

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Thursday, 7 March 2024 at 10.00 am

**Present:**

Cllr Bob Filmer (Chair)  
Cllr Henry Hobhouse (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Nick Cottle	Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Brian Smedley	Cllr Andy Soughton
Cllr Mike Murphy	Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Sue Osborne	

**In attendance:**

Cllr Theo Butt Philip	Cllr Liz Leyshon
Cllr Frances Nicholson	Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Ros Wyke	

**Other Members present remotely:**

Cllr Mandy Chilcott	Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Andy Kendall	Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Sarah Wakefield	Cllr David Woan

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Philip Ham, Shane Collins (substitute Cllr Dave Mansell), Lucy Trimnell (substitute Cllr Sue Osborne), Peter Seib (substitute Cllr Simon Coles).

**73 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**74 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 3**

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources held on 2 February 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

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

There were no questions received from members of the Public.

**76 Scrutiny Corporate and Resources Forward Plan 2023/2024 - Agenda Item 5**

The committee noted the Forward Plan for this committee and it was noted that the Executive Forward Plan would be distributed separately after this meeting and would be included for future meetings.

**77 Delivering Economic Growth via Gravity Enterprise Zone - Agenda Item 6**

Mickey Green, Executive Director for Climate and Place presented his report to the committee, explaining that this was the first of a series of decisions associated with the planned occupation of a large part of the Gravity Site near Bridgwater by Agratas to build the UK's largest gigafactory on the site. It was noted that the Council will take out a loan with central government and then use the business rates from the site to repay these monies.

Members asked a number of questions as follows:

It had been mentioned that due to the funding being put into this project A358 re-duelling was now not going forward – was this correct? *A written answer would be provided once investigated whether this was correct.*

Transport to the site, facilities and infrastructure? Active Travel and public transport opportunities? Transportation of materials to be used on site?

*Brownfield site with a railhead on site which will transport materials and completed batteries. Active Travel Plan in place, bypass constructed and green links in and around the site. The DCO still needed planning applications but this is simplified with the LDO. Investment plan will reflect the Council's priorities and sustainable transport.*

The Commercial Strategy was still to be completed but would consider key railway links and non-ethical mining.

How would Governance groups, Parishes and College be included in plans?

*Agregas and Somerset Council in talks with college and local schools, briefings being held on a frequent basis with local communities, local businesses and the*

*Council. it was also noted that local employment opportunities would increase and therefore important that skills need to be in place early. Further work to be undertaken on as this is a relatively new business and taking lessons from other factories elsewhere.*

Need to be aware of Housing issues if people coming from other areas as there was already a housing crisis due to HPC.

In terms of Governance, the site was subject to the Local Development Order which has a compliance section and was managed by Somerset Council, funding agreement and transparency of decisions through the Executive. The decision has been risk assessed and it was noted that there was no decision as yet on the Investment Plan and need the agreement of the 10 year commercial plan.

The committee thanked the officers and requested a further update later in the year.

Resolved:

The Scrutiny committee noted the recommendations to the Executive as detailed in the agenda report and look forward to further updates on the project.

## **78 Developing the approach to Transformation - Agenda Item 7**

Alyn Jones, Sara Cretney, Dawn Bettridge and Sara Skirton attended the committee to explain the Transformation programme. Councillor Butt-Philip introduced the report explaining that this was a Council-wide programme and there was a need to establish the role of scrutiny, which would include input on the vision and strategy, role in the programme, strategic goals and risks that may be encountered.

It was confirmed that the Transformation programme would redesign the whole council, based on Values and Workforce, with a transformation and improvement plan.

The workforce programme will reshape the workforce, there was a need to reduce the pay bill by £40m, with a number of actions; these being Voluntary Redundancies with the decision on those to be made by the end of April, control on recruitment, reduce the use of agency staff and consultants, Annual Leave purchase, voluntary reduction of hours, expenses and replacement of vacant posts or remove from the structure where non-essential.

