

Shadow Scrutiny - 14 January 2019

Present: Councillor P Murphy (Chairman)

Councillors F Smith-Roberts, S Coles, R Lillis, D Mansell, P Pilkington, R Ryan, P Watson, R Woods, G Wren and C Booth (In place of R Henley)

Officers: Shirlene Adam, James Barrah, Mark Leeman, Sue Clowes, Chris Gage, Paul Harding, Steve Hughes, Simon Lewis, Paul McClean, Marcus Prouse and Clare Rendell

Also Present: Councillors P Berry, R Clifford, M Dewdney, A Hadley, J Horsley, L Lisgo, K Mills, V Stock-Williams, A Trollope-Bellew and J Warmington

(The meeting commenced at 3.35 pm)

33. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillors B Maitland-Walker and N Thwaites.

34. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Shadow Scrutiny Committee.

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Shadow Scrutiny Committee held on 26 November 2018 – circulated with the Agenda.)

Resolved that the Minutes of the Shadow Scrutiny Committee held on 26 November 2018, with amendments, be confirmed as a correct record.

35. Declarations of Interest.

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member or Clerk of a 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 D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr P Murphy	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Dunster	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr P Watson	All Items	Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All items	Milverton Parish Clerk	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Trollope-Bellew	All Items	Crowcombe	Personal	Spoke
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke
Cllr J Warmington	All Items	Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone	Personal	Spoke

Councillor R Clifford declared an interest as the Chairman of the West Somerset Advice Bureau.

Councillor J Warmington further declared an interest as her son was an advisor at Citizens Advice Taunton.

36. **Public Participation.**

Mr P Boyle spoke on Agenda Item 8 Leisure Operators Contract. He raised the following question of the Committee:-

'The current contract provision had caused communication and other service problems and had disenfranchised Council Tax Payers.

One option for the Contract was to have it 'in-house'. He requested that the Committee considered that very carefully and thoroughly, and in particular how it would give Council Tax Payers, who used the provision, a voice for their concerns to be understood and addressed.

The officer thanked Mr Boyle for his question raised at the Shadow Scrutiny meeting.

The Authority decided in 2004 to cease the 'in house' provision and allowed the formation of the Tone Leisure Trust. This led to significant financial savings for the Authority and protected the provision of leisure per se when other authorities were giving consideration to closing facilities.

The Authority had no appetite to re-employ the staff currently employed by GLL in order to deliver the services 'in house' or to bear the significant additional NNDR and VAT costs that would occur as a result.

The Authority then considered the arrangements again and took a conscious decision in 2017, when considering the delivery options for the new contract that it would continue with the 'external delivery' route. The Authority considered that this remained the best way to protect services by ensuring they were delivered in the most cost efficient way. It was anticipated that the new contract would deliver further savings for the Authority.

The procurement route therefore had not included an option for 'in house' delivery.

In terms of listening to customer views, once an Operator was selected for the new contract we would meet with them to discuss the delivery of the services specification which included the requirement to capture customer feedback via a number of routes.

37. **Proposed Financial Support for Citizens Advice Services (2019/20)**

Considered report previously circulated, the purpose of the report was to set out recommendations for how Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) might be able to continue to support Citizens Advice Taunton (CAT) and the West Somerset Advice Bureau (WSAB).

Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) and West Somerset Council (WSC) provided core grant funding (via Funding Agreements) and other project funding to the Citizens Advice (CA) services. Core funding was used by the CAs to support their core service that provided free, confidential and independent advice which included:-

- Benefits, debt and money;
- Housing;
- Employment;
- Legal;
- Health; and
- Consumer.

Public Health also provided core grant funding and so did Somerset County Council (SCC) via Adult Social Care (until 31 March 2019).

SCC had recently (12/09/2018) made the decision to cut their funding support to the CA services across the County. There were two elements to those cuts:-

- 100% cut to core grants; and
- 100% cut to Local Assistance Scheme (LAS) administration grant, and 50% cut to the assessment fee. There was also a 10% cut to the LAS client fund (for purchases).

Both CAT and WSAB had lost approximately one third of their grant funding, much of which was used to maintain their core services.

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

- The Chairman highlighted the risk matrix and that the risk was 25 and had been measured as very high. Even with the support from SWT after mitigation measures enacted as in the report, the risk was still 15 which was high. Concern was raised on whether there were any additional measures that would reduce the risk to at least medium.
- Concern was raised on the high cost of administration against the amount of money available in the fund.
The administration cost was high due to the nature of work involved. Officers had to look in many different places to find the help required for customers which took time and could be costly.
- Members understood that most businesses biggest cost was for their accommodation. Members wanted to support the WSAB and CAT and queried what could SWT do to help. Suggestions were made that SWT could rent out office space at a low cost to assist.
WSAB were currently in a dialogue with WSC about renting some space in Alcombe which would be offered at a peppercorn rent for the first year. CAT were locked into a contract for the next two years and had been offered the use of some office space at the Deane House.
- Members understood why the CAT might not want to use office space at the Deane House as they would want to keep a clear separation between them and the Council as members of the public might assume they were a joint service if they operated out of the Council Offices.
- Members suggested that the CAT could place a bid for the Taunton Unparished Area Fund.
Members were reminded that the Taunton Unparished Area Fund could only be used for that area and not the whole of the TDBC area. The funds could be used for project work but it was the core funding that needed assistance.

- Members suggested that the CAT should be able to provide statistics on what area customers lived in so that a bid could be placed for the Taunton Unparished Area Fund.
- Members supported the work that the WSAB and the CAT carried out in the community and agreed that help should be given to them to be able to carry on with their work. Both offered a wonderful service that was open to all.
- Concern was raised that help was only given in the main towns of Minehead and Taunton and Members queried how did they assist those located out in the rural areas.
The WSAB provided telephone and online assistance for those located out of the main towns. Officers were also aware that within the WSAB area, broadband signals could vary and therefore they offered home visits to those that could not make it into Minehead. Other outreach programs were also offered by the CAT in the Taunton area.
- Members supported the outreach programs and wanted to see them continue into the future.
- Members queried whether the WSAB and CAT were actively recruiting for volunteers.
Work was being carried out to hold several roadshows to recruit volunteers. Volunteers were a great resource but required supervision which still meant that a paid employee was required.
- Members queried whether Village Agents were being used.
Yes they were.
- Members highlighted that some Parish Councils had given funding towards the WSAB and CAT.
- Members highlighted that donation boxes would be distributed within the District, along with Parish Councils being approached for assistance. WSAB had contacted the local radio station for some publicity and wanted to reassure the Committee that they had sought help within the community.

Resolved that the Shadow Scrutiny Committee agreed and supported the following:-

- a) A one-off financial package of support, that totalled no more than £45,000, to be made available during 2019-20, to support a citizens advice 'transformation' programme and delivery of the LAS;
- b) That the detail of the expected outputs and outcomes from the 'transformation' programme be discussed and agreed between CAT/WSAB and the relevant portfolio holder/Strategy Specialist;
- c) That SWT continued to work proactively with CAT and WSAB to explore suitable accommodation options/support;
- d) That SWT retained the current level of funding (to support CAT and WSAB core services) through the duration of the current Funding Agreement; and
- e) That the Councils used their maximum endeavours to assist the Advice Services with their accommodation needs where feasible.

38. Transformation Programme Highlight Report and Implementation Plan Update

Considered report previously circulated, the purpose of the report was to provide an update on the Transformation Programme and the Implementation Plan.

The Programme Commentary provided an update on:-

- The Deane House Accommodation Project, which was scheduled for completion on 15 February 2019;
- Process Redesign and Technology, which included phased work on the 240+ processes to be incorporated onto Firmstep ;
- People and Change, which included information on the recruitment process; and
- The Programme Finances, which included information on the budget.

Within the Business as Usual Commentary, an update on the priority tasks was presented to the Committee and included Phase Two Recruitment, Member Case Management and Risk Areas.

The Implementation Plan Update highlighted the following for the period:-

- Branding had been approved by the Shadow Executive on 6 December 2018;
- Bank account details had been confirmed;
- Slight slippage from November but there was no concern raised; and
- Corporate Governance and Standards Committee were due to develop stage two of the SWT Constitution.

