

## **Scrutiny Committee**

This report summarises the work of the Scrutiny Committee since 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015.

### **Items considered at 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2015**

#### **Presentation – Introduction to Scrutiny**

The Scrutiny Managers outlined the key aspects of South Somerset District Council's Scrutiny function, including statutory roles and responsibilities as well as the importance of Scrutiny maintaining an independent, objective and non-partisan approach.

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#### **Reports to be considered by District Executive**

##### **SSDC Annual Performance Report**

- Members formally recommended that Scrutiny are actively involved in any future review of Performance Indicators, as mentioned by the Performance Manager at the meeting.
- Members queried if recent changes to working practices, in particular the introduction of hot-desking arrangements had had any impact on the sickness absence levels?
- Clarity was also sought over PI's 006 and 007 relating to Inward investment – Scrutiny recommend that the reporting against these indicators is clarified to show the number of jobs actually created.

##### **Capital Outturn report**

- On page 18, members questioned why only two post completion reports had been completed?
- Members also asked for an explanation as to why the Capital Spending Pattern on page 16 consistently shows an underspend, although it was noted that the gap is narrowing.
- Members noted that there is no reference to the Infrastructure Reserve, and although they noted that very little of this reserve has been spent, it would still be useful to see it reported.

##### **Revenue Budget Outturn Report**

Members sought clarification on the figures relating to NNDR contained in the report - does this figure mean that we had an additional £132 k NNDR debt than that of the grant? What is being done to mitigate this in the future?

##### **Superfast Broadband**

This complex issue has been the subject of a detailed Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, and as we have reported in the past, this is a very frustrating issue, caused mainly by the lack of information from the CDS project team. When this matter was considered by DX in June, members of the Scrutiny Committee fully endorsed the recommendations that although an agreement in principle to provide the funding could be made, no actual monies should be released until assurances had been provided that:

- a) Businesses premises would be a priority; and
- b) That the money would be spent in South Somerset.

Members of Scrutiny Committee note that despite the best endeavours of officers, these assurances have not been provided and this now poses a difficult decision going forward. Members noted that the Devon District Councils are having their contribution covered by Devon County Council and so essentially; this leaves SSDC as the only District yet to commit the funding.

Members noted that the provision of reliable Broadband is very much a local priority and the risk of taking a decision that results in not providing this service to our residents is very real.

In conclusion, members felt that in the absence of the information that would be presented verbally to DX members, they were unable to support a decision either way at this stage.

Members also suggested that approach to this matter could be referred to the National Audit Office as the whole process involves significant amounts of public money and this authority is being asked to proceed in the absence of the usual safeguards that we have come to expect.

### **ICT Software and hardware upgrades**

No Comments

### **Designation of a Neighbourhood Area – Castle Cary and Ansford Parishes**

No comments

### **Appointment of Honorary Aldermen**

The committee supported the criteria and rights proposed.

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### **Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Managers explained to members the importance of setting a balanced and well managed Scrutiny Work Programme and emphasised that the decision as to

what to include in the Work Programme rested with the members of the Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Managers went on to explain the various processes that are in place to support this including the Scoring Criteria and the Report Request Template.

In response to a suggestion put forward by Cllr Clark concerning call response times with the Contact Centre, the Committee completed a report request template and asked that a report be included in the August Scrutiny Committee Agenda.

Members also agreed that at the July Scrutiny Committee meeting, they would consider whether to include the issue of the Planning Scheme of Delegation as suggested by Full Council in March, in their future Work Programme.

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### **Items considered on 30<sup>th</sup> June**

Scrutiny Committee made the following comments on the reports due to be considered by District Executive on 2<sup>nd</sup> July:

#### **Yeovil Western Corridor Improvement Scheme**

Members made no comments and were content that the recommendations go forward.

#### **Annual review of SSDC Partnerships**

Members were content that the Heart of Wessex Leader Programme be added to the Partnerships Register.

#### **Corporate Grants Report 2014 - 2015**

The need for this report was questioned given that the information is already reported to each of the Area Committees. There was concern that the report was duplication and unnecessary.

#### **Community Right To Bid – Assets of Community Value**

Members made no comments.

#### **Appointment of Honorary Alderman – Agreement of Criteria and Rights**

- Members re-considered this report in detail. The principle of honouring long service was supported, but any additional financial implications to the process currently in place was not.
- Members were strongly of the opinion that Aldermen should not be financially recompensed.
- Members considered each of the 'rights' as detailed in section 6 of the report, and the ones that the Scrutiny Committee did not support were:
  - *Use of the Members' Room in the District Council offices (including building access card)* – for security reasons this was not considered to be appropriate.

- *Annual parking permit for all SSDC Car Parks – due to the financial implications*
- *Invited to represent the Chairman or Vice Chairman of Council when they are unable to attend a civic event – members were concerned if the Alderman would be duty bound by any Code of Conduct and implications from not being so.*
- *£100 gift voucher per year towards Octagon Theatre tickets – due to the financial implications*

### **Increase in Councillors on Yeovilton Parish Council – Community Governance Review (CGR)**

Members made no comments and were content that the recommendations go forward.

### **Land Adjacent to Steep Holme, Penn Hill Park, Yeovil (Confidential)**

Members considered the report in closed session and were content that the recommendations go forward.

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In addition, members agreed that a report on the Planning Scheme of Delegation should be included in the Scrutiny Work Programme with an anticipated date of 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015.

### **Update on Task and Finish Reviews:**

#### **Council Tax Reduction Strategy**

This Task and Finish Group is now working with the relevant officers on the consultation phase of the scheme review.

#### **Licensing Fees and Charges**

Scrutiny Committee members have agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to look at establishing the principle of total cost recovery where possible and appropriate within the Licensing Service (but to exclude Taxi Fees and Charges).

*Sue Steele, Chairman of Scrutiny Committee*