

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 30 August 2016**.

(10.00 am - 1.05 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Jason Baker	Val Keitch
Mike Beech	Rob Stickland
Dave Bulmer	Martin Wales
John Clark	

Also Present:

Ric Pallister	Tim Inglefield
Clare Aparicio Paul	Angie Singleton

Officers

Donna Parham	Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services)
Martin Woods	Assistant Director (Economy)
Colin McDonald	Corporate Strategic Housing Manager
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager

40. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on the 2 August 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

41. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Amanda Broom, Tony Lock, Tiffany Osborne, Garry Shortland and Neil Bloomfield.

42. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

43. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions raised by members of public at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

45. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman explained that the notes of the last Transformation Board meeting on July 6th were sent out via e-mail to all members; she invited any feedback and questions so she could present them at the next meeting on 6th September.

46. Right To Buy Clawback Agreement - Request from Yarlington Housing Group (Agenda Item 7)

Garry Orr (Yarlington Homes Chief Executive Officer) provided an overview of:

- The history and creation of Yarlington Homes and the work they have done to date within South Somerset to provide affordable housing.
- The impact of the decrease and removal of funding and financing for the provision of affordable housing on Yarlington Homes.
- The numbers of Affordable housing units that could be provided across South Somerset if SSDC were to agree to forgo the Right To Buy (RTB) Clawback.

During discussion the following points were made:

- Since 1999, 889 properties have been sold under 'preserved' RTB in SSDC.
- Gary Orr explained South Somerset Homes/Yarlington homes have built 1211 new homes.
- Home ownership is becoming increasingly unaffordable.
- It is vital that SSDC has the flexibility to invest Capital where it gets the greatest return.
- It's not just about the total numbers of properties being built, the properties provided need to match the needs of those on the Housing Register and in the locations where there is the highest demand.
- There is a need to consider balance of communities also.
- Currently SSDC has approximately £18 million in Capital receipts that are not committed; however there is evidence that SSDC requires approximately £21million over the next five years.

Scrutiny Committee acknowledged the real need for additional affordable housing in South Somerset and appreciates the very different financial climate Yarlington Homes are now operating in.

Scrutiny Committee suggested that the Council first look to consider if the Right To Buy clawback monies should be ring fenced as a principle. This should take account of the impact on the Capital Programme in terms of the other significant projects that this Council wants or needs to deliver on behalf of the community.

Scrutiny members recommended only if this principle is agreed should Council consider how best to allocate the clawback monies to best meet those in housing need on the Housing Register.

47. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 4 August 2016 (Agenda Item 8)

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

48. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 September 2016 (Agenda Item 9)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the reports contained in the District Executive Agenda for the 1 September 2016 and made the following comments:

SSDC / Yarlington Homes Right to Buy (RTB) Clawback Agreement (Agenda item 6)

This item was discussed as a separate item on the Scrutiny Agenda

SSDC Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan (Agenda item 7)

The Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) introduced the report and explained that the report was being brought before members a month early to consider the Rate Support Grant (RSG) offer by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Regarding the four year settlement and the potential negative RSG in year 4, Scrutiny members asked how many other authorities nationally are in a similar position and to what extent a co-ordinated approach with such authorities is being pursued?

Some members queried recommendation 8 and suggested that the decision should in fact be made by Full Council and to accommodate this, a meeting could be arranged for 13th October.

Members questioned whether there should be a more explicit reference in the report to the risk (and appropriate mitigating actions) should the Transformation Programme not deliver the anticipated savings? The Committee noted the Leader's comments that there is in effect no risk as if the Transformation savings are not achieved, services will be cut to balance the budget.

Scrutiny Committee asked if the explanation in paragraph 22 could be amended to reflect that the savings are all over the 5 year period and are in addition to the potential savings attributed to Transformation.

Affordable Housing Development Programme (Agenda item 8)

The Corporate Strategic Housing Manger introduced the report and provided the headlines of the report, he emphasised that SSDC will need to increase the amount of money available to ensure a supply of affordable homes remain available for rent.

Members thanked the officer for a very comprehensive report and noted that the outcome of the ongoing Task and Finish Group looking at the issue of the disposal of affordable housing in rural communities will have an impact on this report going forward.

South Somerset Authority Monitoring Report (September 2016) (Agenda item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning (Place Making) and the Assistant Director (Economy) gave an overview of the report and gave examples of the work being undertaken to address the issues identified.

Members noted that there is no explicit reference to 'Tourism' within the report and felt that this was a significant omission given the important contribution Tourism makes to the local economy. The Committee were pleased to note that the team would look at this point.

Members thanked the officers for a very detailed and accessible report produced during a very busy time for the team.

The Committee also noted that it is important strong links are maintained between this monitoring report and the emerging Economic Development Strategy.

Quarterly Corporate Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – 1st Quarter 2016/17 (Agenda item 10)

The Performance Officer provided an overview of the report.

Scrutiny members suggested that in the officer comments for PI 003 (% of Planning Appeals decisions allowed) it would be useful to also include the amount of any costs awarded against the authority. Members were pleased to note that officers said this information is readily available and is already being monitored at the request of the Portfolio Holder.

