

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 11th September 2008** in the **Main Committee Room**, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00am –12.08pm)

Present:

Members: Dave Bulmer (in the Chair)

John Calvert	Derek Nelson
John Vincent Chainey	Tom Parsley
Geoff Clarke	Keith Ronaldson (until 10.40am)
John Hann	Alan Smith

Also Present:

Martin Wale
 Paull Robathan
 Ann Campbell
 Robin Munday

Officers:

Mark Pollock	Corporate Director – Economic Vitality
Helen Rutter	Head of Area Development (East)
Saveria Moss	LSP Co-ordinator
Andrew Gillespie	Head of Area Development (West)
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager & Acting Democratic Services Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

27. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th August 2008 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

28. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Sue Steele, Hannah Lefeuvre and Pat Martin.

29. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

30. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

32. Chairman's Announcement (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman introduced Natalie House who had been seconded to the Scrutiny Research Officer post for three months to work on the Affordable Housing Review.

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

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager reported that the Scrutiny Research Officer would shortly be meeting with Councillor Tom Parsley to progress the review of Affordable Housing.

A Budget Commission was due to be held at 2.00pm on 14th October 2008 to consider the capital and growth bids.

Meeting dates for the Commission initially looking at the role of the Chairman and then going on to review the role of descriptions of all elected members would be circulated in due course. Scrutiny Committee members were asked to encourage members to attend the Commission.

In response to a question on the Call Centre Commission, the Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that an update report had been submitted to Management Board and she would arrange to circulate a copy to Scrutiny Committee members.

It was anticipated that the Octagon Theatre Commission would meet again in October to consider its final report. The final Commission report would be considered at the December Scrutiny Committee meeting.

34. Local Strategic Partnership: South Somerset Together – Annual Review (Agenda Item 8)

Paull Robathan, Chairman of the Local Strategic Partnership gave a presentation to members of the Scrutiny Committee on the role of the LSP including its governance and emerging regulations, funding and budgets. During his presentation, members noted the following:

- The LSP had become much more structured. Government statutory guidance had been published supporting the District LSP being co-dominant with the County LSP and working in partnership together;
- The LSP was continuing to work well and had supported a number of projects as outlined in the agenda report;
- The LSP was continuing to attract new members to its meetings. Membership included faith groups, businesses and the voluntary sector. Natural England had recently asked to join its membership;

- The LSP had funded and initiated a district only Affordable Housing Study. SCC had provided further funding to extend the project across the County;
- A major area of work had been progressing the Sustainable Community Strategy, which was a statutory requirement for SSDC. This was due to be presented to Full Council on 30th October. A briefing was being held for members on 19th September. It was the intention of the LSP to take the Strategy out into the community e.g. Hospitals, Town Councils.
- The LSP had taken on board District Council procedures in the way that the meetings were being run. Further work on improving the governance of the LSP was currently taking place including guidance on declarations of interest;
- The SCC and District Council LSP were both chaired by an independent chair. SCC was responsible for the Local Area Agreement.
- The changes to Somerset County Council funding arrangements to the LSP. A meeting was due to be held with SCC on 3rd October to discuss issues further.

During the Committee's consideration of the report, members noted the following:

- The main role of the LSP was to manage the partnership. The projects were initiated and facilitated by the LSP and were then handed over to the Sub Groups to progress;
- New projects were being initiated on a regular basis and funded from several sources;
- The Joint Enforcement Project was an example of partnership work and would not have happened without the LSP;
- The LSP had a statutory duty to deliver the Sustainable Community Strategy;
- The District Council was recognised as taking a lead role in partnership working;
- The crossover relationship with the other districts. The LSP chairs met on a regular basis. The Biodiversity Action Plan was given as an example of joint working.

The Chairman thanked the Chairman of the Local Strategic Partnership for his informative presentation. Members of the Scrutiny Committee were content with the methodology used for producing the Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Chairman of the Local Strategic Partnership informed Members of the Sustainable Communities Act coming into force in October 2008, which aimed to promote the sustainability of local communities. It was noted that the LGA were holding a launch event on the provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act on 14th October.

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager was asked to arrange a briefing session for members on the implementation of the Sustainable Communities Act.

RESOLVED: That the methodology used for producing the Sustainable Community Strategy be accepted.

