

Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee

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1. Summary

- 1.1. The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee is required by the Constitution to make an annual report to the Council, and this report builds on the regular Scrutiny reports to Council meetings. A selection of the topics covered by Scrutiny Members during the year is shown in Section 4 of this report.
- 1.2. The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee has discussed a number of strategic and operational issues through the year. The Committee contributed to the Medium Term Financial Plan process and as in previous years held themed meetings on community safety as well as workshop/training sessions.
- 1.3. The Committee has taken a keen interest in the Core Council Performance which monitors the Council's Change Programme and we have considered update and progress reports that covered a wide variety of the Council's business. We have indicated that we wish to continue to receive such reports.
- 1.4. We have used task and finish groups to further explore in depth topics outside of our scheduled Committee meetings and we have found this flexible approach to be productive and interesting.

2. Issues for consideration

- 2.1. This report is for information.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee has 9 elected Members, appointed by Full Council in accordance with party political representation.
- 3.2. Members agreed their work programme would comprise items considered directly at Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee meetings plus other items considered or "commissioned" using flexible arrangements outside of the formal Committee structure.
- 3.3. Our Committee reviews its work programme at each meeting and Members have tried to select a broad range of topics that cover all aspects of the Council's work. During the year Members were reminded that:
 - All Council Members are invited to attend meetings of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee and to contribute freely on any agenda item;

- Any Member can propose a topic for inclusion on the Scrutiny Work Programme;
- Members may be asked by the Scrutiny for Polices and Place Committee to contribute information and evidence from their own division and from their own experience, and to participate in specific Scrutiny reviews.

4. Work Programme

- 4.1.** During the year and already reported to Council, topics considered included:
- Medium Term Financial Plan & Revenue Budget Monitoring;
 - Capital Investment Programme;
 - Corporate Performance & Core Council Programme update reports;
 - Connecting Devon and Somerset updates;
 - Highways projects updates;
 - Traded Services update reports;
 - Asset rationalisation & County Farms;
 - Library Service Review Consultation;
 - Regular Flood and Water Management updates.
- 4.2.** Scrutiny Members have endeavoured through the last year of the Committee's meetings to make suggestions and express opinions to Commissioning/Service Directors and Cabinet Members after discussion and debate. The majority of these were accepted and incorporated either into the operations of the Council or the decisions of the Cabinet. The Committee wishes to formally place on record its appreciation to those Cabinet Members that have attended our meetings. This has often proved to be helpful both for the Committee and also the Cabinet Member and Lead Officer.
- 4.3.** This Committee has also enjoyed a constructive relationship with the two other Scrutiny Committees as all Committees have taken care in establishing our respective work programmes avoid duplication and compliment each others work. All Scrutiny Committees considered the same reports on the Council's budget proposals but each Committee focuses its discussion to the proposals relevant to its own specific remit. To avoid duplication and ensure all Committee Members could contribute to the debates, we encourage all our Scrutiny colleagues to attend our meetings.
- 4.4.** Since our last regular report to Council, we have held two meetings on 06 March and 24 April.

06 March 2018

The Committee first considered a report presented by the Strategic Manager, Community & Traded Services which outlined the consultation exercises currently underway regarding proposals on the delivery of the Libraries Service in Somerset. The public consultation will run for 12 weeks to the 22nd April 2018 and the staff consultation will run until the end of March 2018.

The Committee heard that the current library service is performing well with many strengths but that in order to reduce costs further and continue to deliver a thriving, modernised service, effectively targeted to meet the needs of the population, it is necessary to review and re-design how library services are delivered. The proposals under consultation have been developed following consideration of a wide range of information and data. The proposals show that

SCC aim to keep as many library buildings open as possible but that for a number of libraries community support may be required to do this.

The Committee also received a presentation which outlined where further information on the proposals and the evidence, data and impact assessments that support them, can be found online. This information is also available in paper form in libraries. The presentation showed the level of response so far to the consultation across different age ranges.

