

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 9th October 2008** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 1.33 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

John V Chainey (until 12.00)	Pat Martin
Geoff Clarke	Tom Parsley
John Hann	John Richardson (until 11.50am)
Tony Lock (until 12.00)	Keith Ronaldson (until 11.30am)

Officers:

Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager
David Julian	Head of Countryside, Heritage & Tourism
Roger Meecham	Engineer
Pam Harvey	Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Manager
Sue Eaton	Performance Projects Manager
Rina Singh	Corporate Director (Communities)
Vega Sturgess	Corporate Director (Environment)
David Stapleton	Corporate Director (Health & Well-Being)
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

Other:

David Mansell	Strategy and Communications Team Leader, Somerset Waste Partnership
Steve Read	Managing Director, Somerset Waste Partnership

39. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Calvert, Dave Bulmer, John Calvert, Derek Nelson and Alan Smith.

41. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Pat Martin declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item - 12 Yeovil Sports Zone, as she was a member of the Project Board. She left the room during the consideration of this item.

42. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

44. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman welcomed Councillor John Richardson who had replaced Councillor Hannah Lefevre on the Scrutiny Committee.

45. Progress on Scrutiny Commissions (Agenda Item 7)

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager informed members of the following:

A Budget Commission was being held on Tuesday 14th October at 2.00pm in Committee Rooms 3 & 4. Councillors Geoff Clarke, Tom Parsley and John Richardson expressed an interest in attending the Commission meeting.

The first meeting of the Commission on the role of the Chairman and the role profile for all elected members would be held on Thursday 16th October at 10.00am in the Chairman's Office. It was noted that the Commission was open to all members.

Eleven members had registered their interest in being involved in the Affordable Housing Commission. It was noted that the Scrutiny Research Officer post was soon to become vacant, however, the resource would be replaced at the earliest opportunity. The date for the first meeting would be confirmed in due course.

The Leader of the Council informed members about a report soon to be received from the Rural Development Agency regarding proposals for combing resources in housing. The Leader agreed to provide the Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager with timescales relating to the release of the report and suggested that it may be beneficial to postpone the Commission until the outcome of the report. The Chairman agreed to take these considerations into account.

46. Sort It Plus Trails (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman welcomed David Mansell, Strategy and Communications Team Leader and Steve Read, Managing Director of the Somerset Waste Partnership to the meeting.

Members received a presentation explaining in detail the early findings of the SORT IT PLUS trails, which covered 8,500 households in Mendip, Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane. During the presentation, members noted the following:

- SORT IT PLUS was an integrated package of waste services involving weekly food waste collections, fortnightly refuse collections, optional charged garden waste collections and adding cardboard and plastic bottles to recycling collections. The trials were also testing innovative new collection vehicles and different recycling frequencies;

- The differences between service packages were in the frequencies recycling collections for current standard recyclables and the additional plastic bottle and cardboard;
- The trial rounds had been selected to contain households with similar characteristics.
- The Taunton Deane trial rounds were performing slightly better;
- The costs of each service package would be affected by the results of the trials, especially by the collection yields achieved and by the operational effectiveness of the trial vehicles;
- After a few early problems, most residents on the trials had successfully switched to the new collection systems;
- There was no difference in relationship to frequency of collection between urban and rural areas for standard dry recycling;
- A newsletter and postal questionnaire were delivered to all trial households, and to date over 3,600 questionnaires had been returned, giving a response rate of 36%;
- The total additional costs for each service package in south Somerset;
- The key decision for South Somerset was to agree whether to adopt a SORT IT PLUS service option in 2009/10 and if so which service package to implement;
- An interim report on the results of the trials would be presented to the Somerset Waste Board on 17 October followed by a final report on 21 November.

In response to questions and comments, members were informed of the following:

- Performance and collection yields were closely related to collection frequency;
- It was possible to have different packages in different areas, however it would be more advantageous for each authority to adopt the same package;
- Other vehicles were currently being tested to enable collection of all materials on one vehicle including food waste;
- Compaction vehicle systems had been tested with varying degrees of success. Bottles were proving a challenge to compact;
- The end market for plastic bottles and cardboard including the issues associated with the collection of plastics and contamination;
- The contract with ECT allowed a profit sharing mechanism.

