

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 14th August 2008** in the **Main Committee Room**, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00am – 11.35am)

Present:

Members: Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer	Tom Parsley
John Calvert	Keith Ronaldson
John Vincent Chainey	Alan Smith
Geoff Clarke	Andrew Turpin
Tony Lock	

Also Present:

Tim Carroll
Jo Roundell Greene

Officers:

Andy Foyne	Head of Economic Development, Planning and Transport
Mark Pollock	Corporate Director - Economic Vitality
Keith Wheaton-Green	Climate Change Officer
Nigel Collins	Transport Strategy Officer
Sue Eaton	Performance Projects Manager
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager & Acting Democratic Services Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

14. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2008 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

15. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors John Hann, Hannah Lefeuvre, Pat Martin and Derek Nelson.

16. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

17. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

18. Issues Arising from Previous Meetings (Agenda Item 5)

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

19. Chairman's Announcement (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- The Scrutiny Commission on the Role of the Chairman had been postponed. It was hoped that the Commission would be reconvened following the holiday period.
 - The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager reported that she was in the process of recruiting a part-time Scrutiny Research Officer post. The post would be dedicated to undertaking research and providing support to the Scrutiny Commissions.
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20. Progress Reports on Scrutiny Commissions (Agenda Item 7)

This item was taken under Agenda Item 11 - Scrutiny Work Programme.

21. Publication of a Carbon Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Property gave a brief introduction to the report and commented on the amount of work that had been put into preparing the Strategy, which she considered to be an extremely important piece of work.

The Climate Change Officer commented on the progress that the Council had made so far in addressing carbon reduction. He referred to the following:-

- Objective 19 of the Corporate Plan
- The addition of a dedicated Climate Change Officer
- In 2006 the Council had signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change and published a protocol
- The Carbon Trust Programme

A member referred to the Workshop involving members and councillors and asked how the list of suggestions put forward at the workshop compared with the Strategy before them.

In response, the Climate Change Officer confirmed that all ideas raised at the workshop had been incorporated into the Strategy and a second workshop had looked at areas of controversy. He referred to Appendix 4 to the report, which outlined details of the first workshop and said that both officers and members had been given several opportunities to feed their comments/ideas into the Strategy document.

The Corporate Director - Economic Vitality commented on the opportunities for partnership working and gave an example of the Green Travel Plan, which was a priority for the Local Strategic Partnership.

In response to a member question on how the goals of the Strategy would be measured including successes and failures, Members were informed that the Council had to report its carbon emissions to Defra and as part of this process information on energy use, business mileage and usage from fleet vehicles was fed into a spreadsheet for monitoring purposes. The Climate Change Officer referred to the actions contained within the Strategy being both smart and achievable.

The Climate Change Officer explained in further detail the work being undertaken with the Carbon Trust on the Carbon Trust's Local Authority Carbon Management Programme. A Steering Group had been established to identify the council's baseline carbon emissions and the Group was being advised by the Carbon Trust on the most suitable carbon reduction projects to implement.

In response to concerns over the lack of specific information in relation to targets and actions within the Strategy, Members were informed that the Climate Change Officer would have further information on the Carbon Trust Action Plan targets in October. It was also confirmed that the LAA targets would be incorporated into the Strategy.

In response to a question on the amount of officer time and resources required for implementing the Strategy, Members were informed that one of actions within the Strategy was to review officer resources as it was recognised that this was an expanding area of work. The Heads of Service had been made aware of the likely need for additional staff, however at the present time it was felt that staff resources were adequate. It was noted that finances would be more difficult to achieve and that there were a number of actions within the Strategy that were subject to successful funding bids.

In response to questions, members were advised of the following:

- The cost associated with installing woodchip boilers;
- The final Green Travel Plan would be available in December 2009.
- It was up to local authorities to demonstrate justification for lower thresholds for renewable energy requirements on new sites and this could be achieved through the Local Development Framework process.
- The Local Plan included proposals to deliver and achieve sustainable links e.g. cycle/walkways.
- Property Services were responsible for monitoring the consumption of gas use in the council's largest building and would be able to provide reasons for variations. Consumption depended on weather conditions and changes in the use of buildings.

Members welcomed the Strategy as a strong start in addressing this difficult issue and recommended the inclusion of more detailed targets to improve the 'robustness' of this important Strategy.

RESOLVED: That the Carbon Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation Strategy be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee in 6 months, incorporating the more specific Local Area Agreement targets, Carbon Trust Action Plans etc. to address the concerns raised by members.

