

Scrutiny Committee

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since the last report to Full Council. The committee met on 27 February 2018 to consider:

Yeovil Innovation Centre

The Economic Development Manager presented a report which answered specific questions raised by Scrutiny Committee in relation to the operation of the Yeovil Innovation Centre.

During a short discussion, the Economic Development Manager and Director for Commercial Services & Income Generation responded to points of detail, their comments included:

- The Innovation Centre offered basic business advice to allow for business growth. However this may not be the same approach as provided by other Innovation or Business Centres where they have higher tech businesses.
- It was felt the Centre catered for a niche market in the area responding to customer demand. Many of the businesses grew and moved on elsewhere, and a lower than the national average of businesses failed within three years.
- The Centre was always intended to be an incubation and innovation centre.
- Continually reviewing to see where further benefit could be added, and evolving as required.
- We are in regular contact with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Growth Hub, and it is disappointing that they are using an alternative venue for business events.
- Business Plan will be revised in the coming year
- Information about 'The Hive', including history about the trial and funding. It was still running but demand had not been as high as may have been wished for. The space was currently unavailable for several weeks due to being booked out as a Transformation Assessment Centre.
- There was still a principle of hot desking and renting a desk for the day, as the space provided both a social and business environment.

At the end of discussion it was agreed when the revised business plan is drafted Scrutiny Committee would consider it and make comment.

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 March 2018

Members considered the reports within the District agenda for 1 March 2018 and made comments including:

District-wide Voluntary Sector Grants 2018/19 (Agenda item 6)

- Members noted the revised/updated information in the appendices regarding Somerset Rural Youth Project and Somerset Film – and were content that all the recommendations go forward.

SSDC Review of Operational Office Accommodation – Progress Report on Area Presence (Agenda item 7)

- Recommendation 1 – a timeframe was stated of 2 years but are there any timeframes for when preliminary proposals may come forward.
- Page 25, para 8 – it was noted that the Members' Leadership and Development Project Group had also discussed the possibility of touchdown or hub spaces based at medical centres and other some other venues but these were not mentioned in the report.
- Page 25, para 8 – members were supportive of the ideas put forward for possible hubs and touchdown spaces, and felt it would be an opportunity to maximise engagement with communities.
- Members asked what the current situation is regarding discussions with Somerset County Council and the One Public Estate scheme, as we should not be duplicating the OPE.
- Members sought re-assurance that existing commercial commitments regarding any of our property would be addressed appropriately, and in a timely manner, with those involved.

Business Rates Relief – Local Discretionary Relief, Year 2 (Agenda item 8)

- Scrutiny made no comments.

South Somerset District Council Car Park Charging Policy Paper (Agenda item 9)

- Page 34, para 2 – Scrutiny noted the report referred to Scrutiny Committee requesting a Task And Finish Review and wished to make clear this had not been the case, the Chief Executive had suggested officers produce a report when Scrutiny Committee stated that they were not going to undertake the Car Park Charges review in the immediate future, due to priorities and resources.
- Some members felt that increasing charges in Yeovil and the market towns would be at odds with regeneration plans for some of the towns.
- Members felt people often parked where it was free, and charges in some towns were already displacing some parking onto nearby residential estates.
- Some members felt if implementing inflationary increases it should be done at regular intervals but only if cost effective to do so regarding administration costs.
- Scrutiny were strongly against the idea of introducing a flat rate charge for parking on Sundays, as there was little evidence to support the rationale and proposed charges. For example what other Councils charge for Sunday. It was felt the income potential from doing so was not enough to consider undertaking a consultation and trial.
- Members were against applying a 10% increase to charges at the current time as many businesses and the retail sector were already struggling in the current economic climate.
- Many members felt applying an increase at the current time was the wrong time, especially for Yeovil with the imminent launch of the Yeovil Refresh.
- It was also noted that residents, commuters and businesses had endured years of highway road closures and various utility works in , and around, Yeovil which had caused prolonged disruption and already had a big impact upon business in the town.
- It was felt the statutory consultation period of 28 days was too short for such a potentially contentious issue.
- Page 37, para 17 – Scrutiny queried how accurate and realistic was the projected income figure?
- Members felt there was a very high reputational risk to SSDC of implementing increases to car parking charges at the current time and that this may not be reflected adequately in the risk matrix.

