

South Somerset District Council

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

(9.30 am – 11.20 am)

Present:

Members: Rupert Cox (in the Chair)

John Calvert	Tom Parsley
Geoff Clarke	Keith Ronaldson
John Vincent Chainey	Alan Smith
Peter Gubbins	Jean Smith
Pat Martin	Sue Steele
Derek Nelson	

Officers:

Philip Dolan	Chief Executive
Rina Singh	Corporate Director (Communities)
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny & Acting Democratic Services Manager
Angela Cox	Committee Administrator

81. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 13th November 2007 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

82. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors John Hann and Hannah Lefeuvre.

83. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

84. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

86. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman gave his apologies for the meeting of the full Council on 13th December 2007.

The Chairman reported that he and the Scrutiny Manager had attended the Local Government Information Unit on 4th December and given a presentation on the Scrutiny arrangements at South Somerset. He said their presentation had been well received and mirrored the Government's best practice of allowing non-executive Members to bring forward questions to Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman announced that he would be stepping down as Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee after the January 2008 meeting, due to work commitments

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

The Scrutiny Manager reported that the Vice Chairman, Councillor Sue Steele, the Portfolio Holder for Health, Housing and Inclusion and the Corporate Director (Health and Well-Being) had met to discuss progress of the Scrutiny Commissions on the Housing Advice Centre and Affordable Housing. Following this, the Corporate Director (Health and Well-Being), would be presenting a progress report to the Committee in February or March 2008.

88. Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Update (Agenda Item 8)

The Chief Executive explained the reasons for re-applying for a Comprehensive Performance Reassessment following the Council's 2004 rating of 'Fair'. He said that since that assessment, he felt that the Council's performance had improved greatly and he outlined the benefits of being re-categorised as 'Good' as:-

- Lower fees charged from the Audit Commission
- Grant opportunities would be opened up
- Easier to attract quality staff to a 'Good' Council

He outlined the timetable for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) as:-

- 7th November 2007 – Pre-Inspection meeting, at which he had met with the Inspectors and found them to be very knowledgeable on the South Somerset area.
- 5th December 2007 – Submission of Self-Assessment papers. He commended the Corporate Director (Communities) for her work in compiling these papers.
- 17th January 2008 – Inspector's Tour – This would be a brisk 2½ hour walking tour of Yeovil, starting at the Octagon Theatre, followed by a DVD film of the remainder of the district.
- 28th January 2008 – On-site work. A week long inspection of Council services.
- 14th March 2008 - A draft report of the Inspectors conclusions will be issued for comments.
- 20th May 2008 – The final report and category decision will be issued.

The Chief Executive then outlined the 5 themes that the Council would be assessed on as:-

Ambition - The 2004 Assessment rated SSDC's ambition as poor and lacking direction. He said the new Corporate Plan clearly documented the Council's ambition, influenced by the public and stakeholders, and was in line with the South Somerset Community Strategy and consistent with Somerset Strategic Partnership aspirations.

Prioritisation – The Council's priorities were now outlined in the Corporate Plan's Critical Activities, the Portfolio Statements and in the Medium Term Financial Plan. There had been 6 non-priority areas of work identified in 2006/07 and resources had been moved to higher priority areas.

Capacity – This had been heavily criticised in the 2004 CPA inspection but there were now clearly defined roles and structured development for officers and members. Partner organisations were managed strategically and there was empowering of voluntary sector organisations.

Performance Management – This was now quite different from the 2004 Inspection. There were regular performance reports to Members and officers on risk, sickness, strategic action plans and budgets.

Achievement - SSDC was now an award winning council and there had been strong improvements in priority areas of Planning, Housing, Waste and Recycling and Revenues and Benefits. Any successes not reflected in SSDC's improved National Performance Indicators had been carefully explained in the Self-Assessment papers.

The Chief Executive concluded that, in his opinion, South Somerset were now worthy of a 'Good' CPA rating and he would not have put the Authority forward for the Inspection if he did not feel that it was achievable.

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Executive confirmed that:-

- The CPA Inspectors were still finalising the list of District Councillors they would be interviewing during their inspection week.
- The CPA Inspectors would also be interviewing selected Town and Parish Councillors and representatives from SSDC's partner organisations.
- A series of 13 staff briefings on the CPA Assessment had been arranged in early January 2008 and a presentation would be made to Members at each Area Committee in January 2008.
- The CPA Inspectors would be interested in SSDC's post-Unitary position and would expect to find evidence of closer working arrangements with the County and other District Councils.
- The financial cost of the CPA inspection had not been quantified but it was considerably less officer time than had been spent on the 2004 assessment.
- The Inspection had been a catalyst to complete some essential work, which would be used again for the Direction of Travel information.
- Although the general public had not been unduly concerned by the 'Fair' rating in 2004, it did reflect the level of service provided by the Council at that time.
- Staff morale was good at the moment despite the current recruitment freeze and restricted budgets.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Members requested some clarity on their roles as SSDC representatives on outside bodies. The Chief Executive undertook to take this issue forward to the Management Board.

- On the Inspector's Tour day, there must be a balanced presentation to reflect that one third of the population of South Somerset lived in Yeovil, one third lived in the market towns and one third lived in rural areas.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the analysis of the data captured at the recent State of the District debate would be published on the SSDC website as soon as it had been received from SIMALTO and would also be reported to District Executive.

RESOLVED: That the report be NOTED.

*Philip Dolan, Chief Executive – (01935) 462101
e-mail: philip.dolan@southsomerset.gov.uk*

89. Scrutiny Work Programme 2007/08 (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman advised that the Capital Programme report would now be presented to the January meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Manager advised that:-

- The Annual Audit Management letter would be presented to Scrutiny Committee in January 2008 as the letter reflected some elements of performance management.
- The Housing Advice Centre and Affordable Housing Commissions were being monitored and the Corporate Director (Health and Well-Being), would be presenting a progress report to the Committee in February or March 2008.
- Following a request from Councillor Andrew Turpin, a Commission would be set up to investigate extending the Concessionary Bus Fare scheme in early January 2008. Interested parties were invited to join the Commission.
- The Commission looking at Members IT provision would meet at the end of January 2008. Officers were working on two proposals and would report at the Commission meeting.
- Two exemplar projects under Objective 19 of the Corporate Plan were part of the budget setting process.
- A county-wide Scrutiny Committee is being established to scrutinise the Somerset Waste Partnership.
- A draft report of the Commission looking at the Contact Centre would be presented to Scrutiny Committee in January 2008.
- The Post Office and Village Shops Commission was forming part of the Economic Development Strategy.

Concern was noted at the managing and process of bringing forward major projects within the Council and accountability from Portfolio Holders.

The Scrutiny Manager noted that this was part of the Corporate framework and she would request that the process be circulated to Members from the Corporate Director (Communities).

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

*Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager – (01935) 462148
e-mail: emily.mcguinness@southsomerset.gov.uk*

90. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 14)

The Scrutiny Manager noted that a Full Council meeting would be held on 24th January 2008 to discuss the proposed Yeovil Sports Zone.

During discussion, it was noted that:-

- The new frontline councillors grants scheme could be discontinued as part of the annual budget savings.
- The Quality Parish Charter scheme was still being worked on and would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee along with the Economic Development Strategy in due course.
- To help reduce the amount of paper used by the Council, Members should only receive Agendas for the Committees they serve on and similarly, the publication and distribution of glossy brochures and plastic binders should be reduced. An expansion of the e-mailed Weekly Bulletin could help this.
- All staff should be made aware of the Corporate Diary when booking meetings involving Councillors to prevent booking conflicting meetings.

Councillor Keith Ronaldson queried the progress made following the motion passed at full Council in September 2007 regarding the County wide Byelaws on the Employment of Young People. The Scrutiny Manager undertook to investigate what progress had been made.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Plan be noted with the comments as above.

*Ian Clarke, Head of Legal & Democratic Services – (01935) 462184
e-mail: ian.clarke@southsomerset.gov.uk*

91. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 15)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place on **Tuesday 8th January 2008 at 9.30a.m. in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.**

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Chairman