*Keith Wheaton-Green, Climate Change Officer - (01935) 462651
e-mail: keith.wheaton-green@southsomerset.gov.uk*

22. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – 4th Quarter 2007/08 (Agenda Item 9)

The Performance Projects Manager introduced the performance monitoring report covering the period to the end of the fourth quarter. She drew attention to the performance areas below target levels and the reasons for these variances as outlined in the agenda report.

The Leader of the Council commented on the current situation with regard to homelessness and stated that more people were being affected by the downturn in the economy. He said that the Portfolio Holder for Housing was working closely with external organisations such as the CAB in getting to cases earlier, particularly those people being threatened with repossession.

In response to a member question regarding the monitoring of staff sickness, the Performance Projects Manager confirmed that there were active management and monitoring procedures in place at the Council to deal with both long and short-term sickness.

Members noted that the Performance Officer had recently left SSDC employment and that the Performance Projects Manager would be presenting the performance monitoring reports to future meetings. The next performance monitoring report was due to be submitted to the October Scrutiny Committee meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Quarterly Monitoring report covering the period to the end of the fourth quarter be noted.

*Sue Eaton, Performance Projects Manager – (01935) 462565
e-mail: sue.eaton@southsomerset.gov.uk*

23. Relaxation of 60+ Concessionary Bus Fares (for residents of South Somerset only) (Agenda Item 10)

Councillor Andrew Turpin presented his report and thanked members of the Scrutiny Committee for enabling him to undertake research work into the benefits of a relaxed 60+ concessionary bus scheme. He referred to the take up of the current scheme and how this had transformed peoples lives by improving social interaction and mobility as well as being good for the local economy.

He referred to one of the main reasons for a relaxed 60+ concessionary fare scheme, which would allow residents of South Somerset to attend early morning hospital appointments and explained that many other local authorities had already adopted a similar relaxed policy. He felt that take up would be minimal without involving additional transport but with enormous benefits.

During discussion on this item, members generally supported a relaxed scheme but raised concerns over the cost implications of such a scheme. They felt that further information was required on the cost of the current scheme and noted that a bid would need to be made through the budget setting process for any additional funding.

In response to members' concerns, the Transport Strategy Officer commented on the following:

- The funding arrangements of the present scheme;
- The operation and funding of other authorities were all different. They offered different types of loadings and bus services to that of South Somerset and could therefore not be compared;
- It was too early in the year to identify the cost of the current scheme. A full year of facts was required to see the actual cost of operation;
- The Council could be looking at a substantial increase in costs as a result of a relaxed scheme including incurring costs from the operators for additional transport;
- Consideration of such a scheme would need to be fully costed and reviewed.
- He would have the capacity to carry out further investigation and be in a position to report back findings to the Scrutiny Committee in June 2009.

The Leader of the Council felt that there was a sector of people who could benefit from such a scheme but would argue that there were alternative transport options available for people attending hospital appointments such as taxi services and social car schemes and that travelling by bus was sometimes not a preferred option for people who were sick. He believed that it was not the right time to be introducing such a scheme and that further information was required on identifying trends and costs.

Members generally supported the need for a relaxed concessionary bus fare scheme but felt that further information was required on the full costs of the current scheme and the implications of a relaxed scheme prior to any recommendation being put forward to a change in policy.

RESOLVED: That in August/September 2009, a fully costed proposal be submitted to members, outlining the full cost and service implications of introducing a relaxation to the existing concessionary bus fare scheme.

24. Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/09 (Agenda Item 11)

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that

- The final report from the Scrutiny Commission on the Role of the Chairman would be presented to members in November.
- A report on the Review of the Octagon Theatre would be presented to members in October.
- The Tourism Service was currently being reviewed and following this, will be able to attend a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
- The Affordable Housing Scrutiny Commission was an intensive piece of work and was the principle reason for recruiting an additional resource.

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

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

25. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that there would be an additional District Executive meeting on 28th October to consider the new

Corporate Plan and the Sustainable Community Strategy. There would also be an additional full Council meeting on 30 October to consider these items.

Members noted that the report on the future of recycling bring bank provision, due to be presented to the District Executive Committee in September, was being delayed until the outcome of the trial of the kerbside collection of cardboard and plastic.

Members were informed that both the County-Wide Air Quality Strategy report and the Disabled Facilities Grants report had been deferred to the October meeting of the District Executive.

The decision on the future of Yeovil Sports Zone would be considered at full Council on 20th November 2008.

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that Somerset County Council would be holding their November Executive meeting in South Somerset.

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*

26. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on **Thursday 11th September 2008 at 10.00am 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