

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday 11th September 2007** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(9.30 am – 12.10 pm)

Present:

Members: Rupert Cox (in the Chair)

John Calvert	Derek Nelson
John Vincent Chainey (to 11.10am)	Tom Parsley
Geoff Clarke	Keith Ronaldson
Peter Gubbins	Alan Smith
Hannah Lefevre (to 11.10am)	Jean Smith
Pat Martin	Sue Steele

Also Present:

Tim Carroll	Ann Campbell
Tony Fife	Tony Lock
Ric Pallister	Jo Roundell Greene
John Richardson	

Officers:

Rina Singh	Assistant Chief Executive
Vega Sturgess	Corporate Director - Environment
Andrew Gillespie	Head of Area Development - West
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Angela Cox	Committee Administrator

40. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 14th August 2007 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

41. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor John Hann.

42. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

The Democratic Services Manager advised that, having also taken advice from the Solicitor to the Council, the Scrutiny Committee members who were also Members of Area South Committee, should declare a personal interest in Agenda Item 8: Call in of District Executive Decision on Public Conveniences in Yeovil. He said they could still participate in the debate but, may wish to consider abstaining from any voting, if taken, as it could impact on District Executive's perception of any Scrutiny Committee recommendation.

Accordingly, the following members who were also members of the Area South Committee, declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 8: Call in of District Executive Decision taken on 2nd August 2007 – Public Conveniences in Yeovil, where comments had been previously made by the Area South Committee:

J Vincent Chainey, Peter Gubbins, Hannah Lefeuvre, Pat Martin, Tom Parsley and Alan Smith.

It was noted that in future, the membership of Scrutiny Committee should not be dominated by Members from any one Area Committee.

43. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

45. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman advised that concern had been expressed by some Members that there was currently a waiting list of new customers in settlements of over 1,000 dwellings, requesting a green waste collection.

The Corporate Director (Environment) replied that this was a very temporary situation which had occurred as the service was currently at full capacity due to the wet summer which had created additional vegetation growth. She reminded Members that there were health and safety issues if a collection lorry were overloaded and the cost of purchasing an additional collection lorry would have been in the region of £150,000 which it had not been possible to do, due to the impending hand-over of the waste collection service to ECT Contractors on 14th October. She assured Members that once the service was handed over, then ECT should have the capacity to supply the garden collection service to those households on the temporary waiting list.

The Chairman advised that if Members had any further issues regarding this, then a report could be formally presented to the Scrutiny Committee in the future. Any such concerns should be reported to the Scrutiny Manager in the first instance.

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

Members noted the following:

- The Well Managed Services Overview Commission, looking at the Contact Centre would meet at 9.30am on 20th September with the new interim Head of Customer Services.
- The Economic Vitality and Environment Overview Commission, looking at the provision of cycle paths would meet on 26th September with representatives from Somerset County Council.

Councillor Jean Smith advised that she was pleased to announce that she now had a positive contact, Ms E Bashford, to progress her request to promote the use of real nappies.

47. Call in of District Executive Decision taken on 2nd August 2007 – Public Conveniences in Yeovil (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman reminded Members of the Committee that, if they decided to refer the decision back to the District Executive Committee for reconsideration, then they must have definite reasons for that referral. He invited those Members who had signed the call-in request to speak first.

Councillor Tony Lock expressed his concern that the District Executive decision did not fully address the lack of public toilets in Yeovil. He also referred to the lack of consultation prior to the closure of the toilets in the Quedam Centre.

Councillor Pat Martin concurred that the prior consultation was inadequate and queried whether the District Executive Committee were aware of the impending closure of the Quedam toilets when they agreed to surrender the lease in November 2005.

The Corporate Director (Environment) confirmed that District Executive were not aware of any impending plans for closure when they made the decision to surrender the lease on the toilets at the Quedam Centre in November 2005.

Councillor John V Chainey commented that the two existing public toilets were not strategically located within the town and he felt that other commercial premises toilets were more frequently used.

Councillor Ann Campbell asked that consideration be given to those travelling from outside the town by bus or car and their reliance on public conveniences on arrival.

The Scrutiny Manager reminded the Committee that their focus and deliberation must relate to the decision made by District Executive on 2nd August. Any other issues regarding the provision of public toilets in Yeovil must be the subject of another separate discussion at another time.

Councillor Jo Roundell-Greene, as Portfolio Holder, acknowledged that there was a need to look at public toilet provision in Yeovil in the long term, however this had not formed part of the discussion or decision at District Executive. They had been asked by Yeovil Town Council to consider jointly funding a modular toilet building, however, District Executive had felt that a temporary modular building was not the best way forward. Their view at that time had been to put funding towards a permanent toilet facility somewhere in the town.

In response to questions from Members the Corporate Director (Environment) confirmed that:-

- A survey of toilet facility need within the town was conducted prior to the District Executive decision in November 2005 to surrender the lease on the toilets in the Quedam Centre, which confirmed that provision was sufficient at that time, however, since then, she felt that need could have changed.
- The District Executive were not aware of any impending plans for closure when they took the decision to surrender the lease on the toilets at the Quedam Centre.

- Further survey work was currently underway on the usage of existing town facilities and also a comparative assessment of facilities in other town's of a similar size.

During the ensuing discussion, Members made the following points:

- There is a greater need for more than two public toilet facilities in Yeovil - the policy that states two is sufficient needs reviewing.
- Additional toilet facilities are urgently required before the Christmas shopping period.
- All major businesses in Yeovil were approached and asked to allow public use of their existing toilet facilities, with financial assistance from the Town Council, but none came forward.
- The District Executive report of 2nd August did not refer to any specific policies, only the medium term financial plan, therefore was that decision taken within policy.
- Toilets are more important than the loss of car parking spaces.
- The existing toilets at the Bus Station should be open for longer hours during the Christmas shopping period.

Several Members expressed their wish to defer the Scrutiny Committee decision until the outcome of the request by Yeovil Town Council to Somerset County Council for £50,000 towards new toilet provision, the following day, however, the Scrutiny Manager advised that under the rules of a Call-in report, their decision could not be deferred.

The Chairman then concluded from the discussion that Scrutiny Members preference was to request that District Executive be asked to reconsider their decision taken on 2nd August regarding public conveniences in Yeovil, alongside the existing policies regarding provision of public toilets across the district. Members concurred with this.

RESOLVED: That Members of the Scrutiny Committee were not satisfied that the decision taken by District Executive on 2nd August 2007 was taken in accordance with the Council's policy framework, principally due to not having sight of the existing policy governing the provision of public conveniences.

The Scrutiny Committee therefore recommend that the decision be referred back to the District Executive for reconsideration with specific reference to existing policies.

However, recognising the importance and expediency of on-going work to develop and review a policy relating to long-term public toilet provision, the Scrutiny Committee recommend that this work continue as planned and reports to District Executive in December 2007.

*Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager, (01935) 462148
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48. Corporate Equalities Strategy Progress Report (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman reminded Members that they had requested the update report before them, 9 months after it was first presented in October 2006 and the Portfolio Holder,

Theme Adviser, Assistant Chief Executive and Head of Area Development (West) were in attendance to answer Members questions.

The Head of Area Development, West, reported that slow but steady progress had been made in the implementation of the Strategy, since the departure of the Equalities and Diversity Officer in February 2007, however, he was hopeful to appoint a replacement officer shortly and then expected the Strategy implementation to move forward more quickly. In the meantime, to maintain some momentum, a part-time Consultant had been employed to assist Heads of Service to prepare and develop Service Equality Impact Assessments in line with the agreed Strategy Action Plan.

The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the Corporate Equalities Steering Group was working well with several voluntary sector organisations contributing to the delivery of the Strategy.

The Theme Adviser (Social Inclusion and Equalities) also spoke of the valuable input from external organisations who, at one meeting, had identified womens and ethnic issues at the Goldenstones Leisure Centre. These issues were now being resolved by staff at the Leisure Centre.

The Portfolio Holder (Housing, Environmental Health and Inclusion) said he was impressed at the progress made in implementing the Strategy and looked forward to the appointment of a replacement Equalities and Diversity Officer to progress the Strategy further.

During discussion, Members noted that although there had not been a representative from every ethnic group on the Corporate Equalities Steering Group, it was comprised of people who could bring the perspective of each of the six equalities strands to progress the Strategy.

Members expressed their full support for the implementation of the Strategy and asked that a further progress report be presented to them in 10 months time.

- RESOLVED:**
1. That the Scrutiny Committee note the progress on the Corporate Equalities Action Plan.
 2. That a progress report on the implementation of the Strategy be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in July 2008.

*Andrew Gillespie, Head of Area Development, West – (01460) 260426
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49. Scrutiny Work Programme 2007/08 (Agenda Item 10)

The Scrutiny Manager advised that:-

- The Scrutiny Commission looking at the economic impact of the closure village shops and post offices would be meeting in October, although, the Government's decision on post office closures had been delayed until February 2008.
- The Scrutiny Commission looking at the review of the Octagon Theatre were now acting as a steering group to the Consultant engaged by the Head of Sport, Arts and Leisure.

- She was still waiting to hear from the Carbon Trust regarding the Scrutiny Commission which looked at Objective 19 of the Corporate Plan - CO₂ Emissions, earlier in the year. She agreed to follow this up.

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

*Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager – (01935) 462148
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50. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 11)

The Scrutiny Manager undertook to update the Committee at the next meeting on:-

- The progress of the Quality Parish Council Scheme
- Progress on the proposal to indemnify Members as a consequence of a change on the legal position in respect of serving on outside bodies.

Members noted that more scoping of reports was required to draw out detailed financial information in future.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

*Bob Gillis, Democratic Services Manager – (01935) 462563
e-mail: bob.gillis@southsomerset.gov.uk*

51. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place on **Tuesday 9th October 2007 at 9.30a.m. in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.**

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Chairman