

Scrutiny Committee

At their meeting on 2nd February 2016, members of the Scrutiny Committee considered the following items:

Shared Accommodation Project at Brympton Way Offices

The Assistant Director Environment and the Portfolio Holder – Property and Climate Change introduced the report. The report had been included in the agenda at the request of Scrutiny Committee members to update members on the first 12 months of the shared accommodation project. Laurence Willis – Assistant Director Environment highlighted some of the projects successes:

- In terms of public interest the range of services available from Brympton Way has increased considerably.
- The majority of staff are able to work in the same place nearly every day.
- Most staff teams are based together.
- All Customer First staff are based on the ground floor; this gives the team much more flexibility in terms of managing customer demands.
- Licensing team who have the most visitors to reception are also completely based on the ground floor.
- Due to the change in layout of the carpark only 14 parking spaces were lost, surveys showed we could easily accommodate this.
- Specific hot desk area created for staff who work outside but use Brympton Way as an area to touch base.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- Car parking for elected members remained a concern of busy committee days, with some members saying they frequently used the Visitor parking bays.
- Recently members of the Audit Committee had witnessed some disruption to their meeting caused by a Social Services client – whilst this sort of event didn't happen often; there had been previous occurrences that were distressing. Members were assured that the recent incident was currently being investigated and discussions had with Somerset County Council to try and avoid a repeat in the future.
- Members commented that it is very difficult to book meeting rooms – especially for Scrutiny Task and Finish groups and that the County Council meeting rooms seemed to empty on a regular basis.
- Members felt that the relocation of the Members' Room to the Yellow floor has resulted in fewer members using it. The room was previously well used by members between meetings and to use the computer. Members also commented that the Members' Room is often used for Officer Meetings, meaning it is not available to members. The Assistant Director agreed to look into these issues.

Reports to be considered by District Executive on 4th February 2016

The Scrutiny Committee considered the reports contained in the District Executive Agenda for the 4th February and made the following comments:

Somerset Waste Partnership – Draft Business Plan

- Members were reassured that SSDC would be continuing with the current local arrangements for a discounted rate if a green waste bin was purchased for two years.
- Members suggested that there could be a more high profile publicity campaign to promote higher recycling rates and noted that social media campaigns are generally better received than mass mail outs.
- Members were concerned about the potential impact of the new service delivery model proposals on families with young children – especially in relation to the disposal of nappies etc. Members were reassured that SSDC would continue to offer individual solutions to such issues but asked that due consideration be given to the issue by the Board prior to any final decisions being taken.
- Members sought assurance that adequate Equalities Impact Assessment information would come forward prior to members being asked to approve any new Service Delivery Model.

Revenue Budget 2016/17

- Members queried what proportion of the RSG had been made up by the Rural Support Grant?
- Members noted the increased risk levels facing the authority and were reassured by the s151 officer's actions to mitigate these risks and the judicious use of Volatility fund and other balances.
- Members in particular noted the risk represented by the potential for NHS Foundation Trusts to be given charity status and therefore the ability to claim up to 80% mandatory relief – back dated!
- Members sought clarification that the 4 key projects mentioned at paragraph 13 were sufficiently resourced?
- Regarding the Transformation fund of £2.5 million, members sought clarification as to how this reserve would be allocated and what return on investment is expected?
- Best practice states that effective budget Scrutiny should look to ensure adequate resources have been allocated for the delivery of Corporate priorities – in the absence of an updated Corporate Plan members sought clarification as to when a refreshed Corporate Plan would be produced?

- Members thanked the 151 officer and her team for all their hard work in the challenging circumstances.

