

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in **Chamber B, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil** on **Tuesday 4 February 2020**.

(10.30 am - 12.40 pm)

Present:

Members:

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|---------------------------|------------------|
| Robin Bastable | Robin Pailthorpe |
| Nicola Clark | Jeny Snell |
| Charlie Hull (to 12.30pm) | Mike Stanton |
| Mike Lewis | Rob Stickland |
| Sue Osborne | Gerard Tucker |



Officers

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| Jan Gamon | Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning) |
| Cath Temple | Specialist (Performance) |
| Nicola Hix | Interim Section 151 Officer |
| Jack Savery | Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning) |
| Jo Gale | Specialist (Members) |
| Becky Sanders | Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning) |

90. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 5 November 2019 and 7 January 2020 were approved as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

91. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Hamilton, Mike Lock, Paul Maxwell and Crispin Raikes.

92. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Rob Stickland declared a personal interest for item 12, as a family member worked at Mama Bears Nursery which was referred to in item 8 on page 151 of the District Executive agenda.

93. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

95. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

96. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 9 January 2020 (Agenda Item 7)

The Specialist (Members) noted that the outstanding Scrutiny comments had been raised at the District Executive meeting, and the responses were noted in the minutes of District Executive.

97. Quarterly Corporate Performance Report 2019-20 - Quarter 3 (Q3) (Agenda Item 8)

The Specialist (Performance) presented the report as detailed in the District Executive agenda, which provided details of the current position of the Council's agreed key performance indicators.

During discussion, several comments and suggestions were made including:

- In the future, there would be indicators for planning enforcement and planning validation times?
- Page 227 – was any progress regarding the sourcing of figures at a district level, as the footnote suggested this was still being explored. If the figures would not be available it was suggested that the footnote be removed.
- Page 223 – PCS9 – supporting information column – regarding the days specified – was it working days or calendar days?
- Some members were of the opinion that the figures for planning under protecting core services looked quite good on paper, however, in practical terms it wasn't what they were experiencing as ward members judging from communications with parishes and the public etc. It was felt the targets may be painting the wrong picture.
- Scrutiny Committee noted that at several previous meetings additional indicators had been suggested. Could future potential new indicators be discussed with Scrutiny Committee prior to going to live, in order to ensure requested information is captured and monitored?

The Specialist (Performance) responded to queries and points of detail, and some of her comments included:

- It wasn't possible to amend performance indicators mid-cycle, but some new planning indicators would be included in the new cycle.
- There had been no progress regarding sourcing of waste figures at a district specific level – acknowledge that reference in the footnote should be removed.
- The days recorded at PCS9 were working days.

A member raised the subject of Transformation, and from a performance perspective, noted it was difficult to easily see information about whether the predicted reduction in staffing levels and financial targets had been met. He noted that he had asked on a previous occasion about staffing levels but had yet to receive the information. Another member noted some skills had been lost and displaced, and felt the questions raised were apt for Scrutiny to follow up, but acknowledged officers would need time to gather a response. There was general agreement by members that a report for discussion at Scrutiny would be useful.

At the close of discussion the Chairman thanked the Specialist (Performance) for her informative report and attending the meeting to answer questions.

98. 2020/21 Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan (Agenda Item 9)

The Interim S151 Officer presented the report which set out the draft budget and proposed Council Tax for 2020/21 to enable District Executive to recommend proposals to Full Council for approval.

During discussion several comments and queries to District Executive were raised including:

- A general observation that the finance reports had not been published until the Wednesday prior to the Scrutiny meeting which had given members little time to fully read and consider the reports.
- Cllr John Clark's name had been spelt incorrectly throughout the report and appendices.
- Page 29, para 15 – the wording seemed to imply there may be a new strategy, but the wording didn't seem to be 'hard and fast'.
- Page 29, para 16 – it was noted there were references to the 'Digital Strategy' and asked how the strategy had come about as the committee had no recollection of such a strategy. The budget for the digital strategy was queried, as a significant budget was being requested that had not yet been formally approved. Scrutiny Committee noted they were usually informed when a strategy was being formed, but at the current time felt the strategy had not been discussed or approved.
- Page 42, para 75 - Could the government guidance regarding investment activity by local authorities be circulated to Scrutiny members for information. Some members queried if the likelihood of government limiting commercial investments was known?
- Page 30, para 23 – was the move to a targeted approach aligned to planning performance likely to have a big impact for SSDC?
- Page 53 – members sought clarity about what the Enforcement & Compliance function included, and particularly what budget was specifically allocated for planning enforcement.
- Various pages – a member noted there were multiple references to Birchfield Leachate Pumping Station in several appendices, and highlighted that there was a project group but it had not met for a considerable time. Given the funding being requested it was felt the group should reconvene. *(it was generally agreed that the suggestion to reconvene the project group should be highlighted to Area South Committee).*

- Page 114, 1c – were new parking machines proposed or upgrades to the current machines?

The Interim S151 Officer responded to some points of detail raised during discussion and noted the government guidance regarding investment activity was a public document which she would circulate for information.

The Chairman thanked the Interim S151 Officer for attending the meeting to answer questions.

99. 2019/20 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31st December 2019 (Agenda Item 10)

The Interim S151 Officer presented the report which provided the current projection of the forecast spending and income ('outturn') against the Council's approved Revenue Budget for the financial year, and explained the projected variations against budget.

During a short discussion some queries to District Executive were raised including:

- Page 184 – table 1 – Car Parking – were the reasons for the decline in car parking income known. Acknowledging that less use of car parks may be a factor, some members queried if work was being done to look at the impact of decreased use?
- Page 185 – table 1 – Building Control – members queried the status / progress of the business plan following the peer review.
- Page 185 – table 1 – Development Management – members queried what is being done to recruit permanent staff to reduce agency costs in the future?

There being no further discussion, members were content to note the report.

100. 2019/20 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31st December 2019 (Agenda Item 11)

The Interim S151 Officer presented the report which provided an in-year projection in 2019/20 of the forecast spending ('outturn') against the Council's approved Capital Programme Budget, and to explain the projected variations against individual projects and the programme as a whole.

During a brief discussion, no queries or comments were raised except points of detail which were answered by the Interim S151 Officer.

Members were content to note the report.

101. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6 February 2020 (Agenda Item 12)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 6 February 2020 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers except those marked by an asterisk.

SSDC Council Plan 2020-2024 (Agenda Item 6)

- *Page 12, bullet point 1 – following the recent press release regarding the independent audit of the Transformation process at Somerset West and Taunton Council – members asked if a similar independent review would be undertaken at SSDC.
- *Page 13 – members noted there were references to the ‘Digital Strategy’ and asked how the strategy had come about as the committee had no recollection of such a strategy. The budget for the digital strategy was queried as a significant budget was being requested that had not yet been formally approved. Scrutiny Committee noted they were usually informed when a strategy was being formed, but at the current time felt the strategy had not been discussed or approved.
- Page 17 - Priority project 5: Scrutiny members requested that updated milestones are taken back through committee once drafted..
- Page 20 – priority project 8 – last bullet point under Q4 milestones – some members felt the wording should possibly include reference to delivery or installation.
- Page 20 – priority project – some members queried if SSDC were looking further into the possibility of investing in ‘green’ projects / investments.
- Page 23 – Area Chapter South under Environment theme – members felt reference to the example of Yeovil Rivers Community Trust should be removed.

2020/21 Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan (Agenda Item 7)

- Scrutiny Committee made a general observation that the finance reports had not been published until the Wednesday prior to the Scrutiny meeting which had given members little time to fully read and consider the reports.
- Cllr John Clark’s name is spelt incorrectly throughout the report and appendices.
- *Page 29, para 15 – members noted the wording seemed to imply there may be a new strategy, but the wording didn’t seem to be ‘hard and fast’.
- *Page 29, para 16 – there is mention again of the digital strategy – see comments raised under the Council Plan item.
- Page 42, para 75 – Scrutiny Committee requested for the government guidance regarding investment activity by local authorities be circulated to members for information. Some members queried if the likelihood of government limiting commercial investments was known?
- Page 30, para 23 – members queried if the move to a targeted approach aligned to planning performance would have a big impact for SSDC?
- Page 53 – members sought clarity about what the Enforcement & Compliance function included, and particularly what budget was specifically allocated for planning enforcement.
- Various pages – a member noted there were multiple references to Birchfield Leachate Pumping Station in several appendices, and highlighted that there was a project group but it had not met for a considerable time. Given the funding being requested it was felt the group should reconvene. *(it was generally agreed that the suggestion to reconvene the project group should be highlighted to Area South Committee).*
- Page 114, 1c – members sought clarity about whether new parking machines were proposed or upgrades to the current machines.

Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategies 2020/21 to 2022/23 (Agenda Item 8)

- Page 131 – table 3 – members noted the position of the S.106 monies, but queried why the figure for CIL was showing zero as it was understood CIL monies were now being actively collected?
- Members noted that Audit Committee had already considered the report – Scrutiny members felt it would be useful in the future if they could have sight of the Audit Committee comments for information.

2019/20 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31 December 2019 (Agenda Item 9)

- Page 184 – table 1 – Car Parking - some members sought clarity for the reasons for the decline in car parking income. Acknowledging that less use of car parks may be a factor, some members queried if work was being done to look at the impact of decreased use?
- *Page 185 – table 1 – Building Control – members queried the status / progress of the business plan following the peer review.
- Page 185 – table 1 – Development Management – members queried what is being done to recruit permanent staff to reduce agency costs in the future?

2019/20 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31 December 2019 (Agenda Item 10)

- No queries were raised except points of detail which were answered by the Interim S151 Officer at the meeting.

Corporate Performance Report 2019-20: 3rd Quarter (Agenda Item 11)

- Members sought reassurance that in the future there would be indicators for planning enforcement and planning validation times.
- Page 227 – members queried if there was any progress regarding the sourcing of figures at a district level, as the footnote suggested this was still being explored. If the figures would not be available it was suggested that the footnote be removed.
- Page 223 – PCS9 – supporting information column – members sought clarity regarding the days specified – was it working days or calendar days?
- Some members commented that the figures for planning under protecting core services looked quite good on paper, however, in practical terms it wasn't what they were experiencing as ward members judging from communications with parishes and the public etc. It was felt the targets may be painting the wrong picture.
- Scrutiny Committee noted that at several previous meetings additional indicators had been suggested. Members asked if future potential new indicators could be discussed with Scrutiny Committee prior to going to live, in order to ensure requested information is captured and monitored.

Time Extensions to Public Space Protection Orders for Dog Fouling, Dogs on Leads and Dog Exclusion Area (Agenda Item 12)

- *Members sought clarity as to how the Orders are enforced, and that there are adequate resources available for enforcement.

Future of Local Government in Somerset (Agenda Item 13)

- *Some members made a general observation that there seemed to be an assumption that only two tiers of local authority involved – district and county. They felt further research should be undertaken regarding the impact and opportunity for involving third tier local authorities such as large town councils.
- *Scrutiny Committee recommend that the wording of recommendation C be amended to include that the Project Board give consideration to involving third tier authorities in discussions.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 14)

- No comments.
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102. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted the updates by the Specialist (Members) and Chairmen of the Task and Finish Groups including:

Environment Strategy – regarding the county-wide climate strategy, it was noted good progress being made and there should be a county-wide strategy by late summer. The public engagement programme was underway.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 – the group would be reconvening soon.

Productivity Analysis – this would now be workshops as coordinating diaries had been difficult. Workshops would be arranged for after each Scrutiny Committee meeting, and due to the change in format there would not be a final formal report.

Short Term Lettings – have been asked to delay this work slightly as there is not currently enough officer capacity.

103. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 14)

There were no updates on matters of interest.

104. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 15)

Members noted the Work Programme and made some suggestions for additional items:

- Digital Strategy – as had been discussed earlier in the meeting when considering the District Executive agenda. The strategy is referred to in the Council Plan and the 20/21 budgets but to date no information has come forward to the Scrutiny Committee.
 - Intergenerational housing – a presentation or report on the potential opportunities would be of interest.
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105. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 16)

As mentioned under the Task and Finish item, workshops would be arranged for after each Scrutiny meeting. It was therefore suggested, and agreed, that Scrutiny Committee meetings commence at 10.00am for the next few months.

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 3 March at the earlier time of 10.00am, in Chamber B, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman