

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held by video conference using Zoom meeting software **on Tuesday 4 August 2020.**

(10.30 am - 12.10 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable
Brian Hamilton
Paul Maxwell
Sue Osborne
Robin Pailthorpe

Oliver Patrick
Jeny Snell
Mike Stanton
Gerard Tucker



Also Present:

Jason Baker

Officers

Jo Nacey
Paul Matravers
Stephanie Gold
Becky Sanders

Section 151 Officer
Lead Specialist (Finance)
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)

143. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

144. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicola Clark, Charlie Hull and Rob Stickland. Councillor Oliver Patrick was present as substitute for Councillor Nicola Clark.

145. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

146. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

148. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman noted he had recently attended a webinar hosted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny – Scrutiny Step-Back Review of Covid19. He noted the webinar had been very interesting and if possible he would circulate the presentation slides for information.

149. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 2 and 16 July 2020 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman reminded members that many questions had been answered at the Scrutiny Committee and hence he had no updates to report regarding the District Executive meeting of 2 July. He also referred to the informal meeting of Scrutiny members held in mid-July to consider the Somerset County Council One Somerset Business Case, and noted many of the Scrutiny comments had been echoed by District Executive.

150. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6 August 2020 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 6 August 2020 and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the S.151 Officer and Lead Specialist (Finance).

Update Report on the Impact of Covid-19 on the Council (Agenda Item 6)

- Appendix B (Page 13)
 - it was noted that £48k was listed for Tourism – a member queried how the amount had been derived as the figure seemed quite high.
 - The figure of £200k for the wellbeing / shielding hub was also noted and the figure queried as it seemed high. A member asked where the figure had come from?
 - Building Control fees – these have been reducing for well over a year – what is actually being done to look at and address the downward trend in fees?
- Some members asked if any town or parish councils were approaching SSDC because there's an impact on their reserves – are any town / parish councils looking to SSDC for help?
- Para 29 (page 10) – regarding the delaying of the payment of Business Rates to Central Government and risks of reducing consumerism – what is our exposure?
- Para 31 (page 10) – will the additional expenditure for bereavement services have any impact for Yeovil Without Parish Council?
- Members noted the information provided at the Scrutiny meeting by the S.151 Officer – members queried if the support funding to LED would be a grant or a loan?

- Some members felt there was a need to look at things more strategically now, and that a paper was needed that considered the real consequences of the situation and where we go now and in the future – not just the financial facts – and more and further than a recovery plan.
- Regarding Westlands and the Octagon – are we eligible for some of the recently announced government grants for the Arts? Also what is the status regarding the loan for Westlands?

SSDC Financial Strategy 2020/21 – Revised (Agenda Item 7)

- Para 9 (page 16) – refers to awaiting details regarding the financial settlement for councils – is there an indication of when further detail might be expected? Members queried if there would be another similar report to this item when more information was known?
- Members acknowledged that SSDC was a prudent authority and had reserves and so could mitigate for some of the costs relating to Covid. Some members commented they would not want to see reserves go too low and sought reassurance that SSDC would be able to build up reserves again later.
- Regarding Business Rates – a member queried if the pooling was likely to continue in its current form?

Capital Outturn Report for 2019/20 (Agenda Item 8)

- No questions.

Revenue Outturn Report for 2019/20 (Agenda Item 9)

- No questions.

2020/21 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th June 2020 (Agenda Item 10)

- Table 1 on page 66 – a member sought clarity regarding the figure scheduled / profiled to OPIUM (Investment in Property) - is the figure of £100k additional funding to the project?

2020/21 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th June 2020 (Agenda Item 11)

- No questions.
- The Chairman and members wished to thank the Finance team for all their work and producing the reports.

Annual Achievements Report 2019-20 (Agenda Item 12)

- No questions.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

- Some members were concerned about the number of items scheduled for the September meeting and whether the agenda would be overloaded.

- Future of Local Government in Somerset – was there an indication of when the report may come forward? Scrutiny sought reassurance they would receive the report in good time in order to have adequate time to ready it thoroughly.
 - It was noted that two Transformation Update reports are listed (for September and December) – member sought clarity on the items as they believed the Transformation Programme was closing down. Will the items become Digital Strategy updates?
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151. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 9)

One of the Scrutiny Vice-Chairmen provided an update on the Council Tax Support Task and Finish Group. She noted they had recently had a meeting with a consultant and it was hoped to go out to public consultation soon. The current scheme was quite complicated and so the authority was now looking at a banding system but there was a need to ensure it will be fair. She explained the group would probably need to hold another meeting before going ahead with the consultation.

152. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 10)

There were no updates on matters of interest.

153. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman noted that previously a joint meeting between the Audit Committee and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen with the S.151 Officer had been arranged but then delayed due to officer workloads. In response, the S.151 Officer confirmed that the Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) was in the process of co-ordinating a new date for the meeting

One of the Vice-Chairmen noted that dialogue had commenced several weeks ago between the Scrutiny Chairmen and Leader of Council to discuss the role of Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman noted he would discuss with the Leader about arranging a further meeting.

The other Vice-Chairman noted a working group open to all members had commenced to review the Member Portal. She also noted that she believed central government were looking to review the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and wondered if it may impact on the dialogue and timing of the CIL update report. She also referred to rural broadband and queried what was going to happen now that Gigaclear had totally pulled out from Connecting Devon and Somerset – was there a monitoring role for Scrutiny Committee or should there be something on the work programme as there will still several unconnected networks?

The comments were noted by the Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) and would be followed up in due course. Members were content to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

154. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 1 September 2020, and would probably be held as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

At the end of the meeting, the Chairman expressed his thanks to the Finance Team for all their work and the reports which had been submitted during a very busy time.

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Chairman