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

- Councillors R Clifford and M Dewdney left the room before the discussion of the item.
- Members queried what communications were planned for the New Council and how would the information be distributed to customers and partner organisations.
SWT had a new Communications and Engagement Team who had started work on engagement activity. The Transformation Team were aware that they needed to equip officers with the correct information so that when they communicated with customers and partner organisations, they could give informed updates and advise them of the new ways of contacting the Council which would help alleviate the pressure on the reduced staffing resource.
- Concern was raised that there would not be enough officers in post at the start of April 2019.
- Members suggested that officers needed to manage the customer's expectations and distribute communications properly and in a timely manner.
The Programme Sponsor agreed and they had already started work on communications.
- Members queried what percentage of officers had left and how many had been employed from internal resource along with external applicants.

The figures for who had been employed were not yet known as the recruitment process had not been completed. The current reduction to staff cost was 14% which included the DLO workforce.

- Members queried how were officers going to communicate the new structure with the customers.
The customer did not need to know the structure, they needed to know how to contact the Council. The new structure included case managers who would guide the customer through the processes that were required.
- Members queried what their role was in the new structure.
The Programme Sponsor acknowledged that they needed to engage with Members so that they could help with the delivery of services.
- Concern was raised in the 'dip' in service levels during the delivery of the Transformation Project.
The Programme Director confirmed that was to be expected and that Members had been advised that service levels might be reduced as a result of the recruitment process.
- Concern was raised on the Planning and Enforcement Department and the lack of resource.
The Programme Director agreed that some applications had taken longer than normal to process. Enforcement was being tracked and she hoped that case management activity would enhance enforcement actions and work load.
- Concern was raised on the cost of temporary staff that had been used to assist with service delivery during the Transformation Project.
The Programme Sponsor was aware of the cost of temporary staff and that would be monitored closely.
- Members requested clarification on the figures given for the staff savings. The original figure was 22% and now it was 14%.
The revised figures were due to the DLO workforce being added to the process.
- Concern was raised on damage to the reputation of the Council due to lack of officers and work not being carried out.
The Programme Sponsor agreed and would ensure communications were distributed to minimise the impact on the Council's reputation.
- Concern was raised on 'business as usual' and that it had become more about managing disruption. Members felt that 'Business as usual' had become unattainable.
'Business as usual' was the old work that needed to be covered. The new structure and ways of working would incorporate the work but in a different manner which would achieve results with the reduced staffing resource.
- Concern was raised for the new Councillors elected in May 2019 and how they would navigate through the information on the project.
The structure would be very different going forward and Member Briefings would be arranged for the new Councillors.
- Members queried when would the transition period end.
The Programme Sponsor confirmed there wasn't an end date, the process redesign work was ongoing and they had set a target to ensure they had done enough by April 2019 to manage with the reduced workforce. However, the process redesign work would continue to evolve to reflect the need of the customer.

- Members queried whether they were on target with the process redesign work.
Yes, the main 240 processes should be ready for April 2019.
- Members highlighted that the Member Case Manager role was still available to use and provided a good service.
Members were advised that the Member Case Manager role was how the Customer Case Managers would operate in the new structure.
- Concern was raised on the recruitment process within the DLO workforce.
Clarification was given on the extra support that had been provided for the DLO workforce.
- Concern was raised that when the press release on the Non-Emergency Repairs Line was distributed to Members, no background information was given that explained the reasons why.
The Programme Sponsor apologised that the information had not been distributed to Members. He explained that the Non-Emergency Repairs Line had been introduced to manage customers' expectations whilst the DLO workforce went through their recruitment phase.
- The Chairman highlighted that at the December Shadow Council meeting, Members were reminded of the democratic process for new policies and that Members were invited to attend all the relevant meetings.

Resolved that the Committee noted the update report.

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

Resolved that the press and public be excluded during consideration of item SC40 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.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 6.00pm for a 10 minute comfort break.

The following Members left when the meeting adjourned:-
Councillors P Murphy, S Coles, P Pilkington, A Trollope-Bellew, A Hadley, K Mills, J Horsley, L Lisgo and J Warmington.

The meeting recommenced at 6.10pm and the Vice-Chair stood in as the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

40. **Leisure Operators Contract**

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

Resolved that the Committee supported the recommendations presented in the report.

41. **Shadow Scrutiny Work Programme.**

Considered the Scrutiny Work Programme previously circulated.

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 Programme be noted.

(The Meeting ended at 7.10 pm)