It was noted that the structure needed to be agreed by the end of 2024.

There were other work streams being undertaken including data analytics, restructure works for Teams and impact on staff, staff pay and rewards scheme, Job

Evaluation changes and impact on staff through MTFP.

Alongside those areas, it was also proposed to look at Partnerships and focus on voluntary sector, Parish and Town Councils, Devolution, LCN and to establish the clarity of objectives and activities.

Members commented as follows:

- Need to try to keep hold of quality of staff to provide services in a professional way
- Risk of capacity issues
- LCNs need a complete rewrite, suggest working groups better and whole LCN meetings as more gets done
- Performance figures will be impacted
- Feel transformation programme going too fast – staff stressed, disillusioned and leaving the authority
- Disappointed that Scrutiny had not been involved earlier in the process
- Will staff be transferred to parish/town councils through TUPE?

In response to the concerns raised, Officers sought to reassure the members commenting:

VR programme was business -led and had taken into account previous schemes undertaken by District Councils, VR Panels set up to consider each application and there were a number of roles exempt from applying due to difficulty in recruiting those posts

Need to actively manage impacts, not just chasing savings! Looking at whole organisation from different angles not just top to bottom, assistance being received from Local Government Association and process has been risk assessed.

It was noted that the Scrutiny Committees will look at different parts of the programme but there will be a need to create a plan and a meeting to be agreed with the chair and Vice-chairs of each committee to plan way forward as important that Scrutiny is involved.

Resolved:

The committee agree the recommendations as detailed within the report published within the agenda. They also commented on the governance of the process and role of Scrutiny, along with the wider council Members and that there they should receive regular member briefings. It was also noted that there would be an impact on staff left in the organisation and for the Public to understand the services being cut and those that will be continued.

It was also agreed that in discussion with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the other Scrutiny committees, a joint programme of meetings and working groups be set up to assist with the scrutiny of this programme.

## **79 2023/2024 Budget Monitoring Report Month 10 - Agenda Item 8**

Councillor Smedley left the meeting before the start of the remainder of the meeting (1pm restart)

Nicola Hix presented the Budget Monitoring report for Month 10 which also included as an appendix a summary of Month 9. It was highlighted that a lot of work was being undertaken with the Integrated Care board and Communities was doing well. Appendix 9 showed the spend Boards information from month 9 and it was noted that these boards were making people question whether the spend was necessary or needed. Some Terms of Reference may change from April 2024 and additional boards will be put in place.

Members were asked to note that no Month 11 report will be coming forward as staff will be putting End of Year reports together.

The Chair thanked officers for the member briefings that had taken place and the committee also requested that Corporate Performance report should come to this committee. The committee were also reminded that for the new calendar year, this committee will be meeting before the Executive and so can report on issues that arise.

Resolved:

To note the report and the information contained in respect to Month 10 2023/2024 Budget Monitoring.

The committee requested that information relating to Corporate Performance be submitted for consideration by this Scrutiny Committee.

## **80 Property Rationalisation Programme - Agenda Item 9**

Members received a presentation from Ollie Woodhams explaining that there were 4 recommendations that the committee needed to comment on as a result of Executive Key Decision being consulted on as a result of feasibility studies having concluded and viability confirmed.

The proposals will provide adequate accommodation for staff, risk has been assessed and mitigation of rising market costs, capital receipts, running costs, condition and future maintenance liabilities as well as likely commercial interest.

Members discussed the proposals, they confirmed support for the sale of Petters Way, the West Somerset properties sale, requested confirmation of maintenance costs and the suitability of the current offices and properties, with options for future use.

Resolved:

The committee considered and commented on the recommendations contained within the report submitted with the agenda and they supported the transfer of services, works to properties and with the sale of C Block, County Hall, Taunton.

**(The meeting ended at 2.03 pm)**

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**CHAIR**