

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday 9th October 2007** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(9.30 am – 12.19 pm)

Present:

Members: Rupert Cox (in the Chair)

John Vincent Chainey	Tom Parsley
Peter Gubbins	Keith Ronaldson
John Hann	Alan Smith
Hannah Lefevre	Sue Steele
Pat Martin	

Also Present:

Tim Carroll	Patrick Palmer
Kim Turner	John Richardson

Officers:

Rina Singh	Assistant Chief Executive
Mark Pollock	Corporate Director (Economic Vitality)
Andrew Gillespie	Head of Area Development - West
Charlotte Jones	Head of Area Development - North
Ian Clarke	Head of Legal & Democratic Services
Simon Gale	Head of Development & Building Control
Tony Johnson	Performance Officer
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Angela Cox	Committee Administrator

52. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 11th September 2007 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

53. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors John Calvert, Geoff Clarke, Derek Nelson and Jean Smith.

54. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

55. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

The Scrutiny Manager advised that following the Scrutiny Call-in report of the District Executive Decision taken on 2nd August 2007 – Public Conveniences in Yeovil, as discussed at the September meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, a joint report on this issue and also the provision of public conveniences in Yeovil would be made to the District Executive on 1st November.

She also advised that a member workshop to discuss the Yeovil Sports Zone had been arranged for 7.00p.m. on 22nd October in the Council Chamber, Brympton Way.

57. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

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

Members noted the following:

- The Economic Vitality and the Environment Overview Commission looking at Objective 19 of the Corporate Plan - CO₂ Emissions was still ongoing and a workshop had been arranged for 8th November with officers from across the authority.
 - The Well Managed Services Overview Commission, looking at the Contact Centre had met on 20th September and would meet again on 24th October with the new interim Customer Services Manager.
 - Following the Commission on Flyposting and Illegal Advertising, a plain English version of the Council's Advertisement Protocol had now been published.
 - The Well Managed Services Overview Commission – Support for Village Shops and Post Offices had met recently and were now being supported through the Economic Development and Planning Policy services.
 - The Budget Scrutiny Commission would meet in November and the papers for this would be issued in due course.
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59. Market Towns Vision Progress Report (Agenda Item 8)

The Head of Area Development (West) spoke on how the Market Town Vision fitted between the Yeovil Town Vision and the Rural Vision. He said it was a vision of the three tiers of local government working strategically to improve market towns through community planning. Although it provided a framework for market towns to work together to achieve common aims, which may not otherwise be achieved individually, it recognized the distinct differences in each town.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Kim Turner, said that although she had only been Chairman of the Market Towns Investment Group since June 2007, she felt the meetings were progressing and the market town representatives were working well together.

The Head of Area Development (North) reminded the Committee that some of the market towns were more visionary and forward thinking than others, but all must be helped to achieve their aspirations. The common themes of their aspirations came from

the three basic ideals to promote Community Safety, Tourism and Environmental Projects. Under these themes, they had identified and were working together to explore enhanced CCTV and the installation of tourism interpretation boards in each town.

It was noted that the delivery of the tourism interpretation boards had been delayed and the Scrutiny Manager undertook to update Members on their expected delivery at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Area Development (West) confirmed that the initial funding of £300,000 would not be allocated equally between each of the 10 market towns, but, would be used where needed to pump prime projects and any further funding would be by capital bid in the future for a specifically identified project.

During the ensuing discussion, Members made the following points:

- The corporate branding of the tourism interpretation boards was a positive joint project
- The Market Town Investment Group (MTIG) met every two months to monitor the progress of the Market Towns Vision
- Further funding for any future projects would be the subject of a Capital bid

The Chairman then concluded that the report be noted and a further report of the Market Town Vision be presented to the Scrutiny Committee prior to any future capital bid to the District Executive.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be NOTED.
2. That a further report of the Market Town Vision be presented to the Scrutiny Committee prior to any future capital bid to the District Executive

*Andrew Gillespie, Head of Area Development, West – (01460) 260426
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60. SSDC – Making a difference in our rural communities - A briefing note for Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 9)

The Head of Area Development (North), spoke of the diversity of Yeovil town the Market Towns and the rural areas within South Somerset. She drew Members attention to her four suggested key areas of focus:-

- Community Planning – identifying and managing isolated rural needs
- The remoteness of rural areas – access to services
- The South Somerset Local Development Framework – planning for sustainability in rural areas
- Land stewardship – contributing to a balanced natural environment

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Patrick Palmer, noted the importance of involving the Economic Development Team and linking in with the Economic Development Strategy. He pointed out that some rural areas were high on the Index of Multiple Deprivation because of access to services issues.