- Retail centres in the smaller market towns were reducing and being replaced with residential dwellings with inadequate parking, and hence some car parks were being used for long term parking by residents.
- Members acknowledged that whilst they felt now was the wrong time to implement increases to parking charges, that it was also unlikely there would be a right time.
- Scrutiny proposed an alternative set of recommendations:
 - i. To apply an automatic 4 yearly inflationary increase, subject to it being cost effective to apply such an increase, – with the first increase being made effective from July 2019.
 - ii. In the event that any surplus is generated, this be ring fenced for projects in accordance with CPE legislation and guidelines (this includes public transport, road improvements and environmental improvements; such as public land, free public access to water or recreational facilities);
 - iii. Recommend a full market charges, benchmarking, and car park operational review as part of the car park strategy update to ensure alignment in the area. This is to be carried out by officers in the financial year 2018/2019 for implementation in July 2019; subject to being approved at District Executive.
 - iv. at the time of the statutory consultation, the proposed changes and the reasons for them be clearly communicated as part of the explanation for the consultation.

(NB – In summary, compared to the original recommendations in the District Executive report this is: Rec A – deleted, Rec B – no change, Rec C – changed, Rec D – falls away due to change of Rec C, Rec E – no change, Rec F – deleted, Rec G – falls away due to deletion of Rec F, plus – an additional rec regarding communication)

The 'Making' of the Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda item 10)

- Scrutiny raised no concerns.

Key4Life – At Risk Preventative programme in Somerset (Agenda item 11)

- Scrutiny raised no concerns and endorsed the work undertaken.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 12)

- Members noted that quarterly reporting of Performance needed to be added to the forward plan from July or August onwards.

CONFIDENTIAL – Exclusion of the Press and Public (Agenda item 14)

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Committee resolved that the press and public be excluded from the following items in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, i.e. "Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

SSDC Review of Operational Office Accommodation – Feasibility Study Comparison of South Somerset District Council's Future Head Office Options (Confidential) (Agenda item 15)

- Scrutiny Committee made several comments in confidential session.

Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews

Members noted the updates provided by the Scrutiny Manager on each of the Task and Finish Groups currently in progress or commencing in the near future.

Homefinder Somerset Plain English Policy – No updates since the last meeting.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019 – she had met with the Lead Specialist (Vulnerable Customers) who would circulate a draft timetable shortly. It was anticipated that only two meetings would be needed.

Customer Accessibility – it had been hoped the group would have started by now. However, there had been a need to co-ordinate with many staff. It was also noted the new Lead Specialist for Communications was not due to start work with the authority until mid-March.

Scrutiny Work Programme

The Charges for Pre-Application Planning Advice has been delayed until June or July.

Scrutiny Committee had intended on compiling a report request for an overview report of Yeovil Refresh. After a brief discussion it was suggested, and agreed, that the report request would wait until after the completion of the Yeovil Refresh consultation and for members to receive a copy of the confidential report that recently went to Area South Committee.

From the work undertaken during the Committee meeting the following two items have been added to the Work Programme:

Key Performance Targets – presentation of data	Further to Scrutiny Committees' involvement in the review of performance monitoring early in 2018 it was agreed at Scrutiny Committee on 27 Feb 2018 that Scrutiny Committee will consider the layout and presentation of the quarterly performance reports.
Draft YIC (Yeovil Innovation Centre) 2018 Business Plan	Following a report of the YIC to Scrutiny Committee on 27 th Feb 2018, it was agreed that the revised draft business plan will be put before Scrutiny Committee for consideration later this year – This may be a Task and Finish activity