

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, 25 April 2024 at 1.30 pm

**Present:**

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

Cllr Shane Collins	Cllr Philip Ham
Cllr Tony Lock	Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr Brian Smedley	Cllr Andy Soughton
Cllr Lucy Trimnell	Cllr Mike Murphy
Cllr Simon Coles	Cllr Dawn Johnson
Cllr Sue Osborne	

**In attendance:**

Cllr Theo Butt Philip	Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Frances Nicholson	

**Other Members present remotely:**

Cllr Val Keitch	Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Marcus Kravis	Cllr Liz Leyshon
Cllr Leigh Redman	Cllr Gill Slocombe
Cllr Sarah Wakefield	

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

Apologies were received from Councillors:

Councillor Peter Seib, substituted by Councillor Simon Coles

Councillor Nick Cottle, substituted by Councillor Dawn Johnson

Councillor Diogo Rodrigues, substituted by Councillor Sue Osborne.

## **2 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2**

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources held on 7 March 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Osborne raised a query as she had not had a response to a question she raised on Minute 77 in respect of A358 project and it was confirmed that a response would be chased up.

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

There were no declarations of Interest.

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

There were no members of the Public registered to speak.

## **5 Forward Plan - Scrutiny Corporate and Resources and Executive - Agenda Item 5**

Members noted the Forward Plan for the committee, it was agreed that the following areas should be brought forward to the committee:

Transformation – should be on the agenda for every meeting either as an update or on a specific area for detailed scrutiny, due to the importance of the project.

Asset Management

ICT projects including updates on current projects

Procurement

Planning (Cllr Lock confirmed that a review of the Planning Service currently underway and a full report will be going forward to the next Full council for consideration).

It was also noted that alternative venues for meetings may take place for future meetings.

Resolved:

The committee noted the Forward Plan but requested that the Transformation project be scheduled for each meeting to ensure that the committee are kept up to date on the various elements. It was also suggested that the following areas should

also be included in the Forward Plan:

- Procurement
- Asset Management
- ICT projects – both current and future

## **6 Review of Terms of Reference for Local Community Networks - Agenda Item 6**

Kate Hellard and Sara Skirton, along with Councillor Butt Philip were present at the meeting to bring forward this report to receive comments from the scrutiny committee before being presented to the next Executive committee.

It was noted that there had been a number of working groups set up by the various networks with Highways and the community being particularly successful. There were comments on the networks making strategic decisions and ways of working as a group that were being discussed.

The officers highlighted areas of the Terms of Reference that were proposed to be amended including election of the chair and the expansion and extension of some areas.

Committee members commented that some networks were not compatible and that smaller parishes/villages considered that they should be in another network area, some of the smaller parishes also felt that they were over-shadowed by the larger towns and parishes.

There was also comment on the cost of the LCNs and budget and it was confirmed that the LCNs received a one off budget of £350,000 pending the review and it was estimated that the budget would be £600,000 per annum to run, the staff budget was being used from the current staffing budget and a small top up from the Localities budget; other sources of grants being made available included Public Health and Highways to create resilient communities.

Some concern was raised if monies were being received and how would that change the networks from Boards to Committees as would then be making decisions?

In response to some of the concerns raised, the officers explained the following: Link officers were being trained on the ICT and use of the technology to enable the meetings to continue to be hybrid meetings. There was also some discussion on venues for these meetings as some halls just weren't able to host due to the internet strength.

It was proposed that there would be a link officer for 2 LCNs supporting their work. Parishes can request to move LCNs but would need discussion and agreement of Chair of the LCNs.

The LCN have the chance to influence policy changes and service development

including the Police, Health and local community organisations.

It was agreed that more work needed to be undertaken on encouraging other organisations and representatives to attend the meetings, this included Parish Council as in some areas there was a low attendance and it was hoped that the new link officers would assist in building links to the various organisations to encourage more interaction.

It was also suggested that core membership for some of the LCNs needed to be agreed/updated and this would need to be done ready for Annual General Meeting for each LCN.

It was mentioned that the LCN should be careful not to conflict with other groups in the County, an example being the Health Boards.

Following the discussion, it was proposed that a Task and Finish Group be set up, led by Councillor Hobhouse and to consist of 4 or 5 Councillors from the Scrutiny committee to further review the work of the networks..

Resolved:

The committee noted the report and made a number of suggestions and amendments to the Terms of Reference for the Local Community Networks. It was also agreed that a Task and Finish Group will be set up, led by councillor Hobhouse and 4 or 5 councillors from this committee.

## **7 Review of Scrutiny Committees - Agenda Item 7**

The Scrutiny Manager presented his report to the committee explaining that this was the 12 month review of the scrutiny process, meetings had been held with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs and it was felt that there had been some good collaborative work completed. It was noted that this was a light touch review in view of the transformation project and financial emergency.

It had been agreed that there was no great desire to reduce the number of committees and that there were some issues with attendance for one or two of the committees. It was proposed that it may be better for there to be named or clearly identified substitutes for each committee as it was considered that there would be better engagement. It was also suggested that there needed to be a better relationship with the Executive and therefore it was proposed that an additional recommendation be added to this report for this report to go to Executive before Full Council for agreement.

During discussion Members made the following comments/asked questions:

- Members were in support of the proposals contained within the report and agreed that the Chairs and Vice-Chairs should also be supported.
- Staffing and support for Scrutiny programme? *Jamie will remain as Scrutiny*

*Manager and there were weekly meetings with the Scrutiny support team with officers allocated to the specific committees.*

- Nothing had been heard on the reduction of the size of the committees at present
- It was agreed that the report templates for Scrutiny would be amended to reflect whether it was an information/educational report or for a proposed decision report to clarify for Members
- It was noted that Information reports that had been circulated to committees would be listed on agendas and Members would have the opportunity to ask questions or request that they be added to the Forward Plan for further scrutiny/discussions.

Members also commented that reporting back to Full Council on Scrutiny matters should be reviewed and that the scrutiny reports should be higher up the agenda. Members also requested that training should be given on the Members Portal so that they can look at the Forward Plans and Key Decisions.

Resolved:

The committee the following recommendations:

- (1) The current structure of 5 scrutiny committees to remain in place, with a further scrutiny review to be conducted by the scrutiny chairs in late 2024/early 2025 following any potential service restructure.**
- (2) The scrutiny manager is tasked with preparing a revised and improved scrutiny report template, which enables clearer and more concise presentation of reports, a standard consistency of reports across all 5 scrutiny committees, a clearer link between committee recommendations onto the Executive/Executive Member(s) and ensuring service areas clearly demonstrate where scrutiny is able to add value.**
- (3) That all 5 scrutiny committees adopt a consistent approach to dealing with information only items, in order that agendas are kept clear for items with specific recommendations and the opportunity for the committees to add value.**
- (4) To bolster the links between all 5 scrutiny committees and the Executive by ensuring clear communication between the parties and encourage increased opportunities for committee chairs to update the Executive on areas of focus and present any recommendations/proposals the committee have agreed. Also for the**

**Democratic Services team to establish a central record of all formal scrutiny recommendations and the responses to them.**

- (5) The scrutiny manager to liaise with the 5 Group Leaders in advance of the AGM Council meeting (My 2024) in order to provide detailed attendance information on each of the Committee's membership, to ensure committee membership reflects maximum engagement and consistency.**
- (6) The scrutiny manager to liaise with the 5 Group Leaders to ensure a consistent, timely and wherever possible consistent approach to scrutiny substitutes.**
- (7) To continue with the monthly meetings of the 5 Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs and scrutiny manager.**
- (8) To support the continuation of a dedicated scrutiny resource from the Democratic Services team as per para 3.5, to allow for more effective and efficient scrutiny and increase scrutiny opportunities, whilst ensuring resilience within the officer cohort.**

The committee also agreed an additional recommendation for the report to be put forward to the Executive for their views before a final report to Full Council.

**(The meeting ended at 4.26 pm)**

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**CHAIR**