The Corporate Director (Environment) agreed to circulate an information leaflet to members produced by the Somerset Waste Partnership, which provided further details about plastics, cartons and cardboard recycling. Members were asked to contact David Mansell of the Somerset Waste Partnership direct with any specific questions.

Following discussion, the majority of members generally supported Service Package 2 but because of the cost implications involved felt that further final costs for each service package were required in order to make a properly informed decision, particularly bearing in mind the Council's current financial position.

It was noted that the District Executive would be asked to consider the recommendations of the Somerset Waste Board, including final costings for each Service Package, at its meeting in December.

The Chairman thanked David Mansell for his excellent presentation.

RESOLVED: That the final costs for each SORT IT PLUS service package(s) be submitted to the District Executive as part of the budget setting process for 2009/10.

David Mansell, Strategy and Communications Team Leader, Somerset Waste Partnership - 01823 625713

47. Somerset Tourism Partnership - Presentation (Agenda Item 9)

The Head of Countryside, Heritage and Tourism gave a presentation on the role of the Somerset Tourism Partnership. In particular, he mentioned:

- The Somerset Tourism Partnership was a private/public sector partnership that provided a strategic way forward for Tourism in Somerset;
- All of the five local authorities with the exception of West Somerset were involved in the Partnership;
- The main objective of the Partnership was the production of the 'Jewel of the South West Somerset Brochure' of which 350,000 copies had been produced;
- The brochure was due to be evaluated at the end of the year and revisiting how it should be presented;
- The aim of the brochure was to market quality short break holidays;
- The Partnership had been in operation for two years. During this time there had been a huge amount of co-operation between the public and private sector;
- The Somerset Tourism Partnership achievements included promoting its website and securing funding with SDRWA;
- There was due to be a major announcement in the way that South West Tourism operated;
- The current arrangements of the Partnership with regard to governance, scrutiny and accountability. It was noted at present there were no procedures in place;
- An estimated 7,600 holidays were influenced by the Somerset – The Jewel of the South West brochure.
- The website was currently getting within the region of 3,500 hits per day with approximately half of the users staying on the website for at least 4 or 5 minutes.
- Tourism was the sixth largest industry in the South West.

Following the presentation, members discussed the following issues:

- The remit of the Tourist Information Centres including improvements that could be made to their operation in terms of location and opening hours;
- The role of Chard and Ilminster linking with the Blackdown Hills;
- South Somerset had developed a niche market centred around the culture aspect;

Members considered the issue of governance of the Somerset Tourism Partnership and agreed that Officers should explore the potential of the shared services agenda of Pioneer Somerset for the Tourism Service.

RESOLVED: That Officers explore the potential of the shared services agenda of Pioneer Somerset for the Tourism Service. A report to be brought back to the December meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

*David Julian, Head of Countryside, Heritage & Tourism - (01935 462279)
e-mail: david.julian@southsomerset.gov.uk*

48. Flooding - response to the Pit Review (Agenda Item 10)

The Chairman welcomed the Engineer and the Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Manager to the meeting. Members received a powerpoint presentation illustrating diagrams provided by the Met Office on historic monthly rainfall and anomalies for the South West including rainfall percentages above normal for July 2007

and May 2008. Copies of the slides were circulated to members at the meeting.

During the presentation of the report, members were informed about the recent local flooding incidents that had occurred in July and September. Members noted the following points:

- Castle Cary, Yeovil and Ilminster had been affected by the flooding in July;
- A total number of 60 telephone calls had been taken requesting sandbags;
- 3 crews across the district had been involved in the distribution of sandbags with calls for sandbags ceasing at around 9.30pm;
- Several families had to be evacuated from their homes and were re-located to the local public house;
- Following the flooding, a public meeting was held in Crewkerne involving the Town Council, Wessex Water, the Police and the District Council;
- The main reason for the flooding was due to drainage systems being unable to cope together with local storms being very unpredictable.

In referring to the Pitt Review, the Engineer and Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Manager informed Members that local authorities were required to lead on 21 of the recommendations, however the report was not specific as to whether this was the responsibility of the district Council or the Highway Authority. Further clarification on this issue was expected from DEFRA.

In response to a member question on the reasons for the recent flooding, members were informed that the flooding in Horsey Lane, Yeovil had been a result of an overflow at a weak point in the drainage system. The flooding in Crewkerne had been connected to the public sewerage system and there being too much rain at once.

Members were informed that local parish workshops were being organised to enable communities to help themselves. Parishes were being encouraged to have sandbags located locally to ensure a better more targeted response. The first Workshop was due to be held in Queen Camel in December.

In response to questions and comments, members were informed of the following:

- There was new planning legislation in relation to paving front lawns which required the installation of sustainable drainage systems;
- Samples of floodgates would be available at the Workshop;
- A culvert device was available with no attachments, which could be used for Listed Buildings.

RESOLVED: That the report and presentation be noted.

*Roger Meecham, Engineer - (01935) 462069
e-mail: roger.meecham@southsomerset.gov.uk*

49. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report - Quarter 1, 2008-09 (Agenda Item 11)

The Performance Projects Manager introduced the report, which contained the performance monitoring report covering the period to the end of the first quarter (1 April to 30 June 2008). She explained that the report had been made more user friendly by the introduction of a pie chart outlining performance compared to target. She referred to

the targets levels and explained that performance on or above target levels was 69%.

Members noted that the indicator for the average length of stay in Bed and Breakfast accommodation was below target due to a number of hard to place families remaining in bed and breakfast and also due to the way that the indicator was calculated this had a significant effect on it.

The Performance Projects Manager concluded that generally performance was good and continuing to improve.

In response to a question on whether there had been any impact on figures because of emigrants moving away as a result of the current economic climate, members noted that any indication of this would come from the health service and schooling figures.

In response to a member question on whether there were adequate staff resources to cope with the predicted housing problem as a result of the current economic climate, the Corporate Director (Health & Wellbeing) replied that the Housing Service was currently going through a lean thinking process and as a result would have a formula for staffing requirements based upon the levels of workload.

The Leader of the Council commented that the Council was working proactively with partners to target those people at risk of repossession.

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

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

50. Yeovil Sports Zone (Agenda Item 12)

Having earlier declared a personal and prejudicial interest, Councillor Pat Martin, left the room during consideration of this item, as she was a member of the Project Board.

Scrutiny Committee members requested that the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture attend the meeting to answer member questions.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture introduced the report and informed members of the following:

- A Ward Member Briefing would take place on 17th October.
- A full member briefing would take place on 20th October. The reports would all be circulated prior to the meeting and a copy of the documents would be available on CD. Full information packs would also be available in the Members Room.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture confirmed that she would be willing to receive e-mailed comments from members who were unable to attend the briefing meeting on 20th October and copies of any comments received would be circulated to all members attending the briefing.

Councillor Tom Parsley referred to the issue of affordability and requested that the financial information provided in the reports should be as clear and robust as possible.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee were content to note the update report on the status of Yeovil Sports Zone as outlined in the agenda report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

*Steve Joel, Head of Sport, Arts & Leisure - (01935) 462278
e-mail: steve.joel@southsomerset.gov.uk*

51. Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/09 (Agenda Item 13)

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that:

- The Economic Development Strategy would not be available for the November meeting.
- An item on the role of the Voluntary Sector was suggested for the November meeting. It was agreed to invite Sam Healey from the SSVCA and the District Council's Voluntary Sector Development Officer to give a presentation on the role of the SSVCA and in particular its role in ensuring the work of the voluntary sector is co-ordinated.

It was noted that Management Board had not supported the Scrutiny Committee's proposal of combining the role of Cohesion Officer and Access Officer as it was felt that they were two very distinct roles and that an Access Officer would need to be based in Planning.

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

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

52. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 14)

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager advised that:

- An item on the protocol agreement with South Somerset Homes was due to be considered by the District Executive on 28th October.
- A report on the value for money evaluation of the Homeless Prevention Fund would now be considered by the Executive in December

The Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager agreed to seek clarification from the Head of Democratic Services regarding the timescale for the report on the proposal to indemnify members/officers as a consequence of a change on the legal position in respect of servicing on outside bodies. It was noted that legislation on this matter had now been received.

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*

53. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 15)

Members noted that the next meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** would be held on **Thursday 13th November 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