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## Report of the Five Scrutiny Committees

Chair of Committee: Councillor Claire Sully (Vice Chair), Scrutiny Committee – Adults and Health, Councillor Leigh Redman, Scrutiny Committee – Children and Families, Councillor Martin Dimery, Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place, Councillor Gwil Wren, Scrutiny Committee – Communities, Councillor Henry Hobhouse (Vice Chair), 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 August 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

a. That Full Council note the report.

b. That the Constitution Part 6 – Scrutiny Terms of Reference be amended as follows:

1.17 **REPORTING:** A Scrutiny Committee can report and make recommendations to the Leader, the Executive or the Council, as appropriate, and to partner public bodies involved with Community Safety or the NHS. Each Committee reports annually to Full Council on its work, its future work programme and recommendations for improving the way it carries out its functions, if appropriate.

## Main report and supporting information



### Background and purpose of report

1. The five Scrutiny Committees met 9 times over the period of 27<sup>th</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> November.

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**

Scrutiny Committee - Adults and Health met twice over this period.

#### **2. Meeting 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

- Budget Monitoring Report

The Committee received a report on the budget monitoring position, showing an underspend of £2.1m. The Committee discussed the reasons for the underspend and how services had changed as result of My Life, My Future and other savings.

- My Life, My Future

The Committee received a report on the progress of the My Life, My Future Transformation, including details on the improvements, the savings, and the positive impact on the workforce. The Committee discussed how the restructure programme will impact the transformation, challenges with discharge from hospitals, and the long-term impacts of the shift towards care at home.

- Adult Social Care Performance and Assurance Report

The Committee received a presentation and report on the performance and assurance data used within Adult Social Care. The Committee discussed the CQC assessment the authority is awaiting, the results of the staff survey, the reasoning behind care package hand-backs and how the council has supported providers, and the steps taken to continuously improve.

- Safeguarding Adults Annual Report

The Committee received a report on the statutory duties of Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB), the multi-agency work, and the concerns around self-neglect, homelessness, and placement reviews. The Committee discussed the importance of shared data and partnership working, the need for service user and community engagement, organisational and other abuse and neglect by service providers, variation by ethnicity, and risks to safeguarding.

### **3. Scrutiny Committee – Children and Families**

Scrutiny Committee – Children and Families met twice over the period.

#### **4. Meeting 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

- Children’s Services – Budget Monitoring – Month 4

The Committee received a presentation providing an update on the budget position in Children’s Services, showing a £6.4m forecast overspend. The Committee discussed the Homes and Horizons project, increasing residential care costs, 16+ accommodation, an ongoing consultation for provision for children with additional needs, and the Dedicated Schools Grant Deficit Management Plan.

- Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of Somerset – serious youth violence action plan

The Committee received an update presentation on the Somerset JTAI of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Somerset. The Committee discussed the timetable for actions, the roll out of training to front line staff, the importance of coordinating intelligence and data sharing.

- Transformation Board – deep dive – Children Looked After

The Committee received a presentation on this topic. The Committee discussed concerns about court delays and the impact on children and families, the audits undertaken and the sampling process. They requested further information on children ceasing to be looked after and special guardianships.

- Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group

The Committee received a report from the meeting of the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group. It was noted that there would need to be further meetings and discussion to review the Terms of Reference.

- External placements – update on recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group

The Committee received and noted the update.

- Standing Panel for Education Standards – update

The Committee received and noted the update.

- SWAP Audit on EHCP Improvement

The Committee received a presentation on the audit requested due to complaints made by parents about delays in the EHCP process. It was agreed that the audit report would be considered in detail at the next meeting of the Committee.

## **5. Meeting 21<sup>st</sup> October 2024**

- Children's Services – Budget Monitoring update – Month 5

The Committee received a presentation on this topic. They discussed the downward trend relating to Children in Care, the number of children impacted by the Homes and Horizons delays, the overspend in Education and Transport, what happens to young people in care when they turn 18, variation in school exclusion figures between state-maintained schools and academies, and the breakdown of placement and cost impact of external county placements. It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Committee on various topics.

- Funding and provision for children with additional needs – feedback on consultation

The Committee received a presentation on the responses received so far in the consultation on this topic. The Committee discussed what the next steps were, the monitoring of spending, the phasing of proposals, assurance needed for the proposals, support for pupils that are 'stuck', and the need for fast delivery of the proposals. It was agreed that an update would be brought back to the Committee in March.

- SWAP Audit on Education Health and Care Plan Payments

The Committee received a presentation on the recent audit and highlighted the LGO focus report. The Committee discussed the action plan and implementation timeline, case allocation and appropriate workload levels, how complaints are handled, and how AI and technology can support casework.

- Transform Family View

The Committee received a presentation and demonstration on Transform Family View, which uses data to support integrated working around a child or family across the partnership. The Committee requested an all Member briefing to be arranged.

## **6. Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place**

Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place met once over the period.

## **7. Meeting 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2024**

- Task and Finish Group update: Water Quality in Somerset

The Committee received a verbal update on the Task and Finish Group from the Vice Chair. The Vice-Chair has requested volunteer members for support in progressing this work.

- Q1 Climate and Place Performance Monitoring report

The Committee received a presentation on this topic. The Committee discussed the need for comparison over time, funding deadlines, savings related to recycling centres, school transport, and surface dressing contracts.

- Somerset Council's Climate Vision

The Committee received a report on this topic. The Committee discussed Mendip Hill farmers, ongoing tests with new Carbon Footprint methodology in Somerset, whether the Climate Vision has enough involvement from the Council, expected timescales of the climate partnership, and concerns over council resources particularly relating to workforce.

- Somerset Economic Strategy – Approach to development of Strategy and emerging evidence base

The committee received a report on this topic. The Committee discussed how to ensure there is fair representation and the interest of the public, the importance of a 'golden thread' between Economic Development and Planning, and the need for funding towards apprenticeships and developing green skills.

## **8. Meeting 11th November 2024**

- Local Plan Bi-Annual Update

The Committee received a presentation and a report discussing the Local Plan Bi-Annual Update. Over last six-months' worth of planning work was updated to the committee, including forward plans and upcoming reports that the members can expect in the new year. The committee discussed how best the Scrutiny members can help with the framing of the Local Plan and support the ongoing consultation process. The Plan's alignment with the Council's climate emergency was also discussed.

- Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)

The Committee received a presentation and report highlighting the important work that Somerset Rivers Authority has undertaken over the last few years surrounding the catchment areas. The SRA has published their own strategy for the first time in the last decade that the organisation has operated in and the same was discussed at the meeting under this item. The update was very well received by the Committee. Issues relating to funding, conservation and local plan tie ins were highlighted.

- Month 5 Budget Monitoring Update

The report was shared with the committee as an information item due to time constraints.

- Task and Finish Group Update – Water Quality in Somerset

A member of the public made a public statement and was provided a verbal answer as well as assurance that a written response would be provided. The Committee received a verbal update on the Task and Finish Group from the Vice Chair.

## **9. Scrutiny Committee – Communities**

Scrutiny Committee - Communities met twice over the period.

### **10. Meeting 11<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

- Update L2/L3 Restructure

The Committee received a verbal update on the recent structural changes, including that the Housing responsibility has shifted to the Adults directorate and that for the time being Scrutiny Committee arrangements would not change. The Committee requested a further verbal update as details emerged on the restructure.

- Budget Outturn 23/24 and Month 3 Report

The Committee received a report on this topic. The Committee discussed whether service levels were being reduced to maintain budgets in areas such as customer services, the overspend in Open Spaces relating to an ID Verde contract, and the spend on Coroner services.

- Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

The Committee received a report on this topic at the request of Committee Vice Chair Cllr Dawn Johnson, which explained the relevant legislation, issues in some areas of Somerset such as Taunton, and that a new taxi and licensing policy is being prepared. The Committee discussed cost to providers and training required for provision of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs), harmonising penalties that are dealt with, the importance of raising complaints, the role volunteer teams such as Wivvy Cares play in supporting rural communities, the suggestion that taxi groups could meet with disability group representatives and advertise as being accessible and disability compliant.

### **11. Meeting 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

- Leisure Operators

The Committee received presentations from leisure operators Freedom Leisure and Everyone Active that operate in two areas of Somerset. The Committee discussed booking processes and digital exclusion, decarbonisation expenses, staffing issues, opening hours, attracting various demographics to services, the areas of Somerset with different leisure arrangements, and the possibility of peer collaboration across providers.

- Month 5 Budget Monitoring Report

The Committee received a presentation on the revenue budget, including the forecast underspend in Communities of £0.447m. The Committee discussed the reasons for some areas having variances and the impact of some services being devolved and how to measure that.

- Digital Switch over for the Lifeline Service

The Committee received a presentation on this topic which detailed the ongoing work to switchover Lifeline Machines to digital across the county. The Committee discussed the overall improvements in the new system, how services would operate where there were power cuts and limited phone signal, and that broadband would not be required for the digital system.

- Glastonbury Festival Debrief

The Committee received a presentation that provided an overview of the regulatory work at Glastonbury Festival 2024. The Committee also heard a public question on this topic. The Committee discussed the costs involved, concerns about extra traffic as well as helicopter noise, risks to the work from the restructure, and the importance of engagement with local Members.

