

## SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 1 March 2023

Present: Councillor Sue Buller (Chair)

Councillors Ian Aldridge, Simon Coles, Ed Firmin, John Hassall, Libby Lisgo, Nick Thwaites, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Chris Hall, Sam Murrell, Paul Fitzgerald, Malcolm Riches and Kerry Prisco

Also Present: Councillors Benet Allen and Federica Smith Roberts

(The meeting commenced at 6.16 pm)

### 97. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Habib Farbahi, Simon Nicholls and Sarah Wakefield.

Amy Tregellas and Alison North attended via zoom.

### 98. Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee were approved as a true record.

*Prop: Coles / Sec: Firmin (Unanimous)*

### 99. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr I Aldridge	All Items	Williton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	SCC & Clerk to	Personal	Spoke and Voted

100. **Public Participation**

There were no items of public participation.

101. **To receive an update on the Local Government Review (LGR) and Community Governance Review (CGR)**

Alison North delivered a final verbal update on the Local Government Reorganisation. The main points are as follows: -

- Tier 3 recruitment is due to start next week, with appointments to be made in the week commencing 23 March. This would mean that the top level of management would then be in place to take the workstreams through to vesting day.
- Several milestones had been reached since the last update with approval of the budget, the constitution and workstream readiness being robustly checked.
- One new phone number had now been implemented so there was a single point of contact into the Authority. This provided more resilience for the customer call-centre teams as they now had worked across the whole of Somerset.
- There was only one ICT migration left to implement which was Mendip. It was testament to the hard work and collaboration of the ICT teams that this had been a relatively smooth process. It was hoped that April 1<sup>st</sup> would be a bit of an anti-climax and the public wouldn't notice any change in the delivery of their services.
- Staff were receiving regular weekly updates on managing the change, including how to obtain their new ID badge, payroll arrangements and where they would be working on Day1.

Councillors commented on the recent ICT changes which had presented some challenges with printing and accessing payslips. Cllr Federica Smith Roberts offered to assist with this outside of the meeting if required.

The Chair thanked Alison for her regular monthly updates to the Committee.

The Committee noted the update.

102. **Corporate Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

The Committee noted the updates to the Recommendation and Written Answer Tracker.

One additional comment was made that the £2 concessionary bus-fare scheme has been extended until June, rather than ending on 31 March as detailed in the tracker.

103. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plan**

The Committee noted the items that were going forward to the final Executive meeting on 15 March.

The Chair had been sighted on the Commercial in Confidence report which was the responsibility of Joe Wharton. This unfortunately had not been written in time to be scrutinised by the committee, but members who wished to comment could attend the Executive meeting. The item would be held in confidential session.

No other comments were forthcoming.

104. **Corporate Scrutiny Chair's Annual Report**

The Chair presented her report to the Committee.

Cllr Loretta Whetlor extended her thanks to the Chair and Vice-Chair for their tenure leading the Committee and wished everyone well in the future.

The Chair thanked officers and councillors for the time they had given to the Committee in the past year.

The Committee unanimously approved the report.

105. **Corporate Performance Monitoring Report - Quarter 3 2022/23**

Cllr Benet Allen introduced the Corporate Performance Monitoring report to Corporate Scrutiny and invited the committee to comment.

Comments and questions included the following:-

- Concern about the red risk areas in particular the number of complaints, call waiting times and gas compliance.
  - With regard to complaints – the targets were aspirational and very tight to achieve. Improvements were being made in the final quarter which should hopefully improve the figure overall.
  - Call waiting times were currently reducing due to an increase in staff and more resilience in the system. The figures in Qtr3 were concerning and this was being addressed. There had been some issues with call abandonment due to the recent technical changes but this was being followed up and the waiting times were coming down.
  - The gas compliance issue related to 1 property not having its annual check within the required time. This issue has now been addressed and the target has been achieved.
- It was questioned whether sickness and staff turnover (currently flagged as Amber) were higher than expected and the reasons for this?
  - Staff sickness is difficult to monitor due to the ongoing Covid situation and working from home. Some members of staff on long-

term sick will also falsely skew the figures. Staff sickness is currently higher than expected hence the Amber status. It was asked if comparative figures from other Somerset authorities could be provided to Cllrs so that they could assess whether this was a county wide issue. Malcolm Riches agreed to email the Committee with the statistics.

- Staff turnover was higher than the KPI, but this was expected in the current climate of uncertainty and reflected across the UK, especially in key roles where recruitment and retention were a challenge.

Corporate Scrutiny noted the report.

106. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public - Appendix F ONLY**

The Committee moved to enter confidential session to discuss Appendix F of the report, and a planning issue raised by Cllr Gwil Wren.

*Prop: Buller / Sec: Coles (Unanimous).*

The Committee then re-opened the meeting to vote on the recommendations in Point 2 of the report.

107. **General Fund Financial Monitoring Report as at Quarter 3 (31 December 2022)**

Cllr Benet Allen introduced the Financial Monitoring Report for Qtr 3 and invited the Committee to comment: -

Paul Fitzgerald responded to a concern that had been raised by the Chair prior to the meeting, in respect of Appendix F and writing off bad debt. Somerset West and Taunton takes a robust approach and pursues every opportunity to recover non-payment of council tax/business rates. SWT only carries collectable debt on its books and toxic bad debt had to be written off the accounts especially if there was no chance of recovery and all avenues of investigation had been exhausted.

Cllr Wren expressed interest in 5.10 of the report and the potential cost of clearance of Muddy Acre. Chris Hall advised that this was a sensitive planning issue and could not be discussed in a public forum.

It was decided to move the Committee into confidential session to further explore Appendix F and have an update on the Qtr3 variance on Planning as defined in Table 2 of paragraph 5.10 of the report.

Corporate Scrutiny reopened the meeting to approve the recommendations to the report en bloc. These were accepted unanimously by the Committee.

Paul Fitzgerald thanked Corporate Scrutiny Committee and the Chair for their work with staff over the last year. This was responded to by the Chair, who wished all staff well in their future endeavours.

(The Meeting ended at 7.27 pm)