

## **Scrutiny Committee**

Since the last report to Full Council, Scrutiny Committee have met twice - 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016 and 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

At Scrutiny Committee on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016, members considered the following items:

### **Reports to be considered by District Executive on 2 June 2016**

The Scrutiny Committee considered the reports included in the District Executive agenda for 2 June 2016 and made the following comments:

#### **SSDC Annual Performance Report 2015/16**

Having reviewed the Council Plan 2012-2015 final monitoring report members' sought an update on the action being taken to progress Action C1.12 – Regenerate the former ACI site and the Boden Mill site by 2013 and asked for clarification of the risks if the Development Agreement expires.

The interim Chief Executive and Cllr Jo Roundell Greene Deputy Leader and Portfolio holder for Economic Development explained:

- The agreement is still in place and that they hope to see a planning application come forward in the autumn.
- Henry Boot has been commissioned to undertake this piece of work; we are in regular contact with them.
- This is a very difficult climate to be working in
- The funding from the HCA was used to purchase the site
- There is no danger of losing funding.

Members spoke of their concern for Economic Development, given that there are numerous Council Plan actions that are partially completed. Whilst members appreciate that the actions are impacted on by external influences such as the financial climate recognising the priority of Economic Development in both the last Council Plan and the new one, Scrutiny Committee members felt it would be beneficial for the Economic Development Team to attend Scrutiny Committee to outline the issues they face. The committee want to work with the team to identify any obstacles and potential solutions and make sure there are adequate resources within the team to deliver on these high priority actions.

The committee understand that there are already a number of reporting mechanisms such as Regeneration Boards and Portfolio Holder Briefings and do not wish to cause officers to duplicate work but felt these other boards and meetings are not an alternative to Scrutiny and the role it has to play.

Members raised concerns regarding there being no performance monitoring data for PI031 – percentage of calls to the contact centre, the time it has taken to resolve the issues with the telephones and the reputational issues it could cause, members sought re-assurance with regard to:

- The lack of data and the issues this causes the management.

- How the authority will manage the technical challenge of implementing entire new technical solutions as part of transformation – We must ensure we have the appropriate skills and resource in place?

Members requested a definite list of all the issues and the scheduled fix date.

A document providing the requested data and information was subsequently provided by Donna Parham Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) Jason Toogood (Customer Focus Support Manager)

In response to members' questions regarding PI032- Working days lost due to sickness absence per Full Time Employee the following information was provided:

- The target for working days lost due to sickness per full time employee is 8 days, for last year the total was 10.58 days
- Sickness is categorised as long-term once someone has been off continuously for 10 working days or more.
- The majority of cases shown in the report have been off for a significantly longer period than 10 days.
- If long term cases of sick are excluded the total is only 3.39 days
- This area is the subject of further attention; further training is being provided to all managers regarding sickness management this includes identifying any underlying causes.

### **Revised Homefinder Somerset Policy**

The Scrutiny Chair reminded the committee a one off members group was set up to review the draft consultation, so considerable Scrutiny input has already been given and taken into account

The Scrutiny manager confirmed a full Equalities Analysis of the policy had been completed and was available for consideration.

Members commented the consultation responses did not add up to a 100% and questioned if the remaining percentage would be representative of those who disagree. The committee felt presenting the results in this way was not clear.

Scrutiny Committee agreed they would be willing to review the draft Plain English policy and contribute towards the final version.

### **Fixed penalty Notices for fly tipping**

Alasdair Bell – Environmental Health Manager introduced the report and explained the provision of the fixed penalty was another tool to help to deter fly-tipping.

Following members questions the officer explained the process for determining when an offence is appropriate for a fine or a prosecution.

Members of the committee questioned if it is cost effective to proceed directly to court for second offences or more and suggested that perhaps a different approach is taken to reflect the costs to the Council.

## **Local Strategic Partnership South Somerset Together Annual Review**

Rina Singh - Interim Chief Executive introduced the report and explained:

The partnership had achieved many outcomes since it was formed.

The five funding partners had been reviewing reducing overheads for a considerable period of time and now felt this was the right time to take this next step, simplifying governance arrangements and each partner taking responsibility for chairing on a rotating basis.

Members sought reassurance that the work will continue, the projects will progress and there will be no duplication of work with the other partnerships SSDC are in.

The committee questioned how members will be kept aware of the work of the partnership and asked how future projects will be funded.

The following information was provided:

- There were only five members contributing funding towards the partnership before and all are committed to the partnership.
- The South Somerset Together website will remain, so all information will be accessible for members.
- Some project money remains which the partners can bid for based on the existing process, once this money has been allocated a new system will come into effect where Multi Agency Business Cases will be completed and considered by the partners.

## **Corporate Grants report 2015 – 2016**

The Committee sought confirmation that SSDC always adopts an approach that is encouraging organisations and groups to become more self-sufficient and not reliant on SSDC funding when providing a grant.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture reassured members and gave examples of the work that is done with grant recipients.

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At Scrutiny Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2016 Members considered the following Items:

### **Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7 July 2016**

The Scrutiny Committee considered the reports included in the District Executive agenda for 7 July 2016 and made the following comments:

#### **Five-year Housing Land Supply Update**

The Principal Spatial Planner and Portfolio Holder Strategic Planning (Place Making) introduced the report and raised the following points during discussion and in response to member questions:

- SSDC can achieve 4 years and two months housing land supply.
- At least 50% of councils are also not able to deliver a 5 year housing supply.

- That it's not a case of now having to yes to all schemes, if it is not a good scheme it should be refused.
- Ultimately paying for some under delivery against targets over the last 10/11 years.
- The housing supply has been fairly consistent making the targets difficult to achieve.
- The delivery is not coming forward on some of the larger sites as quickly as expected.
- There are some complicated sites (mixed use, both housing and employment land and requiring substantial infrastructure).
- The population is growing so it is anticipated that the strategic Housing Market assessment is likely to show a similar figure.
- It's not just about giving the permissions, developers only want to build when they are confident they can sell the housing and make profits and the availability of skills and materials also comes into it.
- To help larger sites come forward SSDC may need to consider underwriting some of the risks or infrastructure costs.
- It is felt Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is unlikely to have an impact on sites coming forward.
- A planning case officer will always consider the policies relating to housing and the local plan, the context and circumstances of the site, the locality and the housing delivery in the local area. Although you cannot ignore SSDC has less than five years supply.
- Currently the local wage economy is not taken into account when the targets are set, targets do need to be realistic, and this is now getting some traction.
- The five year land supply is for the district as a whole, although some areas could be more adversely affected than others.

### **Approval of the Somerset District Authorities Regulatory Services Enforcement Policy 2015-2020 and the Environmental Protection Enforcement Policy 2015-2020**

Members supported the recommendations.

### **2015/16 Revenue Budget Outturn Report**

The Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) introduced the report. She raised the following points:

- An additional £1.9 million Council Tax collected this year compared to the previous year and £1.476 million collected of previous year's arrears.
- An additional £0.7 million Business Rates collected this year compared to the previous year and £2.56 million collected of previous year's arrears.
- The successful appeals for Yeovilton and the Doctors Surgeries have had an impact on business rates but there is money in reserves in readiness for this.

Members were concerned regarding the areas shown in the report where income was less than expected. She explained the shortfall against the Crematorium was due to spending on improvements. She confirmed a report will be coming forward with regard to advertising on the web and the Brympton Way canteen for members to make a decision.

### **2015/16 Capital Budget Outturn Report**

Members supported the recommendations.

## **Key4Life – At Risk Preventative Programme in Somerset**

During discussion members raised the following points:

- Is funding also being sought from the Police and Crime Commissioner for this project?
- There are many organisations (estimated over 30) who work in a similar role to this organisation helping offenders in this area.
- There is estimated to only be one organisation who works to support victims of crime in this area.
- It may be beneficial for additional research to be undertaken with regard to this project.

## **Annual Review of SSDC Partnerships**

- Members discussed the report and requested:
- A brief update in terms of review and performance of the Market Towns Investment Group and the Safer Somerset Partnership.
- Clarification of what the removal of the register could mean in real terms? Members were specifically concerned re the potential removal of the Strategic Partnership against Hate Crime, given the current reports of the increase of this behaviour.

## **Community Right to Bid Quarterly Update Report**

Scrutiny Committee considered the report and commented (based on experiences in their wards) that some communities are not giving appropriate consideration to the impact and implications of registering an asset on the list.

## **Scrutiny Committee Report – Request for Further Information on Newly Created Boards**

The Scrutiny Committee introduced the report and made reference to the previous meeting when members agreed to request a report.

During discussion members sought clarification of the decision making process for each of the boards from the Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) and the Assistant Director (Legal and Corporate Services).

The committee raised the following points/questions:

- The Income Generation board has no delegated powers, all decisions regarding expenditure for income generation will go to District Executive. District Executive can utilise up to 5% of Unallocated Capital Receipts (currently up to £900,000 per annum), and if a single element exceeds £900,000 the decision will be taken by Full Council.
- Transformation Board has delegated powers to spend up to the amount that full Council allocated to the project.
- Donna Parham Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) is on the Transformation Board and it is part of her role to ensure monies are spent in accordance with planned expenditure.
- The actions of the transformation board will be recorded at each meeting and presented to members quarterly.
- Transformation Board will have no pre-decision Scrutiny. Can the meeting timetable be altered to enable this?

- There is no 'call-in' provision for decisions taken by the Transformation Board.
- Having Scrutiny Committee members on the Transformation Board doesn't preclude Scrutiny of Transformation.
- The decision of full council to proceed with transformation was on the basis of the report presented to it and the objectives set out within. It is a very important project and the decision did not mean that members would not be allowed to track progress against those objectives.
- Should non-executive members be on the transformation board if it is decision making?
- Are Councillors Sue Steele and John Clark going to have conflicts of interest being on both the Transformation Board and Scrutiny Committee?
- Can agendas and reports be made available to all – perhaps use ModGov.
- Can all members attend all board meetings to observe? Just like committee meetings.
- If I am on a board, am I there in a Scrutiny capacity? If I have to bring information back how do I go about reporting confidential information?
- The main purpose of Transformation is to save money, this needs to be clear in the Vision of the Transformation Board terms of reference. A specific figure should be included as detailed in the Business Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan.

### **Rural District Council Network – Scrutiny of Rural Access to Health**

Members agreed to participate; no additional questions were suggested at the meeting.

It was agreed an invitation to participate should be sent to all members.

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### **Task and Finish reviews**

Members were updated as follows on the progress of the Task and Finish Groups currently underway:

#### **Council Tax Reduction Review 2017**

This Task and Finish group are due to meet again on 14th July, the group intend to consider all the evidence to date, including impact assessments and to make decisions regarding:

- What should be included in the consultation?
- Who should be consulted?
- How the consultation should be promoted?
- What work if any needs to be carried out with external organisations to encourage continual feedback?

#### **Discretionary Housing Payments**

This group are looking to develop a comprehensive SSDC DHP Policy to ensure the best use of resources and a consistent, equitable approach to administering payments. The groups' next meeting is scheduled for 15<sup>th</sup> July and will be attended by representatives from SHELTER and Citizen's Advice to advise members on various sensitive issues relating to this review.

### **Consent to Dispose of Housing Stock / Local Connections Allocation Policy**

This review was established to review the current policy for consenting to the disposal of affordable homes previously owned by SSDC – the review also encompasses a review of some elements of the Rural Lettings policy. A further meeting is arranged for 28<sup>th</sup> July to assess the evidence gathered so far.

The following task and finish work is scheduled to commence in the near future:

### **National Non Domestic Rate (NNDR) discretionary relief policy review**

The changes from the revised policy have taken effect from 1<sup>st</sup> of April, resulting in some more feedback from ratepayers. The Task and Finish group will review this and changes in legislation regarding mandatory relief, to ensure the policy still achieves what it set out to do and that the impact of the changes to mandatory relief are taken into account. This group has yet to be formed, and invitations to all members will go out shortly when officer time permits.

### **Closer working with Community Council for Somerset**

The Community Council for Somerset (CCS) have accepted an invitation from Scrutiny Committee to come and talk with members about CCS and the work they do across South Somerset. The purpose of the meeting is to identify if the two organisations can work more closely to achieve better outcomes for the community.

### **Proposals to establish a combined authority**

Should members agree at Full Council to make an 'in principle' decision to create a Combined Authority, Scrutiny Committee have agreed that they will establish a Task and Finish group; this would be to consider suggestions and evidence of proposals prior to any formal commitments being made.

Scrutiny Committee encourages all members to participate in Task and Finish work; it provides an excellent opportunity for members to:

- Review an area of work in detail.
- Work with officers
- Help formulate recommendations for the creation and amendment of policy and working practice.

All Task and Finish groups agree their own scope, project plan and meeting timetable to best suit the group, so should be able to work around existing commitments.

Councillor Sue Steele  
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee