

Scrutiny Committee

At the Scrutiny meeting held 28th February 2017, members considered the following items:

Follow up was required following the consideration of the Somerset Waste Partnership New Waste Treatment Facility decision at the Scrutiny Committee meeting in January

Members all agreed that the following outstanding queries and recommendations should be sent to all appropriate parties via a formal letter from the Chairman of Scrutiny on behalf of the committee:

Somerset Waste Partnership

- Make the equalities impact assessment for the New Waste Treatment facility and associated Waste Transfer stations available including the details of all mitigation work that has been conducted and is planned to be carried out by the Waste Board and any service providers.
- Amend the presentation of their Agendas and Summary of decision notices to make it clearer when an item is a decision making item and therefore is subject to the 5 day call in period or is an update/information only item.

Somerset County Council

- Highways department to help us by providing information relating to any highway conditions attached to the Permission for the Waste Transfer site at Dimmer and how the residents' of Clanville can have their concerns surrounding the B3153 considered to see if any mitigation measures could be taken forward.
- Minerals and Waste Policy Team revisit the wording in the Somerset Waste Core Strategy and make recommendations to Council to alter the policy to more clearly define what a Strategic Facility is to prevent confusion around Transfer Stations in the future.
- Provide information on the website regarding the make-up of the Waste Scrutiny arrangements and links to agendas and minutes.
- Amend the presentation of their Agendas and Summary of decision notices to make it clearer when an item is a decision making item and therefore is subject to the 5 day call in period or is an update/information only item.

Monitoring SSSC National Non Domestic Rates Relief Policy

Scrutiny endorsed the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.

Discretionary Housing Payment Policy – Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Report

Scrutiny Supported proposed changes to the policy wording made by the Scrutiny Manager and endorsed the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 2 March 2017

Scrutiny Committee made the following comments to District Executive:

District-wide Voluntary Sector Grants 2017/18

- Members noted the slight reduction in grant to Access for All. Given the staff reductions at SSDC as we go through Transformation, Scrutiny queried if now was the right time to cut the funding to the Access for All.
- Members noted the good work of Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) and queried if they would be under increased pressure due to the wider roll-out of Universal Credit? Some members were concerned that CASS may require more money due to the current environment and peoples change in circumstances and sought re-assurance that there was a process to measure how well CASS were managing.
- Page 15 – top line of table refers to number of clients helped – Members queried the type of help provided and for what?
- Page 35 participation at Youth Days – the target wasn't met and members queried if there was any particular reason for this?
- Page 42 – bullet point refers to the InspirED project whereby schools will be able to engage with Take Art. Scrutiny queried if schools needed to pay for this and if not what the funding criteria is.
- Page 42 - members noted the participation figures for some Take Art activities had significantly reduced and queried if there was any reason for the trend?
- Page 45 – members noted the craft exhibition with the National Trust. Members acknowledge the National Trust is a membership organisation and members sought reassurance that people were not required to be a member in order to view the exhibition.
- In general Scrutiny felt narratives would be useful in future reports to explain targets or provide reasons for targets not being met.

Council Tax Penalties & Civil Penalties in Housing Benefit

- Page 54 – Civil penalties and housing benefit – members noted that the paragraphs did not detail what the penalty is and suggested this is amended.
- Scrutiny noted the paragraph about Equalities was missing from the report, and sought reassurance that an Equalities Impact Assessment had been completed.
- Members also wished to clarify their understanding that April would effectively be an amnesty period.

Proposed Changes to Business Rates Relief Policy

- Scrutiny endorsed the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.
- Scrutiny supported the recommendations in the District Executive report.

Review of Discretionary Housing Payments Policy

- Scrutiny noted that since the agenda had been published that the Scrutiny Manager and the Revenues & Benefits Manager had reviewed the proposed revised policy again and had suggested some slight amendments for greater clarity – these being:
 - Clarity about the DHP shortfalls – page 80
 - Slight word changes to points F, G and 2 on page 83
- Scrutiny endorsed the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.
- Scrutiny supported the recommendations in the DX report.

Quarterly Corporate performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – 3rd Quarter 2016/17

- Members commented that few of the performance measures provided monitoring information about standards or services as we progress through transformation.
- Scrutiny asked for narratives/suggested reasons for the fly-tipping indicators, especially as a rise is reported under PI 011.

District Executive Forward Plan

- Scrutiny queried if the item scheduled for May - Intelligent Enforcement Proposal for Council Car Parks – was the item about Automatic Number Plate Recognition or if it was for something different?

Task and Finish Reviews

Street Trading – members explained that they had reviewed the consultation responses and were now working with the Licensing Manger to agree the details and compile the report and recommendations.

Consent for Disposal - The Corporate Strategic Housing Manager attended the committee to provide an overview of the latest situation across the district. Members agreed to re-open this Task and Finish group to specifically focus on existing policies and procedures to see if they are fit for purpose and achieving. As part of their work the Task and Finish Group had raised some concern about the links of disposal of properties to the Rural Lettings Policy. He provided figures to illustrate the impact of the policy to date and the wider issues. Members agreed to give this further consideration and to assess the realistic outcomes that could be achieved by conducting a Task and Finish Exercise.

Council Tax Support – A new Task and Finish group has formed to look at the policy and if and how the policy/scheme could be amended to manage the decrease in administration grant.

Community Council For Somerset – No progress has been made since the last meeting.

Sue Steele
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee