

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 28 September 2020 at 7.00 pm
at the virtual meeting



Open to the public, including the press

Watch the recording here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c72Yv-Fhn2I>

Present:

Members: Councillors Nathan Boyd (Chair), Jerry Avery, Ron Batstone, Samantha Bowring, Cheryl Briggs, Hayleigh Gascoigne, David Grant and Max Thompson

Officers: Emily Cockle, Suzanne Malcolm, Candida Mckelvey, Simon Hewings, Adrianna Partridge, Michelle Wells, Catrin Mathias and Melanie Smans

Also present: Councillors Andrew Crawford, Debby Hallett, Helen Pighills, Judy Roberts, Emily Smith

Sc.59 Apologies for absence

No apologies received.

Sc.60 Minutes

The minutes of the scrutiny committee meeting on 20 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record and will be signed as such by the chair.

Sc.61 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Sc.62 Urgent business and chairman's announcements

The chair had no announcements but ran through a reminder of protocol for a virtual meeting. The chair also welcomed Councillors Hayleigh Gascoigne and David Grant as new members of the committee, replacing Councillors Andy Foulsham (who remains as a substitute) and Mike Pighills.

Sc.63 Public participation

There was no public participation.

Sc.64 Revised budget

Cabinet member for finance, Councillor Andrew Crawford, introduced the revised budget paper. The budget has been revised to reflect Covid-19 pressures on the council and is in line with what other councils are having to do. The pandemic has created £1.1 million extra expenditure and £2.4 million losses in income, some of which will be covered by central government. The council has to fill the gap. Staff are thanked for their support and dedication.

Initiatives to save money and increase revenue have been delayed. This revision is an estimate, and a further report may be needed to reassess later on in the financial year if the additional budget requested is insufficient.

The committee asked questions of the report, as follows:

- The grounds maintenance equipment increase was explained and is due to the insourcing of this work. It represents capital rather than revenue spend.
- Paragraph 18 – Council tax – it was explained that we normally budget for 98% collection rate. Recovery will continue, but the collection rate may not be achievable in future.
- The further report (paragraph 21) – it is hoped it won't be needed, but a report in February 2021 is a fallback.

The committee noted the Cabinet report to recommend changes to 2020/21 budgets to reflect the financial impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, and other matters, on the council.

Sc.65 Establishing a delivery vehicle

The “establishing a delivery vehicle” report was introduced by Cabinet member for development and infrastructure, Councillor Judy Roberts.

Scrutiny Committee is asked to review the proposal to develop a Business Case to establish a council-owned delivery vehicle and to provide any recommendations to Cabinet on the approach. This is a first step which we are keen to move forward with.

The committee asked about what happens in the event of local government reorganisation. Acting Deputy Chief Executive for Place, Suzanne Malcolm, explained that this will be considered, and that external Legal advice had advised that this is one of the reasons that separate district vehicles should be set up initially.

The committee asked for the officers and Cabinet member for development and infrastructure to reconsider rewording the report's title to make the aim clearer. It was explained that the name encompasses in-house, partnership and outsiders. Due to government rule changes, the business case needs to be broader and not just about affordable housing, but also other projects such as community and regeneration. Setting up a wholly council owned company allows delivery of new and old services in a broad sense. Cabinet member for development and infrastructure confirmed that this item will return to scrutiny at the next stage.

If Cabinet endorse, starting the business case will be as soon as possible. There will be budgeting for any expertise advice.

The plan is to work at pace. By the turn of the year, we should have an outline at least – and this will come back to scrutiny committee.

A shared (South and Vale) vehicle is not an option at the moment, each council will have its own vehicle. Joint working and delivery could be an option in the future.

Councillors asked for a definition of affordable housing – they want to see a definition of a home that is affordable to run, not just rent/mortgage.

Money could be saved using sustainable energy, Cabinet member added that they hope to be carbon neutral, but the first priority is affordable housing. The vehicle helps to firm our aims.

It was confirmed that the Savills report was commissioned before the rules changed. We have to adjust to what central government tells us. The public purse has changed, and caveats have been

given. Focussing only on affordable housing is not viable. However, the Savills report is useful and identified potential land for regeneration.

If the Cabinet agrees with proceeding to the business case, and then approves the business case, the next step is a best value consultation.

The scrutiny committee reviewed the proposal and are happy that scrutiny will be consulted at different stages. They do request that a name change is considered

Sc.66 Corporate Plan

Cabinet member for corporate services, Councillor Debby Hallett, introduced this item, and the Cabinet member was pleased that there has been a high return in responses and high-quality feedback. The content pack had been reviewed in light of the feedback received, and high-level metrics identified, some of which are reliant on the availability of data. The council are working with One Limited, on marketing material and there will be a press release on how the plan has changed since feedback from the consultation. Will continue to review deliverability of proposed projects.

The chair thanked the Cabinet member for corporate services and officers. Congratulations were given on the good response.

Changes to the plan included the vision statement – consultees asked that “planet earth” be removed from the wording. Appendix H shows changes made in response to the consultation. Stable finances were queried by residents as to why it is a theme, is it not business as usual. A paragraph will be added in the foreword by Leader Emily Smith to address that.

Priorities given by consultees include ‘openness’.

Councillor Cheryl Briggs asked about river quality, and she was advised to contact the Cabinet member for environment.

Improving engagement with young people was discussed.

Theme 5 – working in partnership, page 92 – committee chairman asked if we could work with neighbouring councils to reach carbon targets.

Cabinet member for corporate services identified a piece missing which covers this point in the corporate plan – programme 2.2.

The climate theme;

1. Council focus (council property etc)
2. District wide
3. Wider

Electric charge points were discussed. Cabinet member for corporate services explained that we don’t want to be held up by other slower projects but will be aware of who is already doing what.

Acting Deputy Chief Executive for Place mentioned that the steering group is progressing, and direct delivery will be pursued.

The committee noted the report for Cabinet and gave feedback to the Cabinet member for corporate services as outlined.

Sc.67 Work schedule and dates for Vale scrutiny meetings

It was confirmed that car parking fees and changes has moved to 23 November. If committee members want additions, please contact the chair.

Can Community Infrastructure Levy come to the October meeting – to be confirmed.

Sc.68 Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED to exclude members of the press and public from the meeting for the following items of business under Part 1 of Schedule 12A Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 on the grounds that: (i) they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, and (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Sc.69 Confidential GLL report

Scrutiny committee reviewed the confidential GLL report.

Sc.70 Confidential appendices - revised budget

The scrutiny committee reviewed the confidential appendices.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm