

Scrutiny Committee

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since the last report to Full Council. The Committee met on 5 June and 3 July 2018 to consider:

5 June 2018

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7 June 2018 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 7 June 2018 and made comments as detailed below.

Review of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) (Agenda item 6)

- Page 5 – Scrutiny noted that use of the RIPA powers to date by the Council had been limited, and queried if there was a reason for this.

Establishing Special Purpose Vehicles for SSDC Investments (Agenda item 7)

- When a Special Purpose Vehicle is established, members asked how they would be able to find out information about the activity of that vehicle. For example agendas and minutes of Board meetings or AGMs etc.
- Page 42 Risk Matrix - regarding the left matrix showing the profile before officer recommendations – Scrutiny felt the positioning of Financial and Reputational risk was too high and may be conveying the wrong message.
- Members acknowledged the responses and information provided by the Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation). Scrutiny suggested that the report did not clearly indicate that the process only applied if an investment or project was time limited, but read as if it was a general procedure. It was suggested that additional wording be added to clarify this and also a slight change to wording of recommendation 7a.
- Scrutiny acknowledged setting up of SPVs was a big step for the authority, but also a necessary one. However it was felt there needed to be some improvement to the process described in the report, and to make clear that a formal proposal will be required to set up an SPV.
- It was also suggested that the advantages and risks of proceeding with an individual SPV also be clearly identified, together with possible mitigation measures for any identified risks.

Commercial Strategy and Investments Progress Report (Agenda item 8)

- Members thanked officers for the detailed report and appendix.
- Scrutiny felt the use of appointed agents was a constructive way forward.
- Members made several comments in confidential session regarding information within the confidential appendix.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 9)

- Members noted an item on the Local Plan review was scheduled for October, and asked if members would have an opportunity to input into the process before that date.

- It was asked if there would be a report in due course regarding the proposal to explore the option of a unitary authority for Somerset.
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Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 9)

Members noted the updates provided by the Chairman and Case Services Officer on each of the Task and Finish Groups currently in progress or commencing in the near future.

Homefinder Somerset Plain English Policy – No updates since last meeting.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019 – Draft consultation text was currently with the Scrutiny Specialist for initial comments prior to circulation to Task and Finish Group members.

Customer Accessibility – Some members have taken part in a card sorting exercise to help shape the structure of the new website. Details of further Scrutiny involvement was awaited.

3 July 2018

Corporate Performance Reporting (Agenda Item 8)

Members received a presentation from the People, Performance and Change Lead on Corporate Performance Reporting which covered the following:

- Overall vision of the corporate performance management framework
- Progress to date
- Building the framework
- Style and layout of reports
- System requirements

The Officer responded to points of detail raised during discussion which included the following:

- For the new performance indicators there were 3 years of baseline information available which was a good starting point for looking at trends.
- Telephone performance was a key performance indicator which would form part of the quarterly performance reports.
- The system used for monitoring information had not changed only choosing what to measure had altered. All previous data was still available within the system.
- In future the performance system would need to be developed in order to accommodate dashboard reporting.
- Benchmarking information against other Councils would be included in future reports, and would involve looking at the use of a single data set. The way data was collected would mean there was a time lag of several months with the reported data provided in quarterly reporting, but this would be indexed in the reports.
- With regard to internal benchmarking, previous trends would be analysed. It was more difficult to look forward and undertake predictive work.
- It was the intention to have performance information available on the members portal.
- A view on tolerance levels would be taken internally and whether interventions were required within the service.
- Members needed to be mindful that the reporting did not deal with real times and would normally be reporting information 6 weeks after the quarter. If there were spikes in

performance, action was likely to have already been taken and so an indicator may be back in the green.

- In future, performance monitoring reports would be submitted to District Executive one month earlier than previously and would follow the same reporting schedule as finance reports.
- Systems will be in place to ensure appropriate action is taken if an indicator is in the red.

Members supported the use of the Red, Amber & Green (RAG) system in future reports as this gave a good indication of performance levels and easily highlighted if an area required immediate action.

The People, Performance and Change Lead advised that the quarter one performance monitoring report would be brought forward in August. She intended to start with a simple report and use the remainder of the year to really understand how best to view the Council's performance and make improvements to develop the report.

The Chairman thanked the People, Performance and Change Lead for her presentation and report.

Organisational Capacity to Deliver Transformation and Maintain Service Delivery (Agenda Item 9)

Members received a report from the Strategic Lead for Transformation. She assured members that there were mechanisms in place and approaches had been devised, to closely monitor the organisational impact of Transformation and balance resources, in order to ensure the Council was delivering effective services whilst implementing the Transformation Programme.

The Director (Service Delivery) acknowledged there were some dips in performance and there were staff shortages in some areas. The Leadership and Management Teams, and the Programme Board, had a good understanding of where the current pressures were with certain services, and active measures were being put in place to make sure that the period of turbulence was minimised. He advised that in order to address these issues a range of measures were being implemented to improve service delivery.

The Strategic Lead and Director responded to points of detail raised during discussion including information about:

- The immediate measures being taken, including use of temporary resources, to fill gaps where services are currently under resourced, to ensure that services are kept at acceptable performance levels and statutory duties are delivered within required timescales.
- The actions being taken to improve customer access via the Contact Centre.
- There were a number of other factors contributing to service pressures and workforce performance such as regulatory changes and business sector skill shortages.
- The additional provision of £250,000 from the agreed budget for additional resourcing was one off funding. It was recognised from other authorities that the operating state would not be perfectly formed from day one and would require supplementing resources as the new technology, processes and roles bed in.
- The difficulties with staff recruitment and shortages of professional staff.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for attending the meeting.

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5 July 2018 (Agenda Item 10)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 5 July 2018 and made comments as detailed below.

Dualling of the A303 from Sparkford to Ilchester (Agenda item 6)

- Members queried if the funding from Highways England was adequate to cover SSDC resources?

Affordable Housing Development Programme (Agenda item 7)

- Paragraph 5.5 – some members queried if Magna Housing Association are restarting their development activities whether this was likely to cause any issues in the short term.

Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy and associated charges (Agenda item 8)

- Members noted that there had been a low response to consultation and queried whether the response rate was adequate to draw conclusions. Members queried if landlords would be made aware of the new charges.
- Page 57 Table 1 – Members queried the terminology as charges are stated per hour. What happens if it's part of an hour - should it state 'per hour or part thereof.'

Adoption of the South Somerset Playing Pitch Strategy 2017 – 2028 (Agenda item 9)

- Some members raised concern that the Strategy seemed to focus on the number of grass pitches rather than the availability of pitches, and noted that grass pitches were high maintenance in terms of resources.
- Chard Ward Members raised a number of concerns relating specifically to the Chard area including:
 - Concern about description of 'deliverable' when there are external factors involved and hence SSDC may not necessarily be able to control delivery of projects.
 - Concern that one club was seen as the focus for the Chard area.
- Some members raised concern about community use of school pitches and noted that negotiations were needed for wider use at some locations.
- Scrutiny queried if the number of responses to the consultation was low/average/or as expected? If low, it was queried if there was a need corporately to look at how SSDC do any consultations in the future (*as this is the second report to possibility mention low response rate to consultations*).

Capital Budget Outturn Report for 2017/18 (Agenda item 10)

- Members noted that it was difficult to keep track of the budget for Transformation and requested if it was possible to have a table that collated all the information together for easy reference.
- Page 197 - Scrutiny queried when the reserve schemes were routinely reviewed to see if any schemes could be removed, re-profiled or funds returned to balances.

Revenue Budget Outturn Report for 2018/18 (Agenda item 11)

- Regarding recommendation C, members sought clarity that if approved what would the new total be in the Transformation Reserve?

SSDC Annual Performance Report 2017-18 (Agenda item 12)

- Members noted that Chard Refresh should be referred to as Chard Regeneration.

SSDC Transformation Programme – Progress Report (Agenda item 13)

- Members queried how many staff in total across all 3 phases had not been offered roles and what this figure was as FTEs - as in the report to Council in April 2017 it had been suggested that we “should seek to reduce our FTE’s by 77”.
- Some members commented the report was difficult to understand as there was much ‘jargon’. They also noted paragraph 18 had a typo and ‘able’ should read ‘unable’.
- Members noted that the remaining communications budget seemed very low and queried if this was intentional.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 14)

- Members noted a report on the purchase of land at Ham Hill was on the Forward Plan for September and queried if this was correct given that a report was being considered this month.

Purchase of Land at Ham Hill Country Park (Confidential) (Agenda item 17)

- Members did not raise any queries and were content that all the recommendations go forward.

Notification of an Urgent Executive Decision: Battery Project – Establishing a Special Purpose Vehicle (Agenda item 18)

- No comments.
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Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted the updates provided by the Chairman on each of the Task and Finish Groups currently in progress.

Customer Accessibility – The website work has progressed considerably. Representatives from the Task and Finish group will be involved in testing a desktop version of the website over the coming weeks as will representatives from all sectors.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019 – no updates since the last meeting

Homefinder Somerset Plain English – no updates since the last meeting

Cllr Sue Steele
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee