

July 2024 Report of the Council's Five Scrutiny Committees

Chair of Committee: Councillor Gill Slocombe, Scrutiny Committee – Adults and Health, Councillor Leigh Redman, Scrutiny – Children and Families, Councillor Martin Dimery, Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place, Councillor Gwil Wren, Scrutiny Committee – Communities, Councillor Bob Filmer, Scrutiny Committee – Corporate and Resources

Local Member(s) and Division(s) affected: All

Executive Summary

The Scrutiny Committees are required by the Constitution to provide Full Council with a summary progress report and outcomes of scrutiny. This report covers meetings since May 2024.

Members of the Council are reminded that:

All Members have been invited to attend meetings of the five Scrutiny Committees and to contribute freely on any agenda item.

Any Member could propose a topic for inclusion on the Scrutiny Work Programme.

Any Member can be asked by the Committee to contribute information and evidence and to participate in specific scrutiny reviews.

Recommendations

That Full Council note the report.

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Main report and supporting information

Background and purpose of report

1. The five Scrutiny Committees met 6 times over the period of May 10th to June 26th, plus two focus groups on specific issues relevant to the committee.
2. Each committee had a standing agenda item for the Work Programme to enable members to comment on and suggest topics for items to come to the committee.

Scrutiny Committee – Adults and Health

Adults and Health did not have a formal committee meeting over this period, but had two focus groups on the topics:

- LGA Peer Review Report, where members were given a detailed breakdown of the feedback received by Adult Social Care in the recent LGA Peer Review
- Stop Smoking Grant, where members were invited to comment on possible uses for the Stop Smoking Grant and approaches to Stop Smoking in Somerset.

Their next committee meeting is July 11th 2024, with the agenda as follows:

23/24 Budget Outturn
CQC Reports on Maternity Services in Somerset
Social Care Workforce
Overdue Assessments/Reviews
Extra Care Housing Model
Consultation on Draft Somerset Suicide Prevention Strategy

Scrutiny Committee – Children and Families

Children and Families met twice over the period.

Meeting 15 May 2024

- **Update on Short Break Provision/Action Plan**

The committee received a presentation on the progress of Short Break Provision, and raised questions around engagement, timescales, budget, and learning from the Homes and Horizons project.

- **Education for Life – Progress on Years 2-5**

The committee received a presentation on the strategy and progress on this area. The committee raised questions on the proposed localities and their geographical areas, SEND, Inclusion, and FIS Staff. The importance of co-production and building relationships were stressed, and members were invited to attend the Education Standing Panel to see the work they do.

- **Update on DBS Checks for Councillors**

The committee received a verbal update on Disclosure and Barring Service Clearance for Councillors. The committee raised the 'portability' of DBS's, the need for candidates for councillor to understand they will need to complete an enhanced DBS, and queries about the regularity of DBS checks.

- **Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic**

The committee received a presentation on this topic. The committee looked at the proposed next steps and considerations for implementation and the agreed Somerset definition. The committee raised the need for clarity on the parameters, the role of the Corporate Parent Board, and the need for data. The committee requested an update to come to a future meeting.

Meeting 26 June 2024

- **Children's Transformation programme**

The committee received a presentation on the programme, providing an update / summary of progress, overarching finance summary, MTFP tracker and on the work of the priority workstreams, which are:-

- Local mainstream school is the right choice for most children
- Developing an excellent workforce for children
- Families can access support early
- Sufficient homes for children in care and school places for children with additional needs in Somerset

The committee agreed that issue of 'data sharing' will be added to its work plan.

- **Education, Health and Care plan and annual reviews**

Further to the meeting in December 2023, the committee received an update presentation on the EHCP process and annual reviews.

- **Children's Services – budget monitoring**

The committee received an update on the budget position, covering (a) the provisional 2023/24 outturn position for Children, Families and Education Services (£12.4m adverse overspend - the overspend predominantly relates to external placements, fieldwork (support for children at home), and SEND transport); and (b) the 2024/25 emerging issues.

It was agreed that the Transformation Board 'deep dive' report, investigating the reasons behind the increase in the (small) number of children looked after, will be shared with the committee. The Committee acknowledged the hard work and noted the update; expressed frustration and stressed the importance and need to see greater detail and information about the current years' budget position.

- **Membership**

There are currently some co-opted member vacancies on the committee and work is underway to try to fill the vacancies.

Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place

Climate and Place met once over the period.

Meeting 6 June 2024

- **Presentation from Lancaster University on the Somerset Catchment Phosphorus Project Update**

The committee received a presentation on this item which was deferred from the Water Quality in Somerset Special Meeting in April.

- **Executive response to Scrutiny Committee recommendations from Special meeting on 26th April 2024**

A public question was raised for this item and responded to.

The committee then received an update on the consideration by Executive of the Scrutiny recommendations from the special meeting in April. The chair asked that members of the committee who would like to sit on a Task and Finish Group would arrange a members-only meeting to discuss if and how the debate can be taken forward.

- **Update on Waste Services**

This item was deferred to the next meeting as it was due to come to a following Strategic Planning committee meeting.

Scrutiny Committee – Communities

Communities met once over the stated period.

Meeting 13 June 2024

- **Verbal Update on Structural Changes**

The committee received a presentation on the Layers 2 and 3 restructure and how that would impact Community Services. The committee raised concerns about who

the decision maker was, the impact on staff of increasing workloads, and whether the restructure would be impacted by summer holiday periods. They also asked for clarification on the consultation process, current vacancies, risks of compulsory redundancies, and whether the gender split of Voluntary Redundancy was the same as that of the council as a whole.

- **Devolution Verbal Update**

The committee received two presentations, one on the devolution of services within Communities across the county, and one on the devolution work in Yeovil specifically. The committee raised concerns around the financial stability of town and parish councils to support the services that were being devolved and the communication with parish councils. For devolution in Yeovil, the committee queried the legal processes for assets and staff (including TUPE) and the actions around IT support.

- **Gypsy and Traveller Review Update**

The committee received a report and presentation on the legal responsibilities and the service areas involved in work with the Gypsy, Romani, and Traveller (GRT) community. The committee raised the importance of finding sites and the impact on landowners (including Somerset Council) of unauthorised sites. They received clarity on the role of the GRT liaison officer and the process for the strategy being developed this year.

- **Somerset Cultural Strategy**

The committee received a report and presentation on a sustainable cultural future for Somerset. Committee members raised the role of LCNs and existing organisations, and suggested the possibility of work around a visitor economy and the potential for small grants.

- **Equality Due Regard Requirement for Scrutiny**

This item was deferred due to the meeting overrunning.

Scrutiny Committee – Corporate and Resources

Corporate and Resources met twice over the stated period.

Meeting 29 May 2024

- **Gravity Update – Delivering Economic Growth Stage 2**

The committee received a report giving details of the next stage of the process for the delivery of the Gravity Enterprise Zone and the draft Gravity Locality Investment Plan. The committee discussed whether the election would impact it, the Local Development Order having environmental and climate change requirements, the completion of the Dunball Roundabout, forums set up to involve communities, and risk management.

- **Improvement and Transformation Programme**

The committee received the latest progress report on the Improvement and Transformation Programme. The committee noted the risks outlined in the report, that Service Managers had proposed structures for their areas, and the timeline for the remainder of the structure to be out for consultation.

The committee looked forward to further updates.

- **Treasury Management update for 2024/25**

The committee received a report on the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2024/25. A revised Strategy Statement would need to be approved due to the advance of the Gravity Project and the implications of proposed borrowing. The committee discussed the need for support from Government to cover the costs of additional borrowing and how borrowing could be affected by the general election and inflation rates. Members also raised questions around PFIs and bench-marking.

- **Property Rationalisation Update**

The committee received a report on the Property Rationalisation Programme, in particular the consultation on the opportunity to lease Deane House, Taunton. The committee welcomed the proposal and it was confirmed that further work was being undertaken in respect of meeting rooms and the remodelling of B block.

Meeting 19 June 2024

- **Provisional revenue outturn and emerging issues 2024/25**

The committee received a report on the latest position on budget monitoring with a high level provisional 2023/24 outturn position for each service ahead of the final outturn and on the potential emerging issues for 2024/25.

- **Productivity Plan**

The committee received a report on the Productivity Plan.

- **LGR Benefits Update**

The committee received a report on the financial benefits to date of LGR at year 1 of being a unitary authority.

- **Equalities Objectives for Somerset Council**

The committee received a report on the responsibilities of Members to give Due Regard to Equality. Training on this topic followed the meeting.

- **5 C's Contract**

This confidential item was discussed in a private session.

Key considerations for the Council

Consultation and feedback

None. Report for information only.

Financial and Risk Implications

None. Report for information only.

Current Risk Score:

Projected risk score if recommended actions are agreed and delivered:

Legal and Procurement Implications

None. Report for information only.

HR / Workforce Implications

None. Report for information only.

Equalities Implications

None. Report for information only.

Community Safety Implications

None. Report for information only.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

None. Report for information only.

Health and Safety Implications

None. Report for information only.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

None. Report for information only.

Social Value

None. Report for information only.

Background Papers

Further information about the five Scrutiny Committees including dates of meetings and agendas and reports from previous meetings are available via the Council's website.

Report assurance checklist ahead of report publication

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	05/07/2024
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	
Workforce (*)	Dawn Bettridge	
Asset Management (*)	Oliver Woodhams	
Executive Director	Relevant Executive Director	08/07/2024
Executive Lead Member	Relevant Lead Member	
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	List local members	
Opposition Spokesperson(s)	Relevant Opposition Spokesperson	
Relevant Scrutiny Chair(s)	Relevant Chair	04/07/2024