

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in **the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Tuesday 5 November 2019.**

(10.30 am - 1.55 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Sue Osborne
Nicola Clark (to 12.50pm)	Robin Pailthorpe
Brian Hamilton	Jeny Snell (to 1.25pm)
Charlie Hull (to 1.30pm)	Mike Stanton (to 1.30pm)
Mike Lock (to 12.30pm)	Gerard Tucker (to 1.05pm)



Also Present:

Jason Baker	Mike Lewis
John Clark	Tony Lock
Val Keitch	

Officers

Martin Woods	Director (Service Delivery)
Toffer Beattie	Specialist (Projects & Programmes)
Kirsty Larkins	Case Services Manager
Sharon Jones	Customer Focussed Team Manager
Cath Temple	Specialist (Performance)
Jo Gale	Specialist (Members)

63. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

It was noted at minute 55, that the word 'review' was missing after the word 'cycling' on the 21st bullet point.

Subject to the above minor amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

64. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Maxwell and Rob Stickland.

65. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

66. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

A representative from High Ham Parish Council addressed members raising concerns about various difficulties the parish council had experienced with the planning department. In particular he referred to timescales and turnaround times regarding consultation with parish councils about planning applications, and provided some examples. He also expressed concern about the planning pages on the new SSDC website no longer being as user friendly as the previous website.

The Chairman reassured the gentleman that his comments had been noted, and would be investigated further, before a response was provided.

A member noted that two other reports on the agenda – Transformation and the Corporate Performance reports – both referred to various timeframes associated with planning applications and that the times had been reduced. However, the realisation seemed to show a different picture, and he would raise his concerns again under those agenda items.

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

The Chairman noted that at a previous meeting a number of varying questions had been raised regarding the Homelessness and the Rough Sleeping Strategy, enforced purchase of property where there is a council debt, and also council tax on second and empty homes. He reminded members that the Specialist (Members) had circulated some information via email in response to the queries raised.

68. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

That Chairman noted that he and a Vice-Chairman had recently attended the Centre for Public Scrutiny as previously advised. The course had been a very informative day. He reminded members that Scrutiny should be seen as a critical friend and there to help rather than oppose. He highlighted to members that they could access LG Inform which was a very useful resource for statistical information and comparing SSDC against other local authorities.

69. SSDC Transformation Programme - Progress Report (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services and Transformation introduced the report which updated members on progress of the Transformation Programme. He noted that this report was in a slightly different format to those previously to reflect the changes going forward, and future reports would be in a similar format.

During a long discussion, members raised a number of questions, comments and concerns, some of which included:

- Regarding the staff survey:
 - How many staff had responded and what this was as percentage of all staff?
 - How many staff are there?

- The methodology for collecting the data and incentivising responses.
- What has been done in response to the survey and to address specific points raised?
- How the data/results could be compared with the previous survey, and how comparisons could be sought in the future to help identify trends, and areas of concern so they could be addressed promptly.
- A summary report of the staff survey results would be useful.
- Should the authority be looking to invest in other schemes to develop staff in order to address specific skills areas where it has proven to be difficult to recruit, e.g. planning.
- Which key lines of development had been delayed due to problems with the Civica platform and what did this mean, in terms of impact and cost, to the authority?
- Concern that we could be seen to be discriminating by not being able to provide the full localities service due to mobile 360 not being usable in areas without 2G or Wi-Fi coverage.
- How had the planning validation time been reduced from 29 days to 10? Could it be due to officers not being flexible to town and parish council requests for extensions of time in order to provide responses?
- Concerned that customers were reporting that they were unable to talk to the planning service via the telephone.
- Concerns had been voiced by parish councils regarding the complexity of the planning pages on the new SSDC website, the frustration at the loss of the weekly planning lists, the delay in response times with regard to planning enquiries, and the need for parish councils to respond within 21 days. Members stressed it was a huge reputational risk with the town and parish councils.
- Was the agile element of the transformation programme achieving its objectives?

The Director (Service Delivery) and the Transformation Lead responded to points of detail and questions. Some of their comments included:

- The response rate to the staff survey had been around 61%.
- Many of the issues raised in the staff survey were being addressed or looked into.
- Reasons why it was difficult to recruit planning officers.
- Will take away the comments about comparing staff surveys with results of previous surveys. A similar survey would be undertaken next year.
- Acknowledgement that graduates included mature and young people.
- Further detail about Release 28 (as detailed in paragraph of 8 of the report). There had been some impacts on efficiencies as some systems were not yet fully operating as expected, but improvements continued to be made.
- Civica Mobile 360 was not currently working offline which was an issue.
- Further detail about the process for extensions of time regarding planning applications, and the actions that had been taken to improve the performance of the planning service. Performance monitoring showed that the authority were determining most planning applications in time and within government targets.
- An ambition was to encourage more customers to access council services online where possible, and for many of those functions to be self-service.
- There were peaks and troughs in demand for customers wishing to contact the council by telephone.