Council Members were asked for their support in encouraging community engagement and participation in the public consultation and were provided with officer contact details.

The Committee discussed: the need to attract higher usage of libraries particularly the young; innovative ways to finance and self-financing solutions; the need to encourage a higher response rate from 18 – 34year olds; parish council precepting; social isolation; challenges with volunteer support and the effects of population and housing growth.

It was confirmed that information gathered during the consultation will be analysed and the results will be presented to the Committee at either the 19 June or 10 July 2018 meeting.

The Committee noted the report.

Next the Committee received a report from the Director of Finance, Legal & Governance and the Director of Children's Services which updated Members on the current Revenue Budget forecast outturn position for the 2017/18 year based on the end of November as well as detailing how the Council's resources are forecast to be used to support the delivery of budget decisions.

The Authority's forecast shows a projected net overspend of £7.741m (see Appendix A, Annex A) when compared to the Revenue Budget. This represents 2.48% of base budget. The majority of the overspend lies in the Children's Services budgets and the Committee received a report from the Director of Children's Services on care placement sufficiency. Most other areas of the Council are within reasonable tolerance although some corporate and support budgets are under pressure. The implication of this forecast is that Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team will need to continue to exercise more stringent control in all areas of council spend to ensure the final outturn position is much lower than this.

The predicted General Reserve position at the end of March 2018 is £7.270m and for the end of March 2019 is £11.270m.

The Committee discussed: issues and costs associated with care placements and the insufficient number of foster carers; the improved position of aged debt and the cost implications of last week's adverse weather.

The Committee noted the report.

Following this, the Committee considered a report presented by the Director of Customers & Communities which provided Members with an update on performance across the organisation.

The report summarised that there are two red but stable segments (P3, C4) and one segment with a declining performance. However, in a verbal update the Committee were informed that a positive Ofsted inspection judgement had been received since the production of the report which meant that P3 was no longer red. In addition, the issues causing the declining performance in P7 have now been addressing therefore P7 is no longer declining.

50% of objectives are green, 36% are amber and 16% are red. The report was presented to Cabinet on 12 February 2018.

The Committee discussed those segments which fell under the Committee's remit. Following a question regarding the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester, it was confirmed that SCC will be formally engaging with the Highways England consultation.

The Committee noted the report.

Finally the Committee considered a presentation from the Executive Assistant, Policy and Research which informed Members of the SCC Business Plan.

The Business plan will outline the priorities in achieving the Council's Vision by creating a set of strategic outcomes, as well as demonstrating partnership working. The Business Plan will be central to service and financial planning and will drive improvements across the organisation.

The Business Plan is currently being drafted and will be considered during this months' Peer Review. It is anticipated that the Business Plan will be in place around June or July and it will be refreshed annually.

Members questioned why the draft Plan was not ready in good time before the Peer Review and whether there would be sufficient time for consultation before implementation. It was confirmed that the Plan would be circulated to Members taking part in the Peer Review as soon as possible.

The Committee discussed: whether income generation is included in the plan; the importance of the Vision and the extent to which Members can influence the Business Plan.

The Committee noted the report.

24 April 2018

To begin the Committee received a report outlining the draft Local Transport Plan (LTP) Implementation Plan 2018/19. Statutory requirements for transport plans require a long-term Local Transport Plan Strategy complemented by shorter term LTP Implementation plans which set out how funds will be used to implement schemes on the ground.

In March 2011, Somerset County Council (SCC) adopted its current LTP covering the period from 2011 to 2026. The Committee was asked for their

views on the draft LTP Implementation Plan 2018/19 prior to it being taken to Cabinet in May. The document is a statutory requirement of the LTP process and replaces the current plan that covered until the end of 2017. The plan is short term (2 years), to allow a review of the longer-term LTP Strategy during its implementation period.

The Implementation plan includes an update on progress since 2013, delivery against key priorities and gives an update on Major Schemes. The document also looks at how the Council might make the best of the opportunities currently available, what we plan to deliver in the near future, and at the challenges and risks involved. It was highlighted to members that £1.5m has been allocated to Small Improvement Schemes.

