LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Local Government Reorganisation Joint Scrutiny Committee held in the Canalside Conference Centre, on Thursday 19 January 2023 at 2.00 pm

Present: Cllr B Filmer (Chair) (SCC), Cllr B Hamilton (Vice-Chair) (SSDC), Cllr R Buckler (SSDC), Cllr S Buller (SWT), Cllr T Butt Philip (SCC), Cllr M Chilcott (SCC), Cllr T Deakin (SCC), Cllr P Ham (MDC), Cllr M Lithgow (SWT), Cllr D Mansell (SCC), Cllr H Prior-Sankey (SCC), Cllr D Rodrigues (SDC), Cllr J Roundell Greene (SCC) and Cllr B Smedley (SCC)

Other Members present: In the room: Cllr A Bradford, Cllr S Wakefield and Cllr R Wyke. On Teams: Cllr P Clayton, Cllr S Coles, Cllr D Denton, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr V Keitch, Cllr A Kendall, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr M Lovell, Cllr L Redman, Cllr H Shearer, Cllr G Slocombe, Cllr M Wale and Cllr R Woods

Apologies for absence: Cllr B Crow, Cllr C Inchley and Cllr P Maxwell

34   **Apologies for Absence** - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors B Crow, C Inchley and P Maxwell, who was substituted by R Buckler.

35   **Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee** - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 27 October 2022 were approved.

36   **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 3

The Committee noted the details of the personal interests of all Councillors present already declared in relation to their membership of County, District, Town and Parish Councils.

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

There had been no submissions for statements/questions received by the deadline of Friday 13 January 2023.

38   **Proposed Asset Management Strategy for Somerset Council** - Agenda Item 9

During the discussion the following points were raised:-
- Councillors queried what sort of timescales were involved in the work and getting the assets up to strategy standards.
  The Head of Corporate Property advised that it would be a strategic long-term document for the Council which would cover the first four years and then be reviewed going forward.

- Councillors welcomed the corporate landlord model.
- Councillors queried whether the funding request had been placed within the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
  The Assets Manager advised that the funding had been placed in the MTFP as a starting point.
- Councillors queried how the cost and decarbonisation work would be balanced out.
  The Assets Manager agreed and understood that the cost for decarbonisation work was high but that they were doing the best they could within the strategy document.
- Councillors queried whether the Asset Management Group would be an officer and member cross party working group?
  The Assets Manager advised that it had not been decided upon yet.
- Clarification was sought on how the pie charts had been calculated.
  The Assets Manager advised that they had been calculated based on number of properties and not the value.

Resolved that the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Joint Scrutiny Committee was asked to scrutinise and comment on the proposed strategy and plan.

39   **Digital Strategy for Somerset Council** - Agenda Item 5

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-
- Items five, six and seven on the agenda were debated together.
- Councillors were pleased to see that user need and culture were at the centre of the strategies.
- Councillors were excited to see the implementation of the strategies.
- Councillors were glad that non-digital users had been acknowledged.
- Concern was raised on how insight to foresight would be covered.
  The Digital Engagement Manager advised that the data on insight would need to be integrated into all teams.
- Councillors agreed that the strategies were ambitious but that more work could be done to get all teams to look at new technology options.
- Councillors urged officers to include non-technological ways of communications and contact (phone calls and face to face) for those customers who did not have access to technology.
  The Digital Engagement Manager agreed and accepted that other channels would be used alongside the digital technology.
- Concern was raised that there were still large areas of the county that did not have access to high-speed internet.
  The Digital Engagement Manager advised that this would be looked at as part of work on the infrastructure.
- Concern was raised on the language used within the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and the term 'older people' should be amended to include those who did not have access to the internet.
  The Digital Engagement Manager advised that the EIA would be made clearer and that they would amend some of the terms used.
- Councillors requested training on the digital technology for themselves, to enable them to better assist their constituents.
- Councillors queried capital to revenue costs.

The Chief Digital Officer advised that the costs were outlined within the strategy and that they would move away from lots of contracts that worked singularly and would try joined up working methods.

- Councillors queried whether there was any data available to show that enabling remote working, encouraged collaborative working.
  The Chief Digital Officer advised that there was no data available as the analysis had not been carried out and that they would look at the research carried out by the LGA.
- Councillors highlighted that large data needed to be looked at, as the Council did not want to hold onto any unnecessary data.
- Councillors agreed that the Council had good technology services but that they needed to be linked to service delivery.
- Councillors suggested that process mapping needed to be included in the strategy.
- Concern was raised on the financial risk and whether the future costs of the strategies had been included in the MTFP.
  The Chief Digital Officer advised that the costs had not been included as the strategy was a high-level document.
- Concern was raised on digital processes being used for certain services.
  The Chief Digital Officer advised that they wanted to ensure digital processes helped not hindered any service.
- Councillors requested that the charter stated that it would include all users and interact in all ways.

Resolved that LGR Joint Scrutiny Board:-
1) Noted the key elements of the Digital Strategy,
2) Noted the high-level implications and risks,
3) Endorsed the strategy content, with comments made by members.

40 **Data Strategy for Somerset Council** - Agenda Item 6

Resolved that LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee was asked to consider and comment on the proposed Data Strategy for the new Somerset Council and review the proposed deliverables to ensure compliance and give confidence that the Strategy could be practicably achieved.

41 **Interim Technology Strategy for Somerset Council** - Agenda Item 7

Resolved that LGR Joint Scrutiny Board:-
1) Noted the key elements of the Interim Technology Strategy,
2) Noted the high-level implications and risks,
3) Endorsed the interim strategy, with comments made by members.

42 **Customer Strategy and Service Standards** - Agenda Item 8

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-
- Concern was raised on the use of the word 'customer', as council services were not optional and residents did not have a choice to approach another council for services.
  The LGR Programme Advisor stated that officers had looked into different wording and agreed that it was not ideal, and that they were

happy to receive any ideas to take back to the Customer Panel for debate.

- Concern was raised on the feedback given to online requests and the standard responses given.
- Councillors queried service standards and alignment.
  The LGR Programme Advisor thanked councillors for their comments and advised that work had been carried out to try and align services.
- Concern was raised on some of the language used within the strategy document.
- Councillors queried how the commitments quoted would be monitored.
  The LGR Programme Advisor stated that they would use customer satisfaction surveys to monitor service, but that they wanted to be more innovative moving forward.
- Concern was raised that the standards would not be achievable from Day One.
  The LGR Programme Advisor stated that work had been carried out along with an audit on standards which had been brought together from the five councils, and that training would be given to ensure standards could be met.
- Concern was raised on the variances given on the response times for letters compared to emails.
  The LGR Programme Advisor agreed and would review the response times stated within the strategy.

Resolved that the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee recommended that the Executive approve the following, including comments and requests made by the Committee:-
1) Approve the draft Customer Strategy, Customer Promise and Customer Standards.
2) Approve the baseline Service Standards in Appendix D.
3) Delegate authority to make any consequential amendments to these service standards following approval of the 2023/24 Budget for Somerset Council, to the Lead Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure and Director of Commissioning.
4) Delegate authority to publish and communicate (ii) and (iii) as Interim Service Standards for vesting day, to the Lead Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure and Director of Commissioning.

43   **LGR Programme Risks** - Agenda Item 10

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-
- Councillors suggested that there should be something added to the register for alignment work for district services
  The Risk Manager agreed and would look to add to the register.
- Councillors thanked officers for their work on the risk register to help improve services.

Resolved that the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee noted the Risk Register.

44   **Any Other Urgent Items of Business** - Agenda Item 11

There were no other urgent items of business raised.

(The meeting ended at 5.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN