

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday 8th January 2008** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(9.30 am – 12.15 pm)

Present:

Members: Rupert Cox (in the Chair)

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

Also Present:

Tim Carroll	Sylvia Seal
Tim Inglefield	Martin Wale
Mike Lewis	

Officers:

Vega Sturgess	Corporate Director (Environment)
Rina Singh	Corporate Director (Communities)
Donna Parham	Head of Finance
Steve Joel	Head of Sport, Arts & Leisure
Tony Johnson	HR & Performance Officer
Jason Toogood	Acting Customer Services Manager
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny & Acting Democratic Services Manager
Angela Cox	Committee Administrator

92. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

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

93. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors John Vincent Chainey, John Hann, Derek Nelson and Paull Robathan.

94. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

95. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

97. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman welcomed officers and Councillors from West Somerset Council who were attending to observe SSDC's Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman announced that this was his last Scrutiny Committee meeting prior to stepping down as Chairman and he thanked Committee members both past and present for their support during his 4 ½ year chairmanship.

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

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager reported that the Economic Vitality and Environment Overview Commission looking at Concessionary Bus fares would meet the following day (9th January 2008) at 3.00 p.m. in Committee Room 3/4 in Brympton Way offices.

The Economic Vitality and Environment Overview Commission looking at Members IT provision would meet on Tuesday 5th February at 3.00 p.m. in Committee Room 1, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

99. Capital Programme 2008/09 to 2012/13 (Agenda Item 8)

The Head of Finance circulated the draft minutes of the District Executive meeting held on 3rd January 2008 where the same report had also been discussed. She outlined that the project for the Market House in Castle Cary had failed to secure lottery funding and therefore it would no longer form part of the current Capital bid process. Management Board had outlined recommendations for approval as shown in Appendix E, which would allow sufficient funding for the remaining life of the Corporate Plan.

The Chairman reminded Members that the prioritised schemes at Appendix C with a score of over 550 would go forward for priority funding (with the exception of the Market House in Castle Cary), however, those scoring only 500 were for Members to debate and recommend prioritisation.

In response to questions from Members, the Head of Finance confirmed that:-

- Although there may be slippage in the delivery of some of the projects, the funding was fully committed and only those schemes which had not commenced could be reviewed at a later date and their funding possibly re-allocated.
- Commencement of improvements to the front of the Brympton Way offices had been delayed by one month to 1st February 2008.
- Car parking charges across the district generated in excess of £1m revenue income each year.

Councillor Sylvia Seal, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Well-Being, said that following a recommendation at District Executive, the previous week, she and leisure officers had prioritised all the three proposed schemes of Multi Use Games Areas,

regeneration of community play spaces and new community play spaces into a top 10, 15 and 20 essential schemes, ranging from a capital commitment of £285,000 over 4 years to £485,000 over 5 years for Members to consider. She circulated details of the prioritised schemes to the Committee.

The Corporate Director (Environment) advised that the Council's Car Park Strategy, which had been adopted in early 2007, had clearly identified a deficiency of car parking spaces in the towns of Bruton, Crewkerne and Ilminster, which were impacting on the economic vitality of the towns, particularly Crewkerne. She had re-profiled the capital bid to stagger the spend over 3 years, placing the Bruton scheme in 2010/11, however, the full cost remained £810,000.

Similarly, she said the need for more public toilets in Yeovil was essential at the moment and both the Yeovil Town Council and the Local Area Working Panel of Somerset County Council had promised funding towards a new site, when identified.

Following a brief discussion, Members were in full agreement that both the provision of public toilets in Yeovil and the new car parks in Bruton, Crewkerne and Ilminster should be priority schemes, with the new car park in Crewkerne being the first priority.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Officer time was an integral part of every capital project.
- Additional car parking would create additional revenue income.
- The Frontline Councillor Grants scheme was currently being evaluated and would be reported to each Area Committee.
- Match funding was now essential for all leisure capital projects.
- Any car parking charges introduced into market towns where there are none at the moment would need to take account of the economic impact they would have on the town.

Following the debate, the Head of Finance confirmed that if Members wished to support the 20 prioritised schemes of MUGA's and play spaces at a cost of £485,000, the public toilets in Yeovil at £150,000 and the new car parks in Bruton, Crewkerne and Ilminster at £810,000, then (counting back in the £309,000 for the Market House in Castle Cary) this would leave £8,285,000 remaining for future capital schemes. This also allowed £250,000 to be set aside for the Yeovil Sports Zone scheme, although it was noted that any decision on the future of the Sports Zone would be taken by full Council.

It was proposed and seconded that the above schemes be fully supported. An amendment was then proposed to limit the MUGA's and play spaces funding to the top 10 prioritised schemes at a cost of £285,000, however, this amendment was not seconded and therefore the original proposal was put to the vote and carried (voting: 7 in favour, 1 against, 2 abstentions)

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Committee recommend that support be given to the 20 prioritised schemes of MUGA's and play spaces at a cost of £485,000, the public toilets in Yeovil at £150,000 and the new car parks in Bruton, Crewkerne and Ilminster at £810,000.

Reason: To recommend to Council the new schemes to be included in the revised Capital Programme from 2008/09.

(Voting: 7 in favour, 1 against, 2 abstentions)

*Joanne Garrett, Principal Accountant, Capital & Treasury – (01935) 462456
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100. Review of Contact Centre – Report from Commission (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman reminded Members that the Commission had been set up following the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports to Scrutiny Committee where the Contact Centre had been reported as falling below their target levels for the percentage of telephone calls answered within 30 and 60 seconds.

The Acting Customer Services Manager confirmed that he checked the telephone statistics daily and if a target was not met in one area, then it nearly always impacted upon another.

In response to questions, he confirmed that:-

- Work was ongoing with Head of Services, facilitated by the Corporate Director (Communities), to change management and other back office practices that impacted on the performance of the Contact Centre and offers from Contact Centre staff to assist with small tasks from other departments during quiet telephone periods was helping towards this.
- Payments for some Council services could be made through the Website, but not all. Changes to the payment engine would need to be made to accept more payment services.
- Information on the SSDC Website must be current and accurate to assist the customer advisers when answering customer enquiries by telephone.
- Discussions with other District Councils in Somerset were ongoing to standardise the delivery of all the Somerset Waste Partnership processes on the Northgate telephone system.

During discussion it was noted that the abandoned call ratio was an unreal reflection of the service and should not be reinstated as a Performance Monitor, however, it was recognised as a good management monitoring tool.

The Leader confirmed that the Transformation Board, set up to look at joint working with other neighbouring local authorities, had now been superseded by the Chief Executive Officers and Leaders meeting groups where broader discussions were taking place on joint working.

The Corporate Director (Communities) also confirmed that a trial of Interactive Voice Response (IVR) software for Waste Service information had taken place during December 2007, which had been very successful, however, as it was a trial, the software had been loaned and if Members wished it to continue then there would be a cost implication.

Members were in agreement that a report on the trial of the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) software and an update report on the performance of the Contact Centre be brought to Scrutiny Committee in 6 months time. They further agreed the

recommendations of the Commission with the exception of recommendation (2) that the abandoned call ratio Performance Monitor should not be reinstated as it unfairly reflected the service.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Committee endorse the recommendations of the Contact Centre Review Commission, with the exception of recommendation (2) and request an updated Performance Report from the service in July 2008.

*Rupert Cox, Chairman of Scrutiny Committee
e-mail: Rupert.cox@southsomerset.gov.uk*

101. Chairmanship of Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 10)

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager confirmed that the appointment of the new Chairman of Scrutiny Committee was a decision for full Council, however, the Committee could make a recommendation to them, if they so wished.

Several members of the Scrutiny Committee paid tribute to the outgoing Chairman for his unbiased approach to the role and for maintaining the harmonious and challenging partnership with the District Executive.

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

102. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – 2nd Quarter 2007/08 (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman noted that there were now only two services which were performing below their target levels and he was pleased to report that the 3rd quarter statistics for the Contact Centre telephone calls (circulated at the meeting) now showed that their performance targets were being met.

The HR and Performance Officer confirmed that the Homelessness BVPI 183b was a national performance indicator and as such, must be published. He said that although the homelessness situation varied from reporting quarter to quarter, performance for the year to date would achieve target levels.

RESOLVED: That the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report be noted with the updates as above.

*Tony Johnson, HR & Performance Officer – (01935) 462172
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103. Scrutiny Work Programme 2007/08 (Agenda Item 12)

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that:-

- The Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing would be reporting to Scrutiny Committee in February 2008 on the Housing Service.

- The Economic Vitality and Environment Overview Commission looking at Cycling Promotion would meet during the first week in March 2008.
- The Well Managed Services Overview Commission looking at Village Shops and Post Offices was awaiting the publication of the Council's draft Economic Development Strategy.

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

*Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny & Acting Democratic Services Manager – (01935) 462148
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104. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager noted that the reports on the Quality Parish Charter and the draft Economic Development Strategy would now be discussed at the March or April meetings of District Executive. Also, the outcome of consultation on changes to the Street Trading Policy report due to be considered by District Executive in February was to be withdrawn from the Executive Forward Plan due to other work within the service negating the need for this report.

It was also noted that the Audit Commission would present the Annual Audit Management letter to District Executive in April 2008.

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*

105. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place on **Tuesday 12th February 2008 at 9.30a.m. in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.**

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Chairman