Full consultation was undertaken for the LTP strategy when it was developed and it is intended that further consultation will be undertaken next year as part of the planned refresh of the long-term LTP Strategy.

The Committee discussed: funding for the central Somerset area, issues around the maintenance of potholes; capacity to deliver Major schemes; the Small improvement Scheme; CIL funds and concern over coastal erosion in West Somerset.

The Committee noted the report and the Major Schemes in place but expressed concern about funding for future schemes and about the resources of the authority to deliver the Schemes.

Next the Committee received a report and presentation regarding the SCC response to the Highways England (HE) public consultation on the proposed A303 Sparkford to Ilchester dual carriageway improvement scheme. The public consultation precedes the formal process of seeking consent to construct. There is a strong business case as to the benefits of the scheme for the economic growth of the south West and the UK, increasing safety and improving connectivity and resilience.

As a nationally significant infrastructure project, the scheme will be dealt with under the Development Consent Order (DCO) process. The Committee were informed that the scheme will be delivered and operated by HE. SCC is a statutory consultee and has a limited role in the process. The consultation provides the last opportunity to influence the design of the scheme before it is submitted for DCO. Once in DCO it is difficult to vary.

The Committee heard that the key concerns raised by SCC in its response broadly echo those of the community with some concerns regarding safety and some regarding the traffic impact and lack of evidence based traffic modelling. HE are continuing to evolve the technical design and are in on-going dialogue with SCC. SCC have asked HE to take steps to mitigate the impact on local communities and have also asked for a mechanism for on-going dialogue with those communities directly affected. No commitment regarding this has been received from HE to date.

The Committee discussed: the lack of information provided by HE; the need to consider local road networks as well as highways; concern over disruption and negative impact on local communities and the need for Community Forums to have the ability to influence decisions.

The Committee noted the report.

Finally the Committee received a report outlining the proposal to award the contract for the provision of temporary labour to SCC.

The current contract is due to expire in December 2018 and a comprehensive review of the options available for supplying a cost-effective service for delivering temporary labour has been conducted in consultation with current users.

The current contract is with Reed and is provided via a master vendor solution and that model provides benefits to SCC through a single point of contact for the authority, reduced supplier margins, increased contract governance, improved performance of the supplier, transparent management information and process efficiencies in terms of the end to end booking process and P2P process.

The contract categorises temporary labour into a number of distinct groups including Admin & Clerical, Engineering & Surveying, HR, IT, Management, Procurement, Social & Healthcare (qualified and non-qualified)

Reed's agency fee within the current contract is charged according to a pre-determined rate for each category as a fixed £ per hour worked by the candidate which is aligned to SCC Spinal Column Points. Under MSTAR2 the rates remain as a fixed £ per hour but vary by wage rates within bands, job category and whether the worker is supplied from Reed's own workers or has been sourced from a third party through Reed as managed vendor.

There are no current concerns regarding the service from Reed. There have been difficulties at times in securing sufficient acceptable Qualified Social Work candidates. Reed have augmented their second tier support suppliers in an effort to resolve this but it is known that this is a marketplace with a high demand at the moment and resource is scarce within the region.

The Committee were informed that spend on temporary labour is reducing and this reduction is expected to increase. Temporary Labour adds flexibility to the workforce but is generally more expensive than the overall cost of a permanent employee. As an example, a temporary social worker costs c£80k pa whilst a permanent employee would be c£60k pa. There is a desire to reduce the reliance on temporary staff in this area and move to a permanent workforce but there is a shortage of supply in the region which impacts on our ability to transition workers to permanent.

The Committee discussed; whether the service could be provided in-house and social worker retention.

The Committee noted the report but requested an interim report 12 months after the start of the new contract to review performance and staff morale.

5. Background papers

5.1. Scrutiny Committee and Panel reports, outcomes and minutes.