PI 019 - Average number of days in Temporary Accommodation, Scrutiny Committee members requested their appreciation and thanks are passed to the Housing Staff who very effectively and efficiently managed a very complex and serious incident earlier this year whilst maintaining the usual service.

PI 031 (% of calls to contact centre resolved in the contact centre)

Last time the Performance monitoring report was discussed, Scrutiny Committee members noted that whilst it is not currently possible to collect the data for this **specific** indicator, there is a significant amount of useful performance information that is available and could be reported to members.

Scrutiny members felt that continually reporting that the data is not available could be damaging in a public report and whilst members recognise the value to the Transformation Programme of this particular indicator, they would recommend that additional indicators are included to provide as full a performance picture as possible. In particular, Scrutiny Members would suggest that additional indicators to monitor the length of time taken to answer calls to the contact centre and levels of customer satisfaction that are already collected are included.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 11)

Scrutiny Committee made no comments.

49. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 10)

Members were updated as follows on the progress of the Task and Finish Groups currently underway:

Council Tax Support Review 2017

The Scrutiny Manager explained that a consultation on the potential amendments to the Council Tax Support scheme was currently running and if members wished to refer people to it, it is accessible via the Councils home webpage.

The next meeting is scheduled for 23rd September where members will be considering the consultation comments to date, external evidence, Council Tax arrears analysis, Risks and the Equalities Impact Assessment.

Discretionary Housing Payments

This Scrutiny Manager explained the next meeting is scheduled for 16th September and would be primarily looking at the issue of rural isolation and the ensuing impacts on mental health.

Consent to Dispose of Housing Stock / Local Connections Allocation Policy

A report is currently being prepared for consideration by the HomeFinder Somerset Board outlining members suggestions for ensuring sustainable local communities are supported through providing appropriate local housing for local people.

Further work is being done to fully understand the impact of the decisions by the various Housing Providers to dispose of stock within South Somerset. The evidence gathered by the Task and Finish Group to date indicates that South Somerset has very limited ability to influence their decisions so the focus of the group is now on ensuring the risk of such disposals is fully understood and reflected in SSDC policies and procedures. A further meeting will be held in September to progress this.

National Non-Domestic Rate Discretionary relief policy

The Scrutiny Manager explained that an invitation had been sent out to all members to participate and there is a meeting scheduled for Monday 12th September to review:

- If the scheme is proving to be fit for purpose.
- If there are any unforeseen issues or consequences for SSDC, business, organisations charities etc.
- If there have been any external changes which have an impact on the policy and should now be taken into account.
- The process that applicants need to go through and the methods of administering the policy.
- The NNDR collection rates and arrears data in relation to the changes that have been introduced.

Community Council for Somerset (CCS)

The Task and Finish group met with Keeley Rudd the Chief Executive of CCS on 8th August, the purpose of the meeting was to identify if SSDC and CCS could work more closely to achieve better outcomes for the community.

A presentation had been provided giving an overview of CCS, the role of the Village Agent and examples of work that have been carried out across South Somerset.

After discussion it was agreed that:

- Communication across the organisations could be improved particularly when it came to identifying and helping those who are vulnerable.
- There are a couple of area of overlap that may need to be further explored with the new Community Involvement Officer at CCS.

It was recognised that there would be a need for a data sharing protocol before the organisations may be able to establish systems to refer individuals or households for specific advice or assistance.

Street Trading

The Scrutiny Manager informed members that this work was a continuation of the work of the previous Licensing fees and charges Task and Finish group and would be focusing on refreshing the Council's policies and procedures in relation to Street Trading. The first meeting is scheduled to take place on 28th September at 10.00 a.m.

The following members indicated that they wished to take part in this review:

Cllrs Martin Wale, Jason Baker, Neil Bloomfield, Val Keitch and Rob Stickland and Tony Lock.

Devolution

The Scrutiny Manager updated members on the Task and Finish Group that had been established at the request of the Leader (and subsequently agreed by Scrutiny Committee) with the aim of supporting members in understanding the implications of moving towards a Combined Authority.

Within the Strategic Alliance with Sedgemoor District Council, two of their elected members would be joining this review;

Cllr Mick Lerry, Leader of Labour Group

Cllr Kathy Pearce, Chair of Community Scrutiny

Cllrs John Clark and Sue Osborne will be the SSDC representatives on this Task and Finish Group. An initial meeting will be arranged for September.

Rural Services Access to Health Scrutiny Exercise

Following the agreement of members to participate in this national project a meeting has been arranged for 21st September at the Deane House, Taunton. Somerset County Council are considering joining with SSDC, WSC and TDBC to carry out this review.

Councillor Sue Steele indicated that she would like to participate in this review and an invite would be sent out to all members seeking additional representatives.

50. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 11)

There were no updates on matters on interest.

51. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

Following on from the productive meeting with the Community Council for Somerset, it was suggested that representatives from the successful One Team approach adopted in the Halcon Ward of Taunton Deane be invited to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Martin Wale, as SSDC's representative on the Police and Crime Panel asked that a report be included in the Scrutiny Work Programme looking at proposals for increased joint working between police forces across the South West. The date of the report has yet to be confirmed but Cllr Wale will bring it forward when appropriate.

52. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on 4 October 2016, on the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way.

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Chairman