

Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny members made the following comments on the reports to be considered by District Executive on 1st October:

Future of Westland Leisure Complex

- Since this matter was last considered by members in early September, property advisors had been commissioned to undertake a condition survey of the asset – members were referred to the full report contained in the confidential papers.
- The condition survey had identified that the roof structure is essentially clear but with some additional works identified to address issues such as end-lap corrosion.
- Additional work on hire analysis over the past two years shows that hire income was in fact greater than previously reported.
- As requested, a risk register has been developed and will be updated as the project progresses.
- An initial meeting of the Project Board had agreed that AW be requested to retain the asset in its' current condition until completion and transfer of the asset.
- AW had been approached about the possibility of separating the Sporting facilities from the Leisure facilities. They had responded by saying that their preference would be for the site to be transferred as a whole, at this stage, they would be prepared to put the option of splitting the site to the Finnmeccanica Board for consideration. The Assistant Director informed members that if the site were to be split, the other funding Partners (AW and Yeovil Town Council) had indicated that they would not be prepared to contribute any funding to a sports only site and that the ticket levy proposal could not be applied to a sports only facility.

The Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services then updated members on the following financial aspects of the project.

- The principles of capital spend
- Estimated expenditure and income associated with the project;
- Impact on capital receipts;
- Benefits of internal borrowing including the revenue implications;
- The current SSDC budget position and the need for members to reallocate resources in line with priorities if the decision is taken to proceed;
- The affordability of the project and the impact on balances.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- In response to a query about the membership of the various sporting clubs associated with the site, members were informed that members are drawn from all over the district, and not just from Yeovil.
- If SSDC were to take over the running of the site, it would be open to the whole community with all current restrictions removed and with a 'pay and play' policy introduced where possible. This would not apply to the cricket facilities as the Cricket

clubs would be required to maintain their own facilities and so would have exclusive use.

- All hire agreements would be negotiated taking into account VAT implications.
- An agreement in principle had been agreed from Yeovil Town Council, other Parish Councils within Area South had been identified as potential funding partners but had not yet been approached. It was not envisaged that Parish Councils outside of Area South would be approached for funding.
- It was queried that The Octagon Theatre is subsidised by SSDC and that when combined with the 'sister venue' at Westland's this level of subsidy would only increase. Members were informed that the financial performance of the Octagon is continually improving and that if the two venues are 'joined' there will need to be a 'truing up' exercise of 'back office' costs. In practice this will see the costs of the Octagon decrease.
- The Westland's Entertainment Venue will fundamentally not be a third theatre for Yeovil.
- Members suggested that having a 3 year business plan would help in making the final decision.
- Members were again reminded that officers had been asked to prepare the report on a 'worst case scenario' basis.
- All external funding sources had been explored and this would continue to be the case.

Following the discussion, a member of the committee proposed that the matter was put to the vote to enable Scrutiny to provide a clear indication to District Executive, this was seconded and subsequently the committee voted as follows on the recommendations contained in the report:

(Voting: 5 in favour, 3 against, 3 abstentions)

Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan

- In response to a query about Service Redesign and the reduction of personnel associated with this process the Strategic Director – Place responded that it was essentially a way of looking at processes, assessing better use of technology and focusing on the best outcome for customers. Business Transformation is a more holistic look at how we do things.
- Members noted that the mentioned the need for the MTFP to reflect the Council's priorities and that the current plan has now expired – members queried what the process is for refreshing the Council Plan and how the wider membership would be involved in this key piece of work.

Affordable Housing Development Programme

- Members thanked the officer for a very detailed and thorough report.
- Members asked that funding generated by HG4 and the geographical spread be kept under review and reported to members.

Loan to Hinton St George

- members sought reassurance that SSDC would have first charge on the property if the loan is agreed and agreed with the suggestion that the Loans policy should be revisited in light of the number of reports now coming forward to Council for approval.

Wyndham Park Community Facilities

- Members supported the recommendation which will help address the chronic shortage of primary school places in Yeovil.

Community Right to Bid

- Members noted this report

Forward Plan

Members asked when the issue of two hours free car parking (as discussed via a Motion to Full Council) would be included in the Forward Plan – at the time, members were informed that any decision on this would have to be taken as part of the 2016/17 budget setting process which is underway.

In addition to the District Executive reports, the Scrutiny Committee also received a report from the Assistant Director – Communities, outlining the LEADER Programme. The report covered the programmes' funding arrangements and how SSDC members can engage with the Programme.

Members commented that progress with the Programme had been frustrating, taking into account the disruption of national and local elections earlier in the year.

It was noted that there is now a revised launch date of 14th October, and that it was likely any bids would be considered in the last quarter of the year. Members asked if the various programme strategies could be circulated, although it was noted that these strategies were probably now out of date. Members thanked the Assistant Director for preparing the report and responding to their questions.

Update on Task and Finish groups

The Council Tax Reduction Strategy Task and Finish Group have now completed their work which will be presented to Scrutiny on 3rd November and subsequently to District Executive and Full Council.

The Review of Licensing Fees and Charges is nearing completion with the final meeting of the Task and Finish Group scheduled for 21st October – the final report and recommendations will be submitted to the Licensing Committee, District Executive and Council.

Councillor Sue Steele
Chairman of Audit Committee