

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Communities held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Wednesday, 30 October 2024 at 10.00 am

**Present:**

Cllr Gwil Wren (Chair)

Cllr Dawn Denton  
Cllr Pauline Ham  
Cllr Kathy Pearce  
Cllr Wes Read  
Cllr Connor Payne

Cllr Lance Duddridge  
Cllr Susannah Hart  
Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey  
Cllr Marcus Kravis

**Other Members present remotely:**

Cllr Andy Dingwall  
Cllr Sue Osborne  
Cllr Rob Reed  
Cllr Mike Rigby  
Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Cllr Liz Leyshon  
Cllr Leigh Redman  
Cllr Bill Revans  
Cllr Claire Sully

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Dawn Johnson, Simon Coles, and Andy Kendall.

**65 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - 09 September 2024 - Agenda Item 2**

The minutes were approved subject to the following amendments: that Cllr Dingwall's query about the HRA accounts be added to the forward plan, that Cllr Denton's attendance be amended to present remotely.

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

No additional interest, new or updated declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

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

Nick Hall spoke in a personal capacity on the issue of regulating Glastonbury Festival. He raised concerns about breach of noise limits on Thursday and Friday

night curfews, the noise of helicopters transporting people to the festival, the need for additional resources to prevent nuisances with offsite campsites and events.

He proposed a fit-for-purpose community consultation model and asked that the Scrutiny Committee guide the process to put relationships with Glastonbury Festival Events Limited on a stronger footing.

The response given at the meeting was that there were no breaches in the license conditions with overnight noise and that there was adequate monitoring; that the number of noise complaints in 2024 had reduced from 41 (2023) to 11; that helicopters are regulated by the civil aviation authority; that extra resource was put in place to monitor off-site campsites; that there is an existing community engagement and feedback process that Parish Councillors, members of the public, and Somerset Council employees attend.

## **68 Work Programme - Agenda Item 5**

It was requested that a progress report on Towns Fund Project across the county be added to the work programme.

It was stated that there needs to be a better understanding of HRA (both capital and general fund) and where it best lives within the council and when it is going to come to the committee. It was clarified that HRA will stay under Communities but General Fund Housing would be moving to Adults Services.

There was a request for an update on the visit to the CCTV service control room.

The Chair went over the items to come to the next few meetings.

## **69 Leisure Operators - Agenda Item 6**

Robert Candlin, Centre Manager, and Matt Wickham, Chief Operating Officer, gave a presentation on the South Somerset contract with Freedom Leisure. They explained that they were a not-for-profit leisure trust operating since 2002 and took over facilities in South Somerset in April 2021; that they operate four sites in the area; the four objectives of the organisation; the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and challenges in South Somerset; the development works completed at three of the centres; the services they offer.

During the discussion, the following points were raised and responded to:

- It can be difficult to book into classes as they are full
  - We are always looking at the programme and how we can make improvements and add additional classes.
- How does membership compare to pre-pandemic?
  - There isn't data available on that as we weren't operating in South Somerset prior to the pandemic.
- In leisure demand can be inelastic. How does that impact pricing? How do you get over being fully booked and deterring walk-ins?
  - Main cost is staffing as everything gets more expensive, price is the only thing we can control.

- We don't have bookings on our lane swimming, you can walk-in.
- A large amount of money has gone to decarbonisation. Can you explain that?
  - This is government funding, supported by South Somerset District Council and then Somerset Council. Projects should have been finished 18 months ago, still not finished but almost there. Majority of the funding was central government, one of our objectives is sustainability and environmental.
- What are the issues with staffing? Is it turnover, short-term contracts, recruitment?
  - It is a challenge – the biggest challenge is the margins, a lot of staff are on minimum wage so the budget has a big impact on us. We struggle with getting people into the industry and keeping them. We lose a lot of people to emergency services, we are looking at our training. We want to find people who give back to our community.
- Are there any demographics you haven't been able to reach?
  - There is still work to do with the older population. We have to look at the demographics of each town we operate in and understand the needs and what we are missing.
- One of the challenges is a leak – who is responsible for the leak?
  - We believe it is the council, it is being invested currently.
- Why are opening hours at the Chard facility limited?
  - We do need to look at that – opening hours are dictated with planning. Since we merged with 1610 there is another site in Chard so members will have access to both with varying hours.

The Chair thanked the presenters.

Mark Washington, Contract Manager and Adam Mundy, Regional Contract Activity & Wellbeing Manager then gave a presentation on Everyone Active. They explained that Everyone Active operates 5 centres in Somerset; they are a large national operator; there are challenges with recruitment and retention; they use a health and wellbeing framework; they are working towards Carbon Net Zero; Vivary Golf Course and Adventure Centre have had a very good year; the '4Cs' strategy of Communities, Colleagues, Carbon Reduction, and Commercial Delivery; the social value impact; the wider engagement work they do with SASP and the NHS.

During the discussion, the following points were raised and responded to:

- There have been complaints about the showers at Blackbrook, have they been addressed?
  - The showers have been fixed.
- Can people go without booking, is it possible to get a paper timetable and pay in cash, is it accessible for people who can't or won't book?
  - We prefer not to print paper timetables but may be able to photocopy the laminated copy at reception. Blackbrook are cashless but Taunton School do take cash.
- What is the benefit of the partnership with the Cricket Club?
  - There is brand awareness, player engagement, and support for walking cricket. It helps to raise awareness locally – team building can take place at high ropes. It is early in the partnership and hard to quantify benefits.
- The age demographics are quite young – how are you attracting people in

their 50s?

- With our programmes we have a good full range of coverage. The aquatic side might not be for everyone.
- Interested in social value with the aging population. Would love to see figures about what social value could be in West Somerset
  - Not sure if social value figures can be done speculatively, but we can take that away.

There was then a more general discussion about leisure operators:

- Only two operators have come to the committee today, did we ask all operators to attend?
  - In the east we have landlord/tenant arrangements rather than the contracts we have in South and West. We are currently starting a procurement exercise in the North, a contract ending in September 2025. Once we know who the operator will be then we will likely invite them along, but at the moment there isn't a contractual agreement.
- Can we ask if there is peer collaboration across providers so that there is equality of services to all of our communities?
  - There is a problem of inheriting four different systems from districts. We can take that away and look at that.

## **70 Month 5 Budget Monitoring report - Agenda Item 7**

Kerry Hepple, Service Manager Management Accounting, gave a presentation on the Communities Revenue Budget. She highlighted the overall Month 5 picture for the whole council, the overspends in Climate and Place, that the Council would need the corporate contingency of £6m, that Communities has a forecasted underspend of £0.447m, that this was a favourable movement due to £1.2m underspend in the Leisure budget, and that Regs and Ops have reduced the predicted overspend by £0.269m.

During the discussion, the following points were raised and responded to:

- Why are the areas in red overspent?
  - It is difficult to manage overspends in coroners and mortuary – charges have been increased.
  - CCTV is funded by Town and Parish Councils but some cameras have needed upgrading and this has generated extra costs.
  - For RLNI provision on beaches, due to poor weather income from car parks has reduced.
  - There have been contract costs for public conveniences and devolution.
- We have no control over what the coroner asks for.
  - Yes, the costs are around post-mortems, the coroner will request a certain number. The price per post-mortem has gone up considerably over the last 18 months. We are trying to get a bereavement system that works for all.
- Cultural services - there has been an underspend in leisure services, is that because of contract issues?
  - Budgets have been brought together with items we no longer need.
- Cultural services – with devolution to Yeovil Town Council, we don't have an

indication in the report on whether the impact will be positive or negative or what order of magnitude we will see.

- We are still working through that – there are complications with some services.
- Underachievement in bereavement – does this mean not as much income as expected? What's driving it?
  - There is a competitive market, there are some private services and we have to match costs. The busiest time of year is yet to come. We are always looking at making systems more efficient and hoping for improvement in crematoriums.
- Are we devolving services without being aware of financial benefit to the council?
  - No, that is not the case.
- Of the six items under housing, how many of these have moved to adults? Need to detail this in the new structure.
  - HRA is staying within Communities.

## **71 Digital Switch over for the Lifeline Service. - Agenda Item 8**

Gareth Denslow, Service Manager Digital & Strategy, and Richard Burge, Strategic Manager Commercial Workforce & Quality, gave a presentation that provided an update on the digital Switchover of Lifeline Machines across the country. They explained that these were community lifelines for 13,000 customers, the need to switch from analogue to digital and to mitigate risk to customers once analogue phone lines are no longer in operation, the timeline of the project and progress so far.

During the discussion, the following points were raised and responded to:

- Will the change create a better system going forward?
  - Yes, the new digital equipment allows us to do a lot more remotely. It will reduce travelling costs as we can program remotely. The equipment has a long lifespan as well.
- Old copper wires worked with power cuts, in Westonzoyland there are many power cuts and limited phone signal. What processes are in place during a power cut?
  - All equipment has a battery backup as well as the option of a simcard. The unit would still run in a power outage. If aerials go down, it still works as it is a different mobile signal that doesn't use as much bandwidth. We also have aerial boosters.
- Are people who need a system required to have broadband? A lot of older people don't use wi-fi, don't have a laptop.
  - It's not required to have broadband, just a telephone line, which will be replaced by a new digital phoneline. Increasingly there are people who only have mobile phones but that's where the simcard mentioned comes in.

## **72 Glastonbury Festival Debrief - Agenda Item 9**

Dave Coles, Head of Regulatory Services, gave a presentation that provided a

debrief on the Glastonbury Festival regulatory work. He explained: the licensing objectives, the pre-event licensing work, and the multi-agency work around the festival; the efficiency savings this year in reduced staffing and vehicle costs of £17,000 and £6,400 respectively, a 41% saving on 2023 costs; an overview of the work of other teams such as traffic management, parking enforcement, communications, public health, and emergency planning.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Why were there more arrivals than departures by train?
  - Not aware of why.
- Regarding costs, what other staff time?
  - The pre-festival work can't be changed as it needs to be safe.
- Can the statutory license fee be changed?
  - No. Highways have a separate agreement outside the license, that work is fully covered by GFEL.
- Are there going to be issues next year after the restructure?
  - Still working through the structures but we aim to ensure the appropriate monitoring is undertaken at this event.
- Could noise complaints have gone down because people expect noise with the festival?
  - There is a complaints process, we can't know why people aren't complaining. There are ample routes for people to make complaints.
- Regarding the volume of helicopters, can we suggest a solution with the CAA and find another safe landing point nearby to avoid near the housing?
  - Glastonbury Festival are looking at how they can reduce the impact of helicopters, but there is not much that can be done from a licensing perspective.
  - May be able to look into that separately from a planning perspective.
- There are complaints about extra traffic from parish councils. How can parish councils get in touch with the organisers and can the organisers come to parish councils to take them on board?
  - GFEL do visit the parish councils and take on board the concerns they have. If they want to contact us directly they absolutely can and we will look into anything not taken on board by festivals. We don't have the capacity to visit every parish council affects but we are happy to listen to any concerns.
  - The best contact would be through Bev Norman or [trafficmanagement@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:trafficmanagement@somerset.gov.uk)
- The restructure timeline puts us not having the structures set until February/March. Does that create a risk for this process for the 2025 music festival and are there any mitigations?
  - There is minimal risk. Don't want to comment on restructuring at this meeting. Whatever the outcome we will ensure measures are in place.
- How are officers interacting with local Members? Where is the process for working with us?
  - A fair reflection. We need to do more, we will arrange a meeting at the right time to feed it in, early in the new year.
- One of the objectives is protection of children from harm, would be interested to understand how we do this. Would be happy to receive a written response.
  - Will take this offline.

The Chair concluded the discussion and said he would write to Sarah Dowden, Service Director for Regulatory and Operations, and Dave Coles, Head of Regulatory Services, to understand the difference of opinion with noise complaints, ensuring appropriate teams are on site after transformation, ensuring continuous improvement, investigating the planning status of the site, and ensuring local community and local Member involvement.

**(The meeting ended at 12.16 pm)**

.....  
**CHAIR**