

## **Scrutiny Committee**

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015.

The Committee met on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

### **Portfolio Holder Decision Called-in by Scrutiny Committee – Consent for Disposal of a Property in Rimpton by Yarlington Housing Group.**

A Call-in had been received in accordance with the Council's Constitution, it is the role of the Scrutiny Committee to agree if the Call-in request should be upheld and the options available to the Committee. A Call-in could only be made on the following three grounds:

- The decision is outside for the Council's budgetary framework (i.e. no funds have been allocated in the budget to this matter);
- The decision is outside of the Council's policy framework (i.e. we don't have a policy covering this matter or the decision is counter to an agreed policy/procedure); or
- The decision making process is flawed (i.e. insufficient consultation, lack of evidence etc.)

Members were reminded that they could:

- Decide there were no grounds to support the Call-in and that the decision should stand; or
- Give specific reasons as to why the decision should be called in and refer it back to the Portfolio Holder to allow them to reconsider the decision in light of Scrutiny's comments; or
- Refer the decision to Full Council, again with specific reasons as to why the decision should be reconsidered.

Members were also reminded that SSDC's Constitution makes provision for 'call-in' after the decision is implemented – this provides an opportunity for Scrutiny to consider the implications of any decision. The Scrutiny Committee can then make recommendations to the Executive or Full Council on changes to policy or practice in the light of their findings – this approach avoids the need to 'suspend' decisions whilst the matter is considered and is most appropriate where members may feel that an adopted policy is no longer appropriate – rather than where they feel that a decision does not comply with a particular policy.

Councillor Sue Osborne, as one of the two signatories of the Call-in was given the opportunity to present her grounds for the Call-in to the Committee.

The Committee heard from Councillor Ric Pallister as the responsible Portfolio Holder, Colin McDonald – Corporate Housing Strategy Manager and Richie Horton – Managing Director – Property (Yarlington Homes).

Following a unanimous vote, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to recommend:

**That the Portfolio Holder decision as proposed stands and that further work is carried out to clarify the SSDC process for consideration of such disposal requests in the future. Such a review will be conducted once the outcome of the HCA decision regarding the request to dispose of a property in Curry Rivel is known.**

### **Journey of Exploration**

The Leader of the Council gave a verbal update to the Committee covering some of the following points:

- The JLAG meeting of the 7<sup>th</sup> January had been rescheduled for the 14<sup>th</sup> January to allow emerging issues to be reflected in the draft headline business cases;
- The Headline Business cases were still on track to be presented to Council in February;
- The continually evolving Devolution Agenda will have an important impact on the final decision; a report on this would be presented at Full Council.

### **Update on SSDC Telephony**

A report was made to Scrutiny Committee on the 4<sup>th</sup> August regarding the new telephony system and some issues that had arisen since its implementation; this report provided a follow up and detailed the current situation.

The Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services presented the report. During discussion, the following points were made:

- Members congratulated both the teams involved for their work in addressing the issues previously raised and improving the service.
- The Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services agreed to update the Committee on any issues should they arise in the future.

### **Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

The Scrutiny Committee considered the reports contained in the District Executive Agenda for the 7<sup>th</sup> January and made the following comments:

#### **Setting the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)**

Scrutiny members have considered this matter in great depth through a Task and Finish Group and Scrutiny Committee – they would like to thank officers for all their hard work on this topic and fully support the recommendations in the report.

#### **Approval of the Somerset District Authorities Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy**

Members supported the recommendations in the report but noted that the report contained no financial implications – even if there are no resource implications, the report should make this clear so that members have the full picture before taking any decisions.

### **Proposed leasing of 80 South Street**

Members supported the recommendations in the report and noted that consideration had been given to SSDC carrying out the building works ourselves, but that it was not appropriate in this case and that the recommendations contained in the report effectively turned the property from a liability into an asset.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan**

Members noted that the Capital Programme element of the report was not included as details were not currently available for all bids – members would be presented with the complete picture in due course.

Members noted that the report outlined the likely impact of the Government settlement and that early indications were that the necessary savings needed by 2020 were achievable.

Regarding the temporary SRA precept, members asked what would happen if one or more Somerset authority did not support its introduction?

Members discussed the potential £200k additional income from Automatic Number Plate recognition for car parking and looked forward to further reports prior to implementation.

Members queried the two separate amounts shown as savings against Vacant Posts, Donna Parham Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) explained that the £143,500 represented the sum that had been achieved to date primarily from people reducing their hours and the £108,000 was a target for further saving.

The Committee queried the savings allocated to the cessation of the CEO contract – a saving of £88k is allocated for this. Members asked what would happen if a decision was taken to appoint a CEO in the future?

Members noted the detailed work that officers had done to investigate the possibility of introducing up to 2 free hours parking. The Committee noted that the findings would seem to indicate that the costs would seem to be prohibitive but did ask that further work be done to cost various options for free parking for periods of less than one hour – members accepted that such work would probably be dependent on the outcome of discussions re: automated number plate recognition.

Members asked when the report of the Strategic Director Place and performance outlining the Transformation Programme would be coming forward to members?

### **Community Right to Bid**

Members noted that All Saints Church in Yeovil Marsh had been nominated and asked for clarification as to whether functioning/ active churches could be nominated?

### **Confidential Item – Urgent Executive Decision**

Members noted the report and asked if in future it would be possible to include how much interest the capital sum would have earned if not allocated to such a project? This would be a useful comparator for members.

### **On-going Task and Finish work**

Scrutiny Committee have formed a Journey of Exploration Task and Finish group to consider the process to inform the business cases for sharing a Management team with Sedgemoor and Staying Alone. The group is made up of 14 members in political balance – the group includes District Executive members as they would be working in a ‘critical friend’ capacity for the Project Board not District Executive. The group agreed their ambition for the review as:

Through our work, members of this Task and Finish Group will aim to ensure that:

- All elected members of SSDC have a sound and evidence based understanding of all the issues and options for future management arrangements prior to taking a final decision
- Members’ thoughts, suggestions and concerns are sought, collated and communicated to the Project Group in a timely manner and can therefore inform the preparation of the two business cases;
- Members’ views on the risks and mitigation measures are sought and represented in the process;
- This group will act as a ‘sounding board’ for the ideas and proposals emerging from the JLAG;
- Equal merit will be given to the business cases for staying alone and sharing a management team with Sedgemoor;
- Any ‘deal breakers’ identified by members will be addressed at the earliest possible opportunity;
- Good working relationships are developed with members at Sedgemoor District Council so that the trust element that has been identified as so crucial is established.

The group have met on three occasions, 26 November 2015, 4 December 2015 and 17 December, weekly meetings are scheduled to consider the work of the Joint Leaders Advisory Group until the business cases are presented later this year.

The Scrutiny Committee are considering priorities for the forward plan, if you have any suggestions or concerns you would like the Scrutiny Committee to consider please contact the Scrutiny Managers: Emily McGuinness or Jo Gale.

Councillor Sue Steele  
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee