

Scrutiny Committee

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since the last report to Full Council. The Committee met on 31 July and 4 September to consider:

31 July 2018

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 2 August 2018 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 2 August and made comments as detailed below. Responses to most comments and questions were provided at the Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officer or Deputy Leader.

Corporate Grants Report 2017-2018

- Members noted the differences across the four areas regarding the percentage awarded against project costs and the town / parish council contributions. Members asked if the variation in figures was due to the types of grant (e.g. revenue, capital or Service Level Agreement) or if there was another reason.

2018/19 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30 June 2018

- Members queried if the virement of £61,610 to the regeneration budgets for Chard, Wincanton and Yeovil had been evenly split between the schemes?
- Building Control Income – members queried what could be done about the predicted shortfall in fee income, and whether the charges need to be reviewed?
- Westlands – Members acknowledged there was annual reporting but asked if it would be possible to have a verbal update on how it's going mid-term.
- Some members asked if the income from property investments could be more clearly reported.
- Westlands – members asked for further detail regarding the issue with utilities (as detailed in the comment).
- The Closed Churchyards Reserve is showing a positive figure – members queried if this meant no further funding will be available?
- Scrutiny made a general observation that the comments in both budget reports contained several acronyms and some readers may be unsure of their meaning.

2018/19 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Quarter Ending 30 June 2018

- Members sought clarity about the frequency of reporting for the progress of investments (Commercial Strategy)

Corporate Performance Report 2018-19: 1st Quarter

- Some members expressed concern that they had experienced long waits on the telephone when ringing the main number. They acknowledged there was a recorded message encouraging people to go online, but they had concerns about vulnerable people who may not be able to get online or did not have the confidence to do so.
- Members queried what tolerance levels were being used to give the amber RAG rating e.g. +/- 10%.

- Past performance figures – members queried which figures were being used in this report – was it the previous quarter, the same period last year or an average of the previous year? It was felt a key or brief narrative would be useful.
- Members acknowledged there were better metrics now but noted a number of indicators were in the red, and queried if SSDC were doing enough to explain Transformation to the public in order to manage expectations.
- Members raised several queries regarding specific indicators (detailed in the Scrutiny minutes).

District Executive Forward Plan

No comments.

4 September 2018

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6 September 2018 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 6 September 2018 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to most comments and questions were provided at the Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officer, director or Portfolio Holder.

Proposed Designation of Herne Hill, Ilminster as a Local Nature Reserve

- Scrutiny supported the recommendations
- Members queried if status as a Local Nature Reserve would have any weight in terms of planning.

Revisions to the Statement of Community Involvement in Respect of Neighbourhood Plans

- Scrutiny sought clarity as to how many Neighbourhood Plans are currently underway.
- Members queried if there was a breakdown of the costs to SSDC for supporting each Plan, and if there were expenses to SSDC above the grant funding available.
- Members asked if officers were aware of any groups who had applied for the additional grant of £8,000.
- Members sought clarity about revisions to Neighbourhood Plans and whether there is a requirement for them to be updated when the Local Plan is revised.

The 'Making' of the South Petherton Neighbourhood Plan

- Members asked how much weight the Neighbourhood Plan carried until it is 'made', and at what point and at what point it would become a material consideration for planning?

The East Coker Neighbourhood Plan Referendum

- No comments.

Update on Superfast Broadband for Rural Businesses

- Members queried if phase 2 of the programme had a set end date?

- Members acknowledged that Superfast Broadband speeds are still low in some rural areas.
- Scrutiny commented that the delivery and availability of Superfast Broadband across the district is patchy. There is a need to map and identify poor broadband areas to see what we may be able to do.
- Some members queried if the state aid criteria was for a fixed timeframe.

Financial Strategy and Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20

- Members asked for further information regarding some technical points in the report, and thanked the Section 151 officer for his explanations.
- Table 6b – ‘Other Earmarked Reserves’ – members asked from where the figure of 1216 had been derived as it wasn’t clear in the report.

District Executive Forward Plan

- Scrutiny noted the item scheduled for December – Local Plan Review – and sought reassurance that all members will have some involvement prior to the report.

SSDC Operational Office Accommodation – Update on Review of Options for Brympton Way and Petters House (Confidential)

- Scrutiny made several comments in closed session.

Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 9)

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

Customer Accessibility – some members have trialled using the new website which is under development, and comments have been made about the design and ease of use.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019 – the public consultation ended on 2 September 2018, and responses are now being collated by officers.

Homefinder Somerset Plain English – no updates since the last meeting.

Cllr Sue Steele
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee