

## **Scrutiny Committee**

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since the last Council meeting.

### **Items considered during Scrutiny Committee 3<sup>rd</sup> February**

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#### **Somerset Waste Partnership Business Plan**

Members commented that in future, it would be beneficial if the current year outturn and variance figures could be included in the report to show how the partnership had performed against agreed budgets.

#### **Budget monitoring reports**

Members noted the 2014/15 Revenue and Capital budget monitoring reports and requested that on future Capital and Revenue Reserves are identified separately.

#### **Revenue Budget – 2015-16**

A Scrutiny Task and Finish group was established to consider various aspects of the budget setting process in greater detail – their final report is included in the Budget Book at Appendix A. In addition, members of the Scrutiny Committee sought clarification as to what level of tolerance was used when calculating the budget given the various elements which remain uncertain e.g. RSG and New Homes Bonus.

#### **Investing in Market Housing**

- Members sought clarification on the issues regarding Right to Buy and what the implications would be and the detail of how these implications would be mitigated.
- Scrutiny queried how the 'need' would be defined as stated in para.6 – how will this be applied consistently?
- Members queried what the risk would be if the market changed.
- Scrutiny queried the recommendation for purchases to be agreed at Portfolio Holder and senior officer level, and whether it was more appropriate for a decision to be made by District Executive to allow for this new policy initiative to be accurately monitored in the first 12 months.
- Members queried if SSDC would be the direct landlord for any future purchases and the associated implications.
- It was queried where this policy would sit with other policies relating to housing and homelessness.
- It was noted there was no risk assessment included with the report.

#### **Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants/Loans and other Financial Assistance – item 12**

- Members asked if any issues had been encountered in the past few years.
- Scrutiny recommend that the element of the policy regarding unsecured loans should be reviewed. Members were of the opinion that there should be some come back on defaulted loans and the policy should be 'tightened up'.

#### **Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 – item 13**

- It was noted that Scrutiny Committee had received a presentation on the same subject at the November meeting. Members did not raise any additional comments to those raised at the November meeting where members questioned the risks and costs associated with the community remedy, and associated investigations regarding complaints and allegations.

#### **The Living Wage – item 14**

- Members sought clarification as to whether deleting the spinal column points as set out in the report constituted a change of policy in that SSDC are now committed to delivering the 'Living Wage' rather than the legally binding minimum wage?

#### **Councillor Induction Programme 2015 & Future IT Proposals for Councillors – item 15**

- Members did not raise any comments about the Induction programme but raised a number of issues regarding the future IT proposals including:
  - Members questioned the proposed amount, after tax and National Insurance, did not seem much to purchase a suitable item of equipment, printer, paper and ink.
  - Members queried how the sum of £320 had been arrived at.
  - Some members raised concern that there may be a risk of the business of SSDC being affected if going paperless, especially during any bedding-in period.
  - It was felt a number of members may not be comfortable with such a big step in I.T. provision, and some members might require more, and different types of support to others.
  - Members accepted the proposal was a way forward but in practical terms did not think it was ideal solution.
  - Battery life at meetings would probably be an issue.
  - It was commented that many members would require the use of Microsoft Word and Excel and queried whether they would be widely available for tablets.
  - Members fully supported the principle of going paperless and digital, but felt how it would be delivered, the associated costs and support needs required further investigation and options.

#### **Family Focus programme Update – item 16**

Members noted the report but expressed disappointment at the 'next steps' detailed on page 132 regarding 'getset' in South Somerset – in that Somerset County Council had failed to recruit to the South Somerset Delivery posts.

#### **Future items to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee**

In addition to considering items including in the District Executive Agenda, at their meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, the Scrutiny Committee will be receiving reports from the Civil Contingencies Manager explaining the processes and policies relating to the discovery of undocumented migrants in Ilminster last year. At their meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> March, members will be considering a report from the Assistant Director – Health and Well-being looking at the successful delivery of the Ranger's Centre project and how the success of this project can be replicated across the authority.

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