

## **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 regular report covers the work of our meetings held on 16 September, 14 October and 4 November.

**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 virtually at 10.00am on 9 December 2020.

### **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.

### **3. 16 September 2020**

## **Climate Change Strategy Task and Finish Group Report**

The ECI Commissioning Director introduced the update setting out the work of the Task and Finish Group, consultation on the framework document, strategy development and Task and Finish Group Feedback. The Governance and timeline for the adoption of the strategy was set out alongside the branding.

The strategy development was set out in the update and built on the Framework developed and consulted upon early in 2020

During the discussion the committee considered the governance timescale along with the consultation responses, National Grid capacity and working alongside the rural network alliance, the work of the director was commended as part of the Task and Finish Group.

The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee noted the completed, formatted and branded full strategy document, action plan and appendices.

## **2020/21 Revenue Budget Report – Month 4**

The Cabinet report (Annex A) set out the Month 4 end of July position against the 2020/21 budget. The usual budget monitoring process has been made more complicated with the significant financial impact that Covid-19 is having upon council services. There has been significant additional expenditure and an adverse impact upon income.

The government recognised this and has paid £29.1m of grant to cover additional expenditure in 3 tranches of funding with grants of £15.7m being received in March, £9.9m in April and £3.5m in July.

Out of the £29.1m Covid-19 grant, £18.8m has been allocated against the current year increased services costs and £9.5m is requested to go into the Budget Equalisation Reserve to address the reductions in Council Tax and Business Rates in future budgets. This remaining unallocated grant of £0.8m is included within the corporate contingency.

The government has announced a scheme to help fund some of the Councils lost income from fees & charges with the 5% of the loss being borne by the council and then the Government supporting 75p in every £1 above this. It is estimated that £3.5m of income can be claimed back through this scheme. The first claim will be submitted by the end of September.

The forecast as at the end of July, is a net overspend of £2.262m which becomes an underspend of £1.238m when taking into account the estimated £3.5m of funding from Government for lost income.

During the discussion of the report, the committee considered the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact on the district Councils was also felt and the potential of funding for fire marshals. The potential of a second spike adversely impacting the financial position further was considered a real risk.

The Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place noted the projected revenue outturn for 2020/21, whether there are any suggestions for additional management actions or alternative options that they would like to recommend to the Cabinet.

### **3. 14 October 2020**

#### **Climate Change Strategy**

The first Item considered was the Climate Change Strategy.

The ECI Commissioning Director introduced the completed Towards Climate Resilient, Somerset's Climate Emergency Strategy report, which has been fully branded, with a joint statement from the five Cabinet members of the five Councils, the report including an overview of nine sectoral themes for strategy

During the discussion of the report, the consultee response numbers were considered along with the next steps and local Councils collaborating together in tackling climate change. The work of the Task and Finish Group was set out and considered with the challenges and ambition to tackle climate change

The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee: - noted the report, with the Chair of Committee for Policies and Place thanking the officer and members for the huge amount of work they have put in to this extraordinary piece of work and emphasised that this is strategy for all of the residents for all of Somerset.

#### **Rights of Way Service Update**

During the discussion of the report,

The Service Manager, RoW introduced the report and then explained the definitive map regarding the application process, the number of applications and the distribution across the County; advised that the backlog of undetermined applications is increasing, however due to processes within the service implemented the applications determined is also increasing. In addition, commented that during the Covid-19 lockdown, there were a 100% increase in service requests, with service provision maintained throughout.

Communications with District Council planning departments is taking place,

especially regarding where developments can impact on or help deliver application routes / rights of way and multiuser route development. The Service Manager RoW continued with a resource update. Following the June 2019 process review of the RoW whole service, a business case for extra resource had been submitted.

During the discussion of the item the backlog of applications were considered along with addressing this, areas and length of adopted pathways and delays to planning applications due to the delay in responses. There remained the possibility of increased demands on the service depending on the direction from the secretary of state.

The Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee noted the report.

#### **4. 4 November 2020**

##### **20/21 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report**

The first Item considered was the 2020/21 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report

The Cabinet report set out the Month 6 end of September position against the 2020/21 budget which is forecast underspend of £0.706m for year.

Covid-19 has had a major financial impact upon council services with significant additional expenditure and an adverse impact upon income. The government has recognised this and has paid a grant of £29.1m to cover additional expenditure and a scheme to help fund some of the Councils lost income from fees & charges with the 5% of the loss being borne by the council and then the Government supporting 75p in every £1 above this. It is estimated that £3.5m of income can be claimed back through this scheme.

During the discussion of the report, the committee considered the compensation for lost income and the impact on a potential redeployment of staff following a second spike. It was considered that monthly monitoring reports would still be considered at Committee but would focus on key areas.

The Committee noted the projected revenue outturn for 2020/21, whether there are any suggestions for additional management actions or alternative options that they would like to recommend to the Cabinet.

##### **Capital Budget Monitoring Quarter 2 Report**

The Cabinet report was the second capital monitoring report for the year. It shows that there is a projected underspend of £4.279m at the end of this financial year (2020-21). The Cabinet Report provided a forecast position for the overall five-year programme. Forecasts at this point indicate a projected underspend of £13.277m.

At the end of quarter 2, the capital programme is currently forecasting total expenditure of £154.219m for this financial year, this was a movement of £56.328m against the original forecast for the year. The report shows slippage of £52.049m and an underspend of £4.279m from the original forecast position (see table 1). The slippage is a continuation of the trend seen at Quarter 1 and Service explanations are provided. The programme is currently forecasting an overall favourable variance of £13.277m.

Of this, £3.713m relates to the Somerset Waste Partnership programme meaning the County Council's capital programme is forecasting a favourable variance of £9.564m. The majority of this is due to a review of approvals in Early Years in which £9.415m is no longer required as the projects have been managed through condition and remedial works.

During the discussion of the report, the Chair thanked the Finance team for their hard work throughout the pandemic

The Committee noted the projected capital outturn for 2020/21 and the forecasted position of the future programme, whether there are any suggestions for management actions or alternative options that they would like to recommend to the Cabinet.

The Committee were in favour of the format of the budget report, whether there are any suggestions or comments on the presentation of information within it.

### **Dillington Business Plan Update**

The Committee were provided a presentation setting out an update of the Dillington business case and performance of the service. The Service had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic but emphasis was placed that the service was back open since the release of lockdown measures.

During the discussion of the report, the committee considered the impact that Covid-19 pandemic had made on the business plan and projected revenue of the service. Discussion took place relating to the break clause in the lease and the future of the services. Some concerns were expressed by the perception of Dillington House locally and the performance of its management group. The Committee encouraged where possible that the Council used this facility to support its ongoing viability.

## **Scrutiny Review Update**

The Democratic Services Scrutiny Manager introduced the update which set out the work undertaken by the Committee since the Scrutiny Review and the ongoing work of the Scrutiny Committee over the last year setting out the work of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group along with work undertaken in relation to 5G Technology and budget monitoring. The Scrutiny Manager reminded the Committee that there continued to be ongoing Scrutiny work with the Somerset Waste Partnership Scrutiny Board and the Somerset Rivers Authority Scrutiny Committee.

During the discussion of the report, the committee considered the progress made and the items considered within the Committee and the new ideas and approaches to Scrutiny.

The Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place noted the report

## **5. Consultations undertaken**

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

## **6. Implications**

**6.1** The Committee considers carefully, and often asks for further information about the implications as outlined in, the reports considered at its meetings.

**6.2** For further details of the reports considered by the Committee please contact the author of this report.

## **7. Background papers**

**7.1** Further information about the Committee including dates of future meetings, and agendas & reports from previous meetings are available via the Council's website [www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers)

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