

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held at the **Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil BA20 2HT** on **Tuesday 1 December 2015**.

(10.00 - 11.50 am)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Clare Aparicio Paul	Sue Osborne
Jason Baker	Tiffany Osborne
Dave Bulmer	David Recardo
John Clark	Rob Stickland
Gye Dibben	Martin Wale
Val Keitch	

Also Present:

Mike Beech	Jo Roundell Greene
Peter Gubbins	

Officers

Rina Singh	Interim Chief Executive
Pam Harvey	Civil Contingencies Manager
Andrew Gillespie	Performance Manager
Anna-Maria Lenz	Performance Officer
Nigel Marston	Licensing Manager
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager

79. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

An amendment to the minutes of the previous meeting was requested, to indicate that Councillor Clare Aparicio Paul had been present at the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2015 were approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment detailed above being made.

80. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tony Lock and Garry Shortland.

81. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillors Rob Stickland and David Recardo both declared a personal interest in item 11, Review of Licensing Fees and Charges, as they are both members of Yeovil Town Council. They commented they would not vote on the item.

82. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

83. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 5)

There were no issues raised.

84. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman updated the Committee on the arrangements and progress of the Journey of Exploration Task and Finish Group, she urged all members to complete the online survey that had been circulated.

85. Severe Weather - Preparation and Planning (Agenda Item 7)

The Civil Contingencies Manager introduced the report and gave an overview of the events covered by SSDC teams, she detailed:

- Day to day operations
- Priorities
- Responsibilities
- Training
- Risks and mitigation measures including driving in flooded areas at night.

In response to questions from members, the Civil Contingencies Manager explained:

- There was no dedicated budget to deal with heavy snowfall, however this did not prevent the necessary action being taken. As in previous years if an overspend was created, and if it exceeded £32,000, SSDC could apply under certain circumstances to the Government's Bellwin Scheme, to get excess costs reimbursed.
 - Somerset County Council had a responsibility to keep the highway free from hazards, to do that in severe weather (ice & snow) they prioritised the highway network into Primary & Secondary routes – detail of the routes is available on the County Council website.
 - SSDC had agreed to support Highways by salting agreed high risk pavements and other areas, where it was considered dangerous or posed a risk, when it was predicted that a severe weather incident may last for three days or longer.
-

86. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 5 November 2015 (Agenda Item 8)

Members noted the update given by the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee.

87. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 3 December 2015 (Agenda Item 9)

Members considered the reports outlined in the District Executive Agenda for 3 December 2015. It was agreed that the following comments would be taken forward to District Executive for consideration:

Funding for Citizens Advice South Somerset 2016/17 (Agenda item 6)

- Members asked what % of the overall operating budget of the CAB the SSDC contribution represents?
- Does SSDC charge the CAB rent for office space at Petter's Way?
- Members queried if there was potential duplication between the role of SSDC Welfare Benefits Advisors and the advice given by CAB – were we in effect paying twice for the same service?
- Members noted that the report refers to a new service specification being drawn up and asked that Scrutiny be involved in this process prior to their implementation?

Quarterly Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – 2nd Quarter 2015/16 (Agenda item 7)

- Members noted that PI029 shows a significant increase in the numbers of anti-social behaviour reports – whilst noting the impact the reduced value of scrap metal is having on the number of abandoned cars, members sought clarification as to what steps are being taken to address this increase?
- Regarding PI031 – the Committee received a detailed report on this issue in August and noted that performance data is still not available. It was noted that a detailed update report will be presented to Scrutiny in January but the ongoing reputational risk to the council was emphasised.
- The Interim CEO indicated that a business case would be coming to District Executive in the New Year, outlining proposals for transforming customer handling within SSDC – this business transformation process would address some of the issues concerning call handling, members were informed that this transformation would require capital investment. Scrutiny Members sought clarification that resources were not being committed to the current fix in Customer services, only to be replaced by the business transformation programme?

Heart of the South West Formal Devolution Bid (Agenda item 8)

- Members noted this item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

Report of the Licensing Task and Finish Group (Agenda item 9)

- The Scrutiny Committee endorsed all of the recommendations and noted that should delegation arrangements with Wincanton Town Council cease, arrangements had already been put in place to allow Taxi Drivers to liaise with SSDC Customer Services Staff based at Churchfields.

Yeovil Innovation Centre – Business Plan and Update Report (Agenda item 10)

- Is the satisfaction target not set a little low – should we not be aspiring for greater tenant satisfaction?
- Members sought clarification as to the role and function of the Innovation Centre – when the project was initiated, it was stated that at some point, it would become self-financing – is this still the aim and when is this projected to happen?
- How long are businesses expected to be based at the Innovation Centre before moving on to more permanent bases? Members were aware that in some areas of the district there is a waiting list for such ‘incubation’ units and the Innovation centre needs to meet this specific brief.
- When are the rent reviews intended to be carried out?

District Executive Forward Plan

- Members queried what progress had been made with the review of the Car Park Strategy/fees since the motion was passed at Full Council, there is no mention of this on the forward plan.
- The corporate plan is out of date, what is the process for revising this, again there is no mention of this on the forward plan

88. Final Report from the Monitoring SSDC Council Tax Support Scheme Task and Finish Group (Agenda Item 10)

The Chairman of the review highlighted the recommendations of the Task and Finish group, and detailed the proposed amendments to the current scheme. She thanked the members of the Task and Finish group for their dedication and the officer group for their support.

In response to questions, the Scrutiny Manager explained the variance in local authority schemes across the country and the challenge going forward for SSDC - balancing a fair scheme, administration costs and the cost of collection and enforcement.

The committee endorsed the report and recommendations to District Executive.

89. Review of Licensing Fees and Charges - Report of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman of the review gave an overview of the work the Task and Finish group had undertaken and explained the recommendations within the report. The Licensing Manager explained the process of total cost recovery and gave some examples.

Members sought clarification over the increase in the private hire charges, and officers confirmed the new charge was for a five year period.

The Portfolio Holder for Licensing thanked the members of the Task and Finish group for their detailed work.

90. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 12)

The Scrutiny Manager explained that the Journey of Exploration Task and Finish group would be meeting on a weekly basis, and as part of this work had advertised a learning event for all members that will be taking place on the afternoon of Thursday 10th of December. The event would include presentations from officers working for authorities that are successfully sharing management teams and more.

91. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

The Chairman informed members that she had received a request from the Revenues and Benefits Manager, seeking Scrutiny involvement in the form of a Task and Finish group to review the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy. Discretionary Housing Payments could be made to people in receipt of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (UC) where they had a housing cost element in their UC. It was designed to help provide additional support where there was a shortfall between their housing benefit (UC housing support) and their actual rent. Central government provides the council with a specified grant each year, but the council was allowed to spend its own money on top of that up to an overall limit.

The Committee agreed to add it to the forward plan, subject to the work not commencing before completion of the Journey of Exploration task and finish work.

ACTION: That a potential review of the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy be added to the work programme.

92. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 5th January 2016 in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way.

.....
Chairman