

## South Somerset District Council

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

*(9.30 am – 12.17 pm)*

**Present:**

**Members:** Sue Steele (Chairman)

David Bulmer	Derek Nelson
John Calvert	Tom Parsley
John Vincent Chainey	Keith Ronaldson (from 10.05 am)
Geoff Clarke	Alan Smith
Peter Gubbins (from 9.55 am)	

**Also Present:**

Tim Carroll	Colin Winder
Robin Munday	

**Officers:**

Philip Dolan	Chief Executive
Rina Singh	Corporate Director (Communities)
Sue Eaton	Performance Projects Manager
Gary Russ	Head of ICT and Procurement
Mark Pollock	Corporate Director (Economic Vitality)
Roger Wotton	Senior Enforcement Planner
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny & Acting Democratic Services Manager
Angela Cox	Committee Administrator

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, a minute silence was held in memory of Councillor Jean Smith.

### 118. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

### 119. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Peter Seib, Hannah Lefevre and Pat Martin.

### 120. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

**121. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)**

There were no questions from members of the public.

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**122. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 5)**

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

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**123. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor David Bulmer as the new Vice Chairman of Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman advised Members that she and the Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager had attended a joint meeting of all the Somerset District and County Scrutiny Chairmen and Scrutiny Managers in Bridgwater on 12<sup>th</sup> March. It was agreed that regular meetings of the Scrutiny Chairs and supporting officers would be arranged in order to share ideas and best practice across the county.

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen had agreed that, in future, the Committee would meet informally at 9.30 am to scope questions on the reports in the Agenda and the meeting would formally begin at 10.00 am.

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**124. Progress Reports on Scrutiny Commissions (Agenda Item 7)**

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager reported that a meeting had taken place the previous week with cycling officers from Somerset County Council and Councillors Andrew Turpin and John Richardson to discuss positive ways of promoting cycling in South Somerset. The meeting had been very constructive and because of the links established it was agreed that a Scrutiny Commission was not necessary at this time.

The Well Managed Services Commission looking at the review of Octagon Theatre would be meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> April at 3.00p.m. to review their objectives and reassess the focus of the Commission.

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**125. Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2007/08 (Agenda Item 8)**

The Leader of the Council advised Members that the Inspection Letter report had already been presented to District Executive the previous week. He said that as the Council had recently undergone a CPA Inspection, there was no Direction of Travel report in the Inspection Letter. He particularly drew Members attention to pages 4 and 7 of the letter which detailed the key messages and the significant improving performance of the Council which he said was heartening.

The Chief Executive noted the positive messages in the letter but also noted the cautions regarding future savings to be made to secure the Council's financial standing. He felt the report was good but some issues needed close monitoring. He said the District

Council prided itself on the range of services offered and it was for the management to ensure they were running as efficiently as possible.

He drew Members attention to the Strategic Improvement Plan to which the action points from the Inspection Letter would be incorporated into and then assigned to officers to complete.

During discussion, it was noted that:-

- Cross county boundary partnerships were inevitable and sensible.
- New partnerships should be allowed time to establish themselves before any savings within the organisation were looked for.
- SSDC had decided not to join the founding partners of South West One but would monitor its progress and consider the benefits of joining.

Members felt that it would be beneficial for Scrutiny Committee to periodically review the Strategic Improvement Plan and monitor the progress of its action points. The Chief Executive concurred with this and agreed to produce a 6 monthly report for the Committee.

**RESOLVED:** 1. That the Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.  
2. That a six-monthly progress report on the actions within the Strategic Improvement Plan be presented to the Scrutiny Committee to enable regular and on-going monitoring of the Improvement Plan. The first update to be included in the October Scrutiny Committee Agenda.

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

## 126. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2007/08 (Agenda Item 9)

The Performance Projects Manager said she was pleased to report that there had been no performance exceptions during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter and all the Indicators were either within or within 10% of target.

The Corporate Director (Communities) said the Customer First service should be particularly congratulated for the improvements in the percentage of calls answered within time. She said this was due to a number of small changes within the service, including call handling in the back offices.

In response to questions from Members, the Corporate Director (Communities) confirmed that the contract for the Northgate telephony software was due for renewal shortly and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) software could form part of the renewal specification although there would be a cost implication to this. She agreed to present a report to Scrutiny Committee on the renewal costs and services of the telephony software when it was available.

During discussion it was noted that partnerships were reviewed for their current relevancy by Heads of Services during their annual service planning process. Although this did not cover all the partnerships that SSDC were involved in, it did cover the major ones. The Corporate Director (Communities) confirmed that the Council did keep a

register of all the key and strategic partnerships to which SSDC contributed funding towards and this was a public document. A review of the relevancy of other partnerships was ongoing. She also noted that the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter had identified partnerships as one of the Council's strengths.

