

## **Somerset County Council**

Constitution and Governance Committee

30 January 2023

---

### **Report of the Scrutiny at Somerset Council Task and Finish Group**

Lead Members: Cllr Theo Butt Philip, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, Cllr Leigh Redman, Vice Chair of the Task and Finish Group

Division and Local Member: N/A

Lead Officer & Author: Jamie Jackson – Scrutiny Manager

Contact Details: 01823 357040

#### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 In October 2022 the County Council’s Scrutiny Manager was tasked to work with the County Council’s current 4 Scrutiny Committees to establish views, suggestions and ultimately formal recommendations on how the scrutiny function should operate at Somerset Council post Vesting Day.
- 1.2 The Scrutiny Manager attended a meeting of each of the 4 scrutiny committees during late October and early November 2022, where he presented a report setting out the purpose of the Task and Finish Group, the intended structure of the group and the reporting timelines. As part of the report volunteers were sought for a cross-committee, cross-party Task and Finish Group.
- 1.3 The Task and Finish group subsequently met on 4 occasions during December 2022 and January 2023, considering various topics such as current structure, what happens elsewhere, possible scrutiny models and a Director’s perspective from David Carter, Deputy Director ECI and Commissioning.
- 1.4 At the final Task and Finish Group meeting on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023 following a number of detailed discussions and several opinions expressed, the Group agreed a series of 7 recommendations, which are detailed below in Paragraph 2.1 and were presented to Executive/SLT on 16<sup>th</sup> January. Following today’s meeting of the Constitution and Governance Committee it is intended the recommendations will be considered by Full Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

#### **2. Recommendation(s)**

##### **2.1 The Committee is asked to consider and comment on the following recommendations from the Task and Finish Group:-**

- (1) There should be a full review of the revised scrutiny structure within 12 months of Vesting Day to ensure it is fit for purpose. This review should take place sooner if required.**

- (2) The Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Families Scrutiny Committees to remain as they are currently constituted.**
- (3) To create a Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee, whose portfolio will include Finance and Procurement, Strategic Asset Management, ICT, Partnerships and Localities and Strategy and Performance. This committee would have specific responsibility for budget monitoring and financial scrutiny.**
- (4) The new Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee will form part of an increase to 5 formal Scrutiny Committees – Adults and Health, Children and Families, Communities, Corporate and Resources and Climate and Place. The Task and Finish group have endeavoured to reflect the revised Senior Officer/Director's structure within the Scrutiny Committee division of responsibilities. This is shown within Appendix A.**
- (5) The 5 Scrutiny Committee model will be supported by an informal 6<sup>th</sup> 'committee' which will comprise the 5 Scrutiny Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs who will fulfil an oversight and steering role for the 5 formal Committees to ensure no duplication, efficiency of meeting time and allocation of work to Joint Scrutiny Committees. This group will also assume the responsibility for the review detailed in Recommendation 1 and will meet initially on a bi-monthly basis.**
- (6) Specific Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting dates are to be established as part of the committee meetings calendar and an on-going forward work programme to be maintained for each of them.**
- (7) To Create a dedicated scrutiny resource from the post Vesting Day Democratic Services team, to consist of a minimum of 1 x Service Manager, 1 x Governance Specialist/Team Leader, 2 x Committee clerks and 2 x Scrutiny Researchers. This would allow for much more effective and efficient scrutiny and greatly increase scrutiny opportunities, whilst ensuring resilience within the officer cohort.**

### **3. Background**

#### **3.1 Developing the new Somerset Council's function**

The request for volunteers at the 4 Scrutiny Committee meetings resulted in the intended 12 elected Member volunteers, however not in the required

numbers to equate to the correct political proportionality. Following a request the Leader of Council agreed to waive political proportionality with the understanding that a Liberal Democrat councillor would be appointed Chair. This enabled the creation of a group consisting of 12 elected Members - 4 x Liberal Democrats, 4 x Conservatives, 2 x Labour, 1 x Green and 1 x Independent plus 2 co-opted scrutiny members. There were multiple representatives from all 4 Committees including 3 of the current Scrutiny Committee Chairs

- 3.2 At the Group's first meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> December, Councillor Theo Butt Philip was elected Chair and Councillor Leigh Redman was elected Vice Chair. The group also agreed the dates for the following 3 meetings and requested a member of the Senior Leadership Team attend the next session. The group also agreed a Terms of Reference and an approximate timeline for consideration of the various topics required.
- 3.3 At the group's second meeting, there was consideration of how the role and responsibilities of scrutiny are detailed within many other Unitary authorities' constitutions and also members gave their experience of scrutiny from within Somerset County Council and also their experience from other Local Authorities. The group also had a very welcome Q&A session with David Carter, Deputy Director ECI and Commissioning, which proved very beneficial.
- 3.4 The group's third meeting provided them with the opportunity to reflect on what they had heard and considered so far, but also the chance to scrutinise the scrutiny committee structures and portfolios at 10 other Local Authorities, including other new Unitary councils and regional neighbours.
- 3.5 At the fourth and final meeting of the group had a further lengthy discussion on what was the best format of scrutiny committees for the new Council to commence with, however all members agreed that one of the most important recommendations is that there must be a review of the scrutiny arrangements within the first 12 months to ensure they are fit for purpose. The most debated area of committee structure related to the areas currently scrutinised by the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committees. The group eventually agreed on a 5 formal Scrutiny Committee model as detailed in paragraph 2.1 and a further 6 recommendations that would be presented to Executive/SLT meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023.
- 3.7 Cllr Butt Philip and the Scrutiny Manager presented the 7 recommendations to Executive and SLT on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023 and there was broad agreement for all of the recommendations proposed and thanks was given to all of the members who had participated and engaged in a very enthusiastic, flexible and timely way.

## **4. Implications**

### **4.1 Legal & Risk:**

This report complies with all legal requirements. The only risk to the Council would result from the Council failing to fulfil its legal obligations.

### **4.2 Financial, equalities, sustainability and community safety implications:**

There are no direct equalities implications arising from any of the proposals in this report. There are also no anticipated direct sustainability or community safety implications associated with the proposals in this report.

## **5. Background Papers**

- 5.1 Council's Constitution  
Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000

## **Appendix A - Scrutiny Committee for Climate and Place portfolio**