*Saveria Moss, LSP Co-ordinator – (01963) 435004
e-mail: saveria.moss@southsomerset.gov.uk*

35. Corporate Equalities Strategy Progress Report (Agenda Item 9)

The Head of Area Development (West) explained that he had corporate responsibility for the Equalities Strategy. He introduced the Theme Advisor (Social Inclusion and Equalities) who had a key role to play in implementing the Corporate Equalities Strategy and also chaired the Equalities Steering Group.

The Head of Area Development (West) introduced the report, which outlined progress on the implementation of the Corporate Equalities Action Plan. He referred to the importance of the Equalities Impact Assessments in ensuring good practice continues and is improved to address the changing make up of the community and the expectations of customer care. He explained that recruitment to the post of Community Cohesion Officer had still not been achieved and that the post was in the process of being re-evaluated through the job evaluation procedure and it was hoped that a successful recruitment process could be achieved in the near future.

In response to questions raised by members, the following points were noted:

- Complaints were dealt with by individual services and were not collated corporately, however this was recognised as a future area that needed to be addressed;
- Information on the Equalities Impact Assessments were available on the Council's website.
- The present Framework had 5 stages to which the Council could aspire; at present the Council was at stage 2;
- The Local Equalities Framework was being modified and would be based on 3 levels and it was the Council's ambition to reach the highest level by 2010.
- Further work was required on gaining a more comprehensive evidence base. It was recognised that some groups of the community were not actively seeking advice and therefore it was difficult to obtain true data;
- Each service area would need to be mindful of their Impact Assessment when developing their Service Plan and recognise the changing make up of the community;
- The importance of improving customer care including access to services to all groups of the community;
- The Heads of Service had been trained on the six equality strands as part of the Impact Assessments process;
- Management Board recognised the Corporate Equalities Strategy as an important area and the Council was making progress in the right direction;
- The use of the clipboard containing a portable hearing loop was widely publicised and that another one could be purchased should the demand for the service increase.

During discussion of the report, members raised the following issues/concerns:

- The lack of progress made in implementing the Strategy and system for recording information regarding the number of complaints;
- The Disability Forum were lobbying the District Council to appoint an Access Officer and it was asked whether this had been taken forward;
- It was questioned whether there was an actual need to recruit a specific post to undertake the work and whether implementation of the Strategy could be achieved within existing resources;
- Whether specific training had been arranged for members on access and cohesion,
- The possibility of combining the post of Cohesion Officer with Access Officer as the issue of access was an important area for the District Council.

In response to members' issues/concerns, the following points were noted:

- The post of Cohesion Officer was an established post within the authority, which was required to move the work forward in order to promote good practice. It was felt that Heads of Service would need some reassurance that matters were being dealt with properly;

- The post of Access Officer was an issue for Management Board to consider;
- All Members had been offered training in the past. The Head of Area Development (West) said that he could circulate a note to members regarding the Equalities Steering Group and its role. Members felt that there was also a need to highlight the role of the Theme Advisor. The Theme Advisor confirmed that she would be willing to receive issues and direct how these could be resolved.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the report on the implementation of the Corporate Equalities Action Plan be noted; and
 - (2) That Management Board urgently consider the possibility of combining the roles of Community Cohesion Officer and Access Officer prior to progressing the recruitment process. The results of this consideration by Management Board will be circulated to Scrutiny members in advance of the October Scrutiny Committee meeting.

*Andrew Gillespie, Head of Area Development (West)- (01460) 260426
e-mail: andrew.gillespie@southsomerset.gov.uk*

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

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that:

- A report on the Cultural Strategy would be considered at the October meeting;
- The Economic Development Strategy would be considered at the November meeting;
- A report on flooding and the response to the Pit Review would be considered at the October meeting;
- The Head of Countryside, Heritage and Tourism would give a presentation at the October meeting on the future and restructuring of the Tourism Service. He would then bring back a further report to a future meeting on any particular issues raised by members;
- The joint scrutiny activity for the Pioneer Somerset review was no longer taking place;
- Taunton Deane District Council were no longer part of the review of the Somerset Waste Partnership. A meeting was due to be arranged for the end of September/early October.

A review on the procedure of the Disposal of Assets was requested by members and added to the Work Programme.

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*

37. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that:

- The date of the future of the recycling bring bank provision had still to be confirmed;
- The proposed changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy would be reported in October;
- The Sustainable Community Strategy would be considered at a special meeting of the District Executive on 28th October and Full Council on 30th October;
- The Bio Diversity Plan would be reported to the District Executive in October and Full Council in November;
- The Cultural Strategy would be reported in December.

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*

38. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on **Thursday 9th October 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