

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday 10th July 2007** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(9.30 am – 12.35 pm)

Present:

Members: Rupert Cox (in the Chair)

John Vincent Chainey	Tom Parsley
Geoff Clarke	Keith Ronaldson
Peter Gubbins	Jean Smith
Hannah Lefeuvre	Sue Steele
Pat Martin	

Also Present:

Ann Campbell	Ric Pallister
Tim Carroll	John Richardson
Mike Lewis	Kim Turner
Robin Mundy	

Officers:

Philip Dolan	Chief Executive
Rina Singh	Assistant Chief Executive
Eleanor Wilson	Head of Customer Services
Sue Eaton	Performance Projects Manager
Tony Johnson	HR & Performance Officer
Martin Cullimore	Customer Adviser Team Leader
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Bob Gillis	Democratic Services Manager

14. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 12th June 2007 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

15. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors John Calvert, Derek Nelson, John Hann, and Alan Smith.

16. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

17. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

19. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

Members were reminded of two upcoming dates – Scrutiny Questioning Skills on 16th July and the Scrutiny Waste Board Briefing on 18th July.

20. Progress Reports on Scrutiny Commissions (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman reported that proposed briefing sessions for each of the Commissions would not now be going ahead on 11th July and there would instead be briefings held for each of the scheduled reviews.

21. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – 4th Quarter 2006/07 (Agenda Item 8)

The HR and Performance Officer referred members to each of the performance exceptions highlighted in the report. As the meeting of the District Executive had been moved back a week the report was being considered first by Scrutiny. The Committee's comments would be forwarded on to the District Executive

It was noted that the Contact Centre was the subject of a separate report on the agenda (agenda item 9) and would be discussed at that time.

Sickness: members discussed the figures and felt that the Council should look at how the private sector managed sickness, and consider the use of an occupational health professional. It was agreed that there was a need to look at training for service managers in those services where the sickness rate was highest. A breakdown of the figures by service would also be useful to identify whether there were any services with particularly high sickness levels that might indicate an underlying problem that needed to be addressed.

Planning: members generally felt that the service was addressing underperformance and that overall the level of performance was improving.

Public Satisfaction: members accepted that satisfaction rates were declining across most councils nationwide. It was also commented that the results would be influenced by the timing of when the survey was undertaken. However, it was still felt that the Council should look to address the decline, looking at how the Council communicates with the public and the reasons for the decline in public satisfaction.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted with the comments as above to be passed to the District Executive.

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22. Contact Centre Overview Commission Scoping Exercise (Agenda Item 9)

Members discussed the potential scope of the review with the Portfolio Holder and the Head of Customer Services

The following areas were identified for review:

- Investigate ways to reduce errors and waste in current systems by using Business Process Re-engineering to re-design the process in the light of lessons learnt
- Investigate why the Contact Centre was failing to deliver in some service areas – this would reduce repeat callers and the number of complaints
- Investigate establishing internal processes that will ensure that all communications with the public are consistent, correct, make sense and are produced in Plain English and therefore cannot be misinterpreted – this element of the review should involve advice from the Communication Team.
- Investigate a change in staffing contracts that better caters for seasonal staffing and short notice changes to times of work so that the service can cover predicted 'busy' periods. This needs to be looked at both in terms of the Contact Centre and 'back office' teams
- Encourage service areas to systematically review all their major work processes and then ensure all their staff are trained adequately on these processes.
- Look at ways to encourage staff to accept calls from the Contact Centre quickly and efficiently – perhaps include this in the Corporate Customer Care package that is currently in development
- Investigate how the Council could better collect data from customers once and then use across services. An example of this is a customer's change of address being notified across all corporate software systems
- Investigate establishing direct integration between Northgate (Customer Services computer system) and other major Council systems. This will reduce the amount of time staff need to spend re-entering information that has been collated within the Contact Centre. This is most urgently required between the Council Tax system and the Customer Services system
- Understand the need to encourage customers to use cheaper access channels. For example, Council Tax banding enquiries is number 10 on the most frequently delivered services, yet this information is readily available on the Council's website for those who have access.
- Need to look at how our customers chose to contact the Council at the moment and in the future: need to look at the levels of funding committed to the different access channels.

The Commission will also act as a member level 'sounding board' for any proposals to amend the performance targets used in relation to the Contact Centre.

Members also agreed that before the review began, all members of the Commission should be encouraged to visit the Contact Centre to listen in to incoming calls so that they had first hand experience of the issues the team faced.

It was agreed that the Commission's first meeting would be in early August and that it would report back in October 2007.

RESOLVED: that the scope of the review of the Contact Centre be agreed as set out above.

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23. Review of Theme Advisor Posts (Agenda Item 10)

Councillors Tim Carroll, Leader of the Council, and Ric Pallister, Deputy Leader of the Council explained the purpose of establishing the Theme Advisor posts.

Councillor Ann Campbell provided more information on her work as a Theme Advisor and Councillor Robin Munday, a recently appointed Theme Advisor, said that he was happy that the report clarified the working arrangements for the posts.

Members thanked Ann Campbell for her report back and felt that this was particularly helpful as the summary in the report was not detailed enough.

In discussion of the report members particularly looked at the reporting arrangements, the themes covered and the proposals for more support for the Theme Advisors. Overall, the Committee supported the recommendations in the report. In particular it welcomed the proposals for a work programme for each Theme Advisor and the clarification on the reporting arrangements. However, it felt that there was a need to review the areas covered by the Theme Advisors to ensure that they did reflect the corporate priorities of the Council. It was also felt that the selection process should be looked at to ensure that the Council was able to fully utilise the knowledge and expertise of all members.

RESOLVED: that the recommendations in the report be supported with the comments as above to be referred to District Executive and full Council.

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24. Scoping the LSP Annual Report to the Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 11)

The Committee considered the report of the Scrutiny Manager on the scope of the LSP's annual report to the Committee. It looked at the key questions identified in the report and highlighted the following issues:

- whether the aims of the LAP were set for too far in the future;
- the membership of the LSP:

- financial accountability,
- considerations of value for money and how to assess whether the LSP and its partners were achieving their objectives,
- the LSP's relationship to the Regional Assembly
- whether the Chairman's position was made more difficult, and whether there was any potential conflict, in also being a portfolio holder.

RESOLVED: that the scope for the Annual Review of the Local Strategic Partnership be agreed as set out under key questions in the report.

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25. Scrutiny Work Programme 2007/08 (Agenda Item 12)

The following updates were noted:

Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme

Review of Impact of Equality Strategy - now to be submitted in September 2007.

Review of Market Town Vision scheduled for September 2007 – Head of Service – Area West to speak to the Committee Chairman and Scrutiny Manager to decide whether the report was necessary.

Quarterly Performance Report to be added in October 2007.

In response to a request from Councillor Sue Steele, it was asked that an item be placed on a future meeting to consider whether to include on the Work Programme a future review of the process and procedures in preparing Section 106 Agreements.

Community Well Being Commission

Housing Advice Centre – first meeting would be in October.

Affordable Housing – the Chairman was to meet with the Portfolio Holder to discuss the timing of the review.

Economic Vitality and the Environment Commission

Advertising Protocol – this had been adopted and the Plain English version would be ready for September Area workshops.

Well Managed Services Commission

Village Shops and Post Offices – there would a progress report to Committee within next two months.

RESOLVED: that the Scrutiny Work Programme 2007/08 be noted with the updates as above.

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26. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

RESOLVED: that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

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27. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place on **Tuesday 14th August 2007 at 9.30a.m. in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.**

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Chairman