The Chief Executive suggested that in the first instance, the list of key and strategic partners be presented to Scrutiny Committee and depending on the outcome, a further report on all SSDC partnerships be presented when that review was completed.

Members were in agreement with this.

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

*Sue Eaton Performance Projects Manager*  
e-mail: [sue.eaton@southsomerset.gov.uk](mailto:sue.eaton@southsomerset.gov.uk) or (01935) 462172

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## 127. Planning Enforcement Policy (Agenda Item 10)

The Corporate Director (Economic Vitality) advised that the existing adopted policy was now out of date and the revised policy before them reflected changes in legislation and working practices within the department. He also noted that the Head of Area Development (South) was currently conducting a council-wide review of all the enforcement services.

The Senior Enforcement Planner advised that a Member Training session on the new Planning Enforcement Policy had been booked for 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008 in the Council Chamber, Brympton Way. He drew Members attention to the new progressive dates on page 8 of the policy which detailed what would happen by when and said a simple guide leaflet was about to be produced for general public distribution. He then asked Members for their comments on the policy.

Members were in agreement that the Planning Enforcement Policy document was well set out and easily understood.

In response to questions from Members, the Senior Enforcement Planner noted that abuse and aggression from customers was increasing and if officers had any doubts as to their personal safety then they would not attend a situation. Members felt that the police service could be encouraged to attend potentially difficult situations with enforcement officers and that the ongoing council-wide review of all enforcement services engage with the police service to explore this.

The Corporate Director (Economic Vitality) confirmed that, although there was no specific budget, if a developer contravened their planning permission then the Council would take firm enforcement action, regardless of cost, if it was in the public interest.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That Scrutiny Committee welcome the clear and revised Planning Enforcement Policy.
2. That the ongoing council-wide review of all enforcement services encompass role of the police service in supporting SSDC enforcement officers.

3. That, when complete, the council-wide review of all enforcement services be brought to Scrutiny Committee.

*Roger Wotton, Senior Enforcement Planner – (01935) 462568  
e-mail: roger.wotton@southsomerset.gov.uk*

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## **128. Request(s) from Councillors for items to be included in the Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)**

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that the Corporate Director (Communities) and the Head of ICT and Procurement were in attendance to agree an appropriate way forward to progress Councillor Munday's request.

Councillor Robin Munday said that as Theme Adviser for E-Government, he had been tasked with reviewing SSDC's IT provision and support to outside bodies. During his investigation, he had found major discrepancies in outdated Service Level Agreements (SLA's) and the buying, storage and maintenance of equipment to the various outside bodies. He felt there were wider issues involved than he alone could review and he asked for the Committees assistance in resolving this.

The Head of ICT and Procurement agreed with Councillor Munday confirming that the support to outside organisations had staff time and resource implications and a formalised level of support would be appreciated by him.

The Corporate Director (Communities) advised that the recent Bentley Jennision report involved restructuring implications for the ICT service and because of this and a current Audit taking place within ICT, there was currently no capacity to provide the information to conduct the review of support to outside bodies unless other work was re-prioritised. She advised that, as this was a sensitive issue involving support to outside organisations, the review be deferred until later in the financial year.

During discussion it was noted that as any decision by SSDC may have financial implications for the outside organisations currently supported, the scoping of the review be deferred until April 2009 to allow time for budgetary considerations in 2010/11.

**RESOLVED:** That a report on the scoping of the review of SSDC ICT services provided to outside organisations be presented to Scrutiny Committee in April 2009.

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

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## **129. Scrutiny Work Programme 2007/08 (Agenda Item 12)**

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager reminded Members that a Scrutiny review meeting of the role of the Regulation Committee was due to take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> April at 10.00 a.m. at Westlands Sports and Social Club. The review meeting would be led by Simon Gale, Head of Development and Building Control.

Members requested a briefing note on the progress of the Yeovil Sports Zone be presented to Scrutiny Committee in May 2008.

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

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

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**130. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)**

The Scrutiny and Acting Democratic Services Manager noted that:-

- the reports on Quality Parish Charters and Food Safety and Health and Safety Service Plans had been deferred to the District Executive Committee meeting in June 2008
- the report on adopting a County-wide Air Quality Strategy would be presented to the District Executive Committee in July 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*

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**131. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)**

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place on **Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2008 at 10.00a.m. in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.**

Members of the Committee are invited to attend at 9.30a.m. to scope questions on the reports in the Agenda.

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**Chairman**