Funding for SSVCA

- Members noted the proposals for SSVCA to incorporate both Mendip's and Sedgemoor's VCA's and sought assurance that both Mendip and Sedgemoor District Councils would continue to provide current levels of funding going forward? Members were concerned that SSDC could in future be asked to contribute increased funding to a larger organisation, providing services in other districts.
- Members were concerned that there is potential duplication with the work of Community Council for Somerset and the SSDC Area Development Teams.
- Members noted the considerable amount of work that had been undertaken in order to review the current arrangements and thanked the officers involved. They noted that it is vital that accurate evidence regarding the impact of the SSVCA is captured before any future funding decisions are made, with particular focus on ensuring there is no duplication with SSDC services, to prevent SSDC effectively paying twice.
- Members were pleased to note the intention to work towards a managed reduction in funding to the SSVCA.

Capital Budget Monitoring

- It was noted that Scrutiny Members have the ability to review outstanding Capital projects on a quarterly basis and this needs to be a robust process to ensure the best use of capital.

Revenue Budget Monitoring

No comments

Community Infrastructure Levy

The Committee noted that the consultation document would be amended to make it clear that developments of less than 6 dwellings would be liable for both the CIL and payments under HG3/4 as viability studies have shown such an approach is feasible.

Members also queried if the definition of 'self-builder' could be clarified within the document?

Before considering this item it was proposed and seconded that the Committee move into confidential session by virtue of paragraph(s)3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Westland Leisure Complex

- Members noted the amount of work that has been done to progress this project and that the project is on course to be delivered on time and within budget.
- Members asked if the Project Board had given consideration to incorporate PV installation in the design of the venue, members appreciate that a separate PV business case would need to be brought forward but feel significant savings could be made if PV installation and building works were done concurrently?
- Members noted that whilst it is disappointing that Brympton Parish Council have declined to make a financial contribution to the project, it has not affected the viability of the project.

Verbal update on Task and Finish Reviews

The Scrutiny Managers updated the Committee on the work of the Task and Finish Group established to review the on-going Journey of Exploration. The next meeting was scheduled for the 5th February at 2.30 p.m. where members would consider the Solo Business case. The draft report of the Task and Finish Group would be circulated via email to Scrutiny Committee members due to the Council report deadlines.

Members were also informed that some members who had previously worked on the Choice Based lettings Task and Finish review had met to consider some proposed changes to the Home Finder Somerset Policy – they had made several suggestions for a consultation paper that will be circulated to people on the Homefinder Somerset list and stakeholders these suggestions were being fed back to the Homefinder Somerset Partnership Board.

Update on Matters of interest

The Scrutiny Manager informed members that in relation to the Call-in considered at the January Scrutiny meeting, officers had now received a response from the Homes and Communities Agency and were now in a position to establish a Task and Finish Group to consider the policy relating to the disposal of properties. Members would be contacted to ask for volunteers for this piece of work shortly.

Scrutiny Work Programme

Members considered a request from Councillors Jason Baker and Val Keitch to establish a Task and Finish Group to look at specific elements, of the Home Finder Somerset Allocations policy. The request followed a motion tabled at a recent Full Council meeting, and although the motion was defeated, the majority of Scrutiny members felt that the debate had raised a number of issues which merited further discussion via a Task and Finish Group. It was therefore agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group with the following remit:

To:

- Clarify existing allocations/ scoring policies and the ‘weighting’ given to local connections – how well are current scoring arrangements communicated?
- Is it possible to introduce local variations to the Somerset wide scheme?

- Are there any legal / financial / reputational / equality implications to adopting local variations?
- Review the percentage of market Town allocations given to those demonstrating a local connection within the last 12 months?

The Scrutiny Committee re-iterated that the Task and Finish Group should consider these points only and that the report should be completed in time to feed into a wider review of the Homefinder Somerset Policy due for consideration by District Executive in June 2016.

Members noted the Scrutiny Work Programme with the addition of a review of the Economic Development Strategy (due to be updated in 2015) and a review of the current suite of Performance Indicators (such a review is pending the adoption of a refreshed Council Plan). Both these items will be included in the Scrutiny Work Programme with a date to be confirmed.

Councillor Sue Steele
Chairman of Scrutiny Committee