- Work was continuing to see how efficiencies could be made to back office processes.
- Further training could be arranged for parish clerks regarding use, and familiarisation, of the planning pages on the new SSDC website.
- Many staff were now working from locations other than Brympton Way, which was helping to reduce mileage costs and the council's carbon footprint.

At the end of discussion, the Chairman thanked the officers for attending the meeting and answering many of the questions raised during debate. The Chairman also clarified with the Director (Service Delivery) that the Director would arrange for a response to be provided to High Ham Parish Council regarding comments raised at Public Question Time on the Scrutiny agenda.

70. Quarterly Corporate Performance Report 2019-20 - Quarter 2 (Q2) (Agenda Item 8)

The Leader 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. The Specialist (Performance) highlighted key elements of the report.

During discussion, several comments and suggestions were made including:

- The Portfolio Holder suggested that the target for H1 (Number of target Households in temporary accommodation) should be removed, and instead the number of households should be monitored. This was supported by Scrutiny Committee.
- Query about how the targets were set for PCS 11, 12 and 13 and a suggestion made that the targets should be stretched to be more challenging.
- Would like to see two additional performance indicators added to the report for the planning service:
 - The number of requests for extensions of time to determine planning applications
 - A target for applications to be validated so X days between receipt and validation.
- It could be useful to know the number of applications that are renegotiated after approval, in terms of contributions, infrastructure and social housing provision etc.

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

71. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 3 October 2019 (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman reminded members that issues and comments raised regarding items on the District Executive agenda for October had been addressed at the Scrutiny Committee and hence there were no updates to report.

72. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7 November 2019 (Agenda Item 10)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 7 November 2019 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers.

SSDC Transformation Programme – Progress (Agenda Item 6)

Members considered this item in full as an item on the Scrutiny agenda. Comments and questions raised are detailed at minute 69.

Corporate Performance Report 2019-20: 2nd Quarter (Agenda Item 7)

Members considered this item in full as an item on the Scrutiny agenda. Comments and questions raised are detailed in minute 70.

Financial Strategy (Agenda Item 9)

- No comments.

2019/20 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the period Ending 30th September 2019 (Agenda Item 10)

- Some members felt there should be greater referencing to the returns on investments within this report.

2019/20 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the period ended 30th September 2019 (Agenda item 11)

- No comments.

Yeovil Public Realm Design Guide (Agenda item 12)

- Scrutiny Committee members recommend that the consultation is delayed until after the Christmas holidays. Members felt the consultation may not get an adequate response due to the distraction of the election activities and highlighted the Council had been criticised before for consulting during holiday periods.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 13)

- No comments.

CONFIDENTIAL – Exclusion of the Press and Public

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Committee resolved that the press and public be excluded from the following items in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, i.e. "Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)."

Budget for Chard Regeneration Programme – Ringfenced Assets update report (confidential) (Agenda Item 16)

- Members made a comment in closed session.
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73. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted the update provided by the Specialist (Members) on the current Task and Finish Group in progress, including:

Council Tax Support – the group were awaiting a monitoring report from the revenue officers, in order that the group can assess the stability of the current Council Tax Support scheme. Once that report had been received and reviewed the group would write their final report with recommendations for the 2020 scheme.

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

The Specialist (Members) confirmed that following a recommendation by Scrutiny Committee, that it had been arranged for the Somerset Rivers Authority to provide a presentation to Full Council in January.

75. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

The Specialist (Members) reminded members that at the previous meeting some suggestions had been put forward for items to be added to the Work Programme, and that she had been tasked with finding out a little more information about each of the suggestions.

While doing research she had been contacted by the Income & Opportunities Manager regarding work around reviewing fees and charges. He had expressed an interest in some Scrutiny members being involved with a Task and Finish Group to help look at the cost of services, fees and charges and to provide feedback at early stage. She noted that if Scrutiny supported such a Task and Finish Review she would circulate an email inviting non-executive members to participate. There was general support for setting up a Task and Finish Group with some members expressing an interest depending on the size of group needed and the timeframes.

The Specialist (Members) then presented background information and officer comments regarding each of the Work Programme / Task & Finish Group ideas that had been suggested. Members briefly discussed whether each item would best suited to a Task and Finish Group, as a discussion item / presentation on the Scrutiny agenda, or something else. The general views were:

- Airbnb – Task and Finish Group
- Community Infrastructure Levy – agenda item
- Environment Strategy – await further information from the Environment Community of Practice
- Equalities Policy – agenda item on progress – March 2020

- Gigaclear – no further action as Broadband update discussed as an agenda item for District Executive in November 2019
- Housing / Building for investment – agenda item summer 2020
- Housing Developers / Environment – Specialist (Members) to contact officers for further information.
- Contact via telephone – put on hold as received update information in the Transformation Programme Progress Report
- Loneliness and Isolation - Specialist (Members) to contact officers in SSDC and SCC for further information
- Management Companies – on hold to seek further clarification
- Planning Scheme of Delegation – consider again at a later date

The Specialist (Members) noted she would start to update Work Programme and progress possible start-up of new Task and Finish reviews.

76. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 3 December 2019 at 10.30am.

Post meeting note: The December meeting of Scrutiny Committee was later cancelled..

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Chairman