed: the role of the SuDS inspector; the connection between highways, housing and flooding and the need for as much green space on developments as possible.

The Committee noted the report.

23 January 2019

The Committee began by considering the Month 8 Revenue Budget Monitoring report which outlined the projected revenue outturn for 2018/19. For the first time in this financial year, an underspend of £0.921m is projected. This projection is based upon actual spending to the end of November 2018 (month 8) and compares to the available budget of £317.882m.

The main change between the month 7 and month 8 projections is that a revised approach to the calculation of the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) has been applied, taking advantage of new and more flexible regulations.

In a verbal update, the Committee were informed that a refund of around £1m is due to be received from central government. This refund relates to business rates and it is proposed to put this towards general funds once received. It was clarified that the business rates refund was a one-off sum to be received in 2018/19.

The Committee discussed: the change in calculation of the MRP and whether this would result in further debt payments needing to be made; planned use of the underspent funds and the need for the Committee to consider the Business Plan alongside the financial plan.

The Committee noted the report.

3. Consultations undertaken

- 3.1. The Committee invites all County Councillors to attend and contribute to every one of its meetings.

4. Implications

- 4.1. The Committee considers carefully, and often asks for further information about the implications as outlined in, the reports considered at its meetings.
- 4.2. For further details of the reports considered by the Committee please contact the author of this report.

5. Background papers

- 5.1. Further information about the Committee including dates of meetings in the new quadrennium, and agendas & reports from previous meetings are available via the Council's website. www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.