

SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 29 JULY 2025

Present:

Councillor Mick Smith (Chair) (in the Chair)
Councillor Richard Spooner (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Neil Baker
Councillor Derrick Skinner

Councillor Ross Shipman
Councillor Christine Smith

Also Present:

J Dethick	Director of Finance and Resources & Section 151 Officer
D Vickers	Communications, Marketing & Design Manager
P Kerry	Trainee Accountant
J Hayden	Senior Scrutiny Officer
T Scott	Governance and Scrutiny Officer

SSC/ Apologies for Absence

1/25-

26 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Clegg, C Lacey and K Tait.

SSC/ Declarations of Interest

2/25-

26 None.

SSC/ Minutes of Last Meeting

3/25-

26 RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Services Scrutiny Committee held on 13 May 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

SSC/ Medium Term Financial Plan - Outturn 2024/25

4/25-

26 The Director of Finance and Resources presented a report informing the Committee of the contents of the attached Financial Outturn 2024/25 report to be presented to Cabinet on 31 July 2025.

The report to Cabinet included details on the Financial Outturn 2024/25, the General Fund, Reserves, General Fund Balances, the Housing Revenue Account, the Capital Investment Programme and Capital Financing.

RESOLVED – That the Outturn Report was noted.

SSC/ Budget Monitoring Report - Q1 2025/26

5/25-

26 The Director of Finance and Resources presented a report informing the Committee of the financial position of the Council following the first quarter's

budget monitoring exercise for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme. The report would be presented to Cabinet on 31 July 2025.

Members referred to the section in the Capital Programme Outturn appendix called 'prudential borrowing', and asked what this involved and why it had increased in amount. The Director of Finance and Resources explained that this figure was an estimate of how much the Council would need to borrow, and the amount had increased because the Council was undertaking more external borrowing.

Members referred to the new Clay Cross Active leisure centre, and enquired if it would end the year in profit. The Director of Finance and Resources informed Members that when Finance Officers undertake the next revised budget, the report presented to the Committee would include details on the financial performance of Clay Cross Active.

RESOLVED – That the Monitoring Report was noted.

SSC/ 6/25-26 Generative Artificial Intelligence - Task Group Update

The Director of Finance and Resources and the Communications, Marketing & Design Manager delivered a presentation informing the Committee of ways the Council would be utilising Generative Artificial Intelligence.

The presentation included information on:

- What AI was and how it could assist the Council
- The Council's 3 Step Plan (Copilot integration, integration into current systems and a data cleanse)
- The risks involved

The Director of Finance and Resources explained some of these points in more detail, and told the Committee that AI was a technology evolving rapidly, and it could change the way the Council delivers services. Members were also informed that the Council has selected Microsoft Copilot as its main AI application going forward because the Council already used a number of Microsoft products.

The Committee discussed some of the risks of AI, and the Director of Finance and Resources stated that the Council are being careful with how quickly it progresses with AI, because of the number of risks involved especially those that could lead to data protection issues.

Members discussed the opportunity this would bring to the Authority in terms of saving time in work processes and also reducing costs, and enquired as to how this will be monitored. The Director of Finance and Resources informed the Committee that there would be a number of ways this would be monitored but gave an example of how the testing of Copilot has saved a particular service area a lot of time and this will undoubtedly lead to efficiencies and has already been successful in some service areas.

A Member of the Committee asked whether unions were consulted when

employee positions and terms and conditions were being reviewed. The Director of Finance and Resources confirmed that unions were consulted in such matters as a matter of course.

The Committee discussed that this was a significant area of change and improvement at the Authority going forward and requested that this topic come back to a future meeting (approximately 6 months) to see what progress has been made.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted, and AI is added to the Work Programme for around 6 months' time.

SSC/ 7/25-26 **Policy Development**

The Communications, Marketing & Design Manager presented the draft Digital Strategy to the Committee.

The Communications, Marketing & Design Manager advised that the Strategy replaced the current one which was more inward facing. The new Strategy was not only inward facing but external facing too. The Committee were informed that 'Digital Inclusion' was a section of the Strategy that sought to help residents without the Internet if they needed to apply or pay for something. Members were pleased to see this included, because they felt there were a number of people who did not have access to the Internet for a number of reasons.

Members enquired to the development of a Council based App, which was becoming more popular for accessing information and are generally easier to use/navigate. The Director of Finance and Resources informed the Committee that the Council were looking at ways to improve access to services etc but have been looking at the Gov Notify route, however options will be explored.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

SSC/ 8/25-26 **Cabinet Business**

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented a digest of Cabinet decisions taken since the last Committee meeting on 13 May 2025. The digest set out key information for each decision.

The Senior Scrutiny Officer also presented Members with the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions for the period 15 June 2025 to 15 July 2025.

Members referred to the decision in the Forward Plan titled 'Award of Contract for Financial Software' and enquired as to given the potential changes to Local Authorities in a few years, and the discussions that had just taken place on AI, is the new software future proof. The Director of Finance and Resources confirmed that it was and explained that the contract has been done in such a way that it covers 3 years with a view to be extended.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

SSC/ 'Horizon Scanning'

**9/25-
26**

The Senior Scrutiny Officer updated Members on potential significant changes in the Council's operating environment, including changes to national legislation and regulation.

The Senior Scrutiny Officer explained that there was nothing to bring to the attention of Members.

RESOLVED – That the update was noted.

SSC/ Work Programme

10/2

5-26

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented the Work Programme 2025/26 for the Committee to agree. Members were informed that this was the first Work Programme of the 2025/26 year.

Members asked if the missed bin collection suggestion that was raised in 2024/25 had been added to the Work Programme. The Senior Scrutiny Officer explained that she was liaising with the relevant officers to confirm availability but it would appear at a future meeting.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme 2025/26 be agreed.

SSC/ Additional Urgent Items

11/2

5-26

None.

SSC/ Date of Next Meeting

12/2

5-26

The next meeting of the Services Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on 9 September 2025 at 10.00 am (meeting moved from 2 September).