

Scrutiny Committee - 13 November 2018

Present: Councillor S Coles (Chairman)

Councillors F Smith-Roberts, J Blatchford, W Coombes, E Gaines, R Lees, L Lisgo, S Martin-Scott, N Townsend, S Lees (In place of R Henley) and R Ryan (In place of T Hall)

Officers: Nick Bryant, Chris Hall, Steve Hughes, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell and Andrew Stark

Also Present: Councillors P Berry, D Durdan, H Farbahi, R Habgood, J Horsley, I Morrell, V Stock-Williams and A Sully

(The meeting commenced at 6.20 pm)

26. **Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Councillors T Hall and R Henley.

27. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 October 2018 were taken as read and were signed.

28. **Declarations of Interest.**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member or Clerk of County, Parish or Town Council or any other Local Authority:

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr W Coombes	All Items	Stoke St Mary	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr E Gaines	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Townsend	All Items	Kingston St Mary	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke

29. **Financial Monitoring 2018/19 - as at 30 September 2018**

Considered report previously circulated, which provided an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Council for the financial year 2018-19.

The current revenue forecast outturn for the financial year 2018-19 was as follows:-

- The General Fund Revenue Outturn was forecasting a net underspend of £13,000.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was forecasting underspend of £356,000.

The current capital forecast position for 2018-19 was as follows:-

- The General Fund Capital Account was forecasting spend of £11,762,000 against a total Programme budget of £71,883,000 with £43,462,000 forecast to be spent in future years (£16,659,000 spent in previous years).
- The Housing Revenues Account Capital Account was forecasting spend of £8,679,000 against a budget of £17,686,000 with £9,007,000 forecast to be spent in future years.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements and asked questions which included:-

- Concern was raised on the delay in the implementation of the Pay by Foot parking scheme and that it would introduce variations in the parking charges for each car park for 'blue badge' holders.
- Members queried what factors had contributed to the £356,000 underspend on the HRA.
The main variances were in responsive maintenance and staff vacancies.
- Concern was raised on the Community Safety budget error of £42,000.
When the previous budget was set, there had been an assumed amount that had been funded from the reserve, which had been carried forward.
- Members queried whether the budget allocations in Appendix C would be held for the projects listed.
Clarification was given on the allocations and the details of the projects would be distributed to the Committee.
- Concern was raised on the risk that had been flagged on the DLO Trading Account.
Due to work still being carried out on the account, officers did not have the full details, so were unable to report accurate figures, however, the forecasts were closely monitored and were subject to audit.
- Members requested clarification on the HRA expenditure and what could be done to help divert money to help with the housing problems.
A written response from the Housing Manager would be distributed to the Committee.
- Concern was raised that the Council was not meeting its statutory function to provide homes for the homeless.
The Interim Finance Manager would report their concern to the Housing Manager.
- The Chairman reminded Members that the Homelessness Manager had attended the previous meeting of the Committee and it was suggested that a Members Briefing could be arranged for further detail on the homelessness policy.
- Members suggested that other officers should attend meetings where financial reports were discussed so that any queries that related to the policies could be answered.
- Members queried the reasons behind the Car Parks £89,000 overspend.

The Car Parks overspend was a result of the delay in the Pay by Foot scheme, but once the project was implemented, officers expected an increase in income.

- Members requested assurance that the upturn in parking income would happen once the Pay by Foot scheme was implemented.
Officers had researched other Pay by Foot schemes that had been introduced across the country and found that each scheme had reported an increase in income. This was due to the nature of the scheme which allowed customers to park for longer without the worry of being fined.
- Members requested clarification on the additional volume costs of £53,000 on the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) contract.
The additional volume costs were based on garden waste and new containers being charged separately to the SWP contract.
- Concern was raised on the cost of the roll out of smart phones within the Authority and Members queried what the cost related to.
The roll out of smart phones related to the introduction of the 8x8 internet phone system that had replaced the fixed terminal phones in the offices.
- Members requested clarification on the cost of the Transformation Project.
Full details were due to be published in the agenda for the Shadow Scrutiny meeting scheduled for 26 November 2018, until then, the details had not been finalised.
- Members queried the significant forecast variance for Planning and whether this was due to the amount of agency staff that were working in the department.
The Head of Strategy anticipated that the costs related to the use of agency staff partly as a result of the Transformation Project. Fortunately the department had seen an increase in additional income.
- Concern was raised on the forecast for the DLO Account and Members requested that an update be brought to Scrutiny in either December 2018 or January 2019.
The Governance and Democracy Specialist would add the item to the Scrutiny Work Programme.
- Members requested a breakdown of the figures for Insurance and Improvements costs that had been included in sections 7.6 and 8.5 of the report.
The Finance Officer would send out a written answer.
- Members queried whether the way the DLO department operated would change in the future.
Yes, all departments were due to change their working practices as part of the new structure and Transformation Project.
- Concern was raised on the amount that had been spent on ICT and that the figures would only increase over the years with the roll out of new equipment.
There would be money set aside from certain budgets to help pay for new equipment in the future. There had been issues with certain aspects of the roll out, however, there were many benefits linked to the new equipment. Further 'drop in' sessions would be arranged to assist Members with any technical questions.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee noted the Council's forecast financial performance for 2018-19 financial year as at 30 September 2018.

30. **Report of the Task and Finish Group Review into Affordable Employment Land**

Considered report previously circulated, which set out the findings of the Task and Finish Group charged to review Taunton Deane Borough Council's (TDBC) 2009 Affordable Employment Land Strategy, agreed by the TDBC Executive.

There was no doubt that TDBC needed to create an appropriate balance between the number of homes and the number of jobs provided. Taunton Deane was falling behind neighbouring conurbations in providing well-paid employment. The Council must work in meaningful partnership to facilitate inward investment and encourage economic growth.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements and asked questions which included:-

- Members were pleased with the report and welcomed the cross party approach.
- Members queried where the recommendations would be taken moving forward.
The recommendations would be taken to TDBC Executive and then through the Shadow democratic process.
- Concern was raised on the community engagement via the Town and Parish Councils and that the Un-Parished area of Taunton had not been involved.
They were aware that community engagement needed to include a wider area with a broader aspect and agreed that this warranted further debate.
- Members queried whether the group had looked at what methods could be used to help incubate businesses using different types of business models in particular co-operatives.
Yes, they would need to look at co-operative work and investment in further detail.
- Concern was raised on rural areas and their economies. Members highlighted that more and more businesses were relocating to rural areas.
Work was carried out on rural areas and they had looked into start-up businesses for those areas to move away from being Taunton-centric. Due to the level of report, they were not able to go into too much detail on rural areas. Resource was a concern which needed to be addressed prior to the New Council being formed so that new business opportunities were not missed.
- Members queried what superfluity of land really meant for TDBC.
When applications for larger developments had been brought forward, the applicants had stated that there would be mixed use properties but this had not always happened. Quite often properties ended up being predominantly used for housing and employment land was often then placed on the outskirts of town.
- Officers advised that the challenge they faced was that the employment land that was retained by TDBC was deliverable.

- Members queried how they could constructively enable work to be carried out and contribute to the project.
The report had provided a good basis for work to be carried forward by Members and the sites held in the portfolio had good prospects.
- Members queried whether there was a danger of the aspirations being repeated and were there any other areas that had carried out similar work.
The Head of Strategy discussed the challenge that was involved in the work to ensure that the research and development centre did not compete with similar sites within the area and sites managed by other authorities. The research sector needed to be explored through the Council's strategy and they needed to understand the scope of the work involved and go through the process to see how the requirements and locations would be addressed.
- Members highlighted that People, Place and Prosperity were the three key drivers to the project along with the Garden Town status.
- The Committee thanked the Members and Officers for all their hard work on the project.
- Members wanted the project to be driven forward through the democratic process and would address the report to the new Chief Executive.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee noted the following:-

1) Affordable Employment Land:

- a) TDBC and the subsequent Council must investigate an urgent reappraisal of all employment sites;
- b) TDBC and the subsequent Council must identify the means by which the supply of affordable, starter type employment units could be delivered. There were two suggested means by which this could be undertaken:
 - i) Planning-based approaches boosted through allocation, a streamlined Local Development Order that identified suitable sites or, a more criteria-based Local Development Order that sets the broader locations and parameters subject to which starter units could be delivered; and
 - ii) Expedient Council enabling through a standalone approach or development partner involvement.

2) Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre:

- a) TDBC and the subsequent Council should undertake a prompt detailed feasibility study into the viability of such a centre. This needed to be enabled by appropriate TDBC resources, including officers, elected members and a dedicated office if appropriate. Effective use of appropriate partnership working was crucial to the success.

31. **Time Extension.**

The Chairman proposed a 30 minute time extension which was carried.

32. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved that the press and public be excluded during consideration of item 33 on the grounds that, if the press and public were present during the item, there would be likely to be a disclosure to them of exempt information of the class specified in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended as follows:

The item contained information that could release confidential information that related to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). It was therefore agreed that after consideration of all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

33. **Confidential Update on the Leisure Procurement Project**

The purpose of the report was to update the Committee on the Leisure Procurement Project.

Resolved that the Committee noted the update report.

34. **Scrutiny Work Programme.**

Members were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance and Democracy Specialist.

Resolved that the content of the Work Plan be noted.

(The Meeting ended at 9.45 pm)