During discussion, Members noted that:-

- The demographics of some villages are changing as young people could no longer afford to buy a property in their home villages.
- Affordable rural housing was key to keeping young people in villages which in turn linked to local jobs.
- There were pockets of high economic activity in some rural villages.
- Support for rural shops and businesses was vital.
- The Market Town Vision should be linked to the rural position statement as people from rural areas often shopped and worked in the market towns.

Members expressed their full support for progressing the rural position statement.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Area Development (North) and the Portfolio Holder for their work in progressing the draft rural position statement.

RESOLVED: That the report be NOTED

*Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development, North – (01458) 257401
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61. Section 106 Agreements (Agenda Item 10)

The Head of Development and Building Control explained that Section 106 Obligations were used in planning permissions where it was not possible to use conditions, for example, on third party land or to seek contributions from a developer. He said the level of work that the Legal Section had undertaken in the past two years to complete Section 106 Obligations for key development sites was unprecedented. Issues he felt required addressing were:-

- Improved communication between Development Control & Legal services
- Having standard templates for Section 106 Obligations on the SSDC Website
- Improving the planning gain from developments

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed the process which his staff followed in compiling a Section 106 Obligations. He said that to improve communication between the Development Control and Legal services a Case Management System was being introduced to enable planning officers to track the progress of Section 106 Obligations.

In response to questions, the Head of Development and Building Control confirmed that:-

- Section 106 Obligations would apply to all housing developments of 15 dwellings or over, although they were sometimes used on individual farm dwellings.
- The South Somerset Draft Deposit Local Plan detailed when planning gain money should be sought and where it should be spent.
- Any planning gain monies had to be spent in the locality of a development to relate to its impact on the local area.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that once a standard suite of draft Section 106 Obligations were posted on the SSDC website, this would help developers to understand what would be required and speed up the planning process.

The Chairman concluded that:-

- The improvements to the processes within the Development Control and Legal services be noted.
- Information on Section 106 Obligations and planning gains be included in Members training.
- the Development Control unit recognise that good communication with Ward Members is important.

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

*Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager – (01935) 462148
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62. Quarterly Monitoring Report – 1st Quarter 2007/08 (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted that although the sickness days per FTE were within 10% of the target, that target was aimed high at being one of the top 25% performing Authorities in this area. Sickness monitoring was rigorous through the Management Board and by personal interview of staff.

The Performance Officer confirmed that abandoned calls within the contact centre were no longer monitored at the decision of the Portfolio Holder, who did not feel they were relevant or accurate. The Portfolio Holder noted that although the percentage of calls being answered within 30 and 60 seconds was still causing concern, he felt that the Well Managed Services Overview Commission, looking at the Contact Centre would put forward some positive solutions.

It was noted that the new Partnership Monitoring reviewed the effectiveness and relevance of SSDC's significant partner organisations.

Members congratulated the Head of Development and Building Control and his team for achieving all their targets on the percentage of planning applications determined within time.

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

*Tony Johnson, HR & Performance – (01935) 462172
e-mail: tony.johnson@southsomerset.gov.uk*

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

The Scrutiny Manager advised that:-

- the report on the implementation of the Corporate Procurement Strategy would now be discussed at the November Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- the Scrutiny Commission looking at Objective 19 of the Corporate Plan - CO₂ Emissions, was still a live Commission.

It was noted that any problems with Members IT provision should first be discussed with the Head of Service and the Portfolio Holder.

The Leader of the Council thanked the Committee for including a discussion on Area Based Decision Making relating to Planning in their Forward Plan.

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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64. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted that the report back on the Scrutiny call-in of the decision on Yeovil Public Conveniences, and, the report back on the provision of public conveniences in Yeovil would be brought as one report to the November meeting of the District Executive.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

*Ian Clarke, Head of Legal & Democratic Services – (01935) 462184
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65. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place on **Tuesday 13th November 2007 at 9.30a.m. in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.**

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Chairman