## **12. Scrutiny Committee – Corporate and Resources**

Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources met three times over the period.

### **13. Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> August 2024**

- 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Month 3 (Qtr 1)

The Committee received a report on this topic, which included details on the main variances in each directorate. The Committee discussed various pressures in Children, Families & Education Services, as well as the cost of care home places and the value of outstanding Licensing debts.

- 2024/25 General Fund Capital Budget Monitoring Report

The Committee received a report on this topic. The Committee discussed that borrowing is only done as and when needed, the need to ensure the Council still has the resources to deliver on Capital Programme schemes within the agreed timescales, the need to review the budget, and requested further detail on slippage of budget for items such as road maintenance.

- 2024/25 Housing Revenue Account Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Report

The Committee received a report on this topic including the forecast overspend in the revenue budget of £2.359m. The Committee discussed voids, the difficulty sourcing the right trades and materials, challenges with recruitment, and properties being handed back in a much worse condition.

- Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review Consultation

The Committee received a report on the consultation exercise being undertaken relating to proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The Committee

discussed whether it would be appropriate to apply a flat rate rather than a percentage to the CTR, the need for data on areas where most residents would be affected by proposals, the risk of increased casework for Councillors, and that the consultation needs to be publicised.

- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) Policy

The Committee received a report on this topic around changes to the Council's existing RIPA Policy. It was highlighted that statistics showed that the County Council and Somerset Council had not used the investigatory powers granted by the Act. The Committee made comments to improve the report.

- Improvement and Transformation Programme Update – Target Operating Model

The Committee received a report on this framework for the type of organisation Somerset Council wanted to be. The Committee discussed the report and offered some suggestions for improvement.

#### **14. Meeting 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

- 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Month 4

The Committee received a report on this topic, which forecasted a revenue overspend of £8.4m, offset by the £6m corporate contingency. The Committee discussed how the information was presented in the report, the contingencies position, the spend on legal agencies, mitigations in the Children's Services budget, the Climate and Place overspend relating to the Waste Contract, the sustainability of the current position, and the overarching risk to the council.

- 2023/24 General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Outturn

The Committee received a report on this topic which showed a 2023/24 outturn position of a £1.8m underspend. The Committee discussed how the information is expressed, and the risks around the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.

- 2023/24 General Fund Capital Budget Monitoring Report – Outturn

The Committee received a presentation on this topic, which showed a slippage of £196.890m from 2023/24 to 2024/25 and beyond. The Committee discussed the need for profiling to highlight potential slippages going forward, oversight and the need for scrutiny, and concern about staff changes and the loss of corporate knowledge.

- 2023/24 Housing Revenue Account Revenue & Capital Budget Monitoring Report – Outturn

The Committee received a report on this topic, which included a revenue underspend of £810k that had been transferred to supplement general reserves. The Committee discussed the need for consistent reporting, the fire safety budget, overspends relating



to voids, funding for energy efficiency works, and requested detail on figures relating to outturn variances and level of reserves.

### **15. Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

- 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Month 5

The Committee received a report on this topic, showing a forecast overspend of £5.324m, an improvement from the previous month. The Committee discussed the urgent need for action on the overspend in Children’s Services, the cost of LCNs, and the reduction in works done by highways and waste.

- Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Update 2025/26 to 2029/30

The Committee received a report on this topic, which highlighted the main objectives of the MTFS. The Committee discussed the Adult Social Care Precept, earmarked and ringfenced reserves, many possible scenarios for the MTFP, the need to closely track the rate of inflation, and that the next report would come in February 2025.

- Improvement & Transformation Programme Progress Update

The Committee received a report on the progress of this programme, including detail on the risk programme. The Committee discussed the risks around staff redundancies and motivation and that there are significant recruitment and retention issues in some areas, whether staff facing compulsory redundancy could be retrained and redeployed, the capitalisation programme not being confirmed and the risk that poses, whether there had been an increase in sickness absence, and that a skills audit could have avoided some loss of skill.

### **Key considerations for the Council**

#### **Consultation and feedback**

None. Report for information only.

#### **Financial and Risk Implications**

None. Report for information only.

#### **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**

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	Scott Wooldridge	5/12/24
Finance & Procurement	N/A	
Workforce (*)	N/A	
Asset Management (*)	N/A	
Executive Director	Alyn Jones	5/12/24
Executive Lead Member		
<b>Consulted:</b>	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	N/A	
Opposition Spokesperson(s)	N/A	
Relevant Scrutiny Chair(s)	All Scrutiny Chairs	4/12/24