

# The Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 24 February 2009 from 10:00 in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton.

## Present

(All Members were present for the duration of the meeting unless otherwise specified)

Mr A J Govier (in the Chair)  
Mr D I Nelson (Vice-Chairman)

Mr W J Dyke	Mr A Paul (to 13:05)
Mr I Galloway	Mr A Trollope-Bellew
Mr A Ham (Substitute)	Mr R A Tully
Mrs C Lawrence	Mr D Yeomans (Substitute)
Mr J Mochnacz	

**Executive Board Members Present:** Mr S Crabb, Hazel Prior-Sankey, and Mr A Shire.

**Other Members Present:** None

**Apologies:** Mr P A Gubbins, Mr D J Huxtable and Mr J D Osman. Jill Shortland – Leader of Council, Mr D Greene – Portfolio Holder.

### 381 Declarations of interest – agenda item 2

- 1.0 Mr Govier, Mrs Lawrence, Mr Nelson, Mr Osman, Mr Paul all declared a personal interest as District Councillors in respect of agenda item 5.
- 1.1 Members of the Executive Board present declared a prejudicial interest with regard to agenda item 6 but were invited to remain by the Committee to answer questions and provide explanation or clarification during the meeting.

### 382 Minutes of 27 January meeting – agenda item 3

- 1.0 Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2009 were received and approved as accurate and signed as correct.

### 383 Public question time – agenda item 4

- 1.0 There were no questions asked, statements/comments made or petitions presented.

**384 Joint scrutiny panels – review of operation – agenda item 5**

- 1.0 The Committee considered this report about the two informal joint scrutiny panel reviews that had been undertaken of the Pioneer Somerset Programme and the Somerset Waste Partnership. Members were reminded that in June 2008 the Committee had agreed to engage with the district councils to undertake two joint scrutiny reviews. The review of Pioneer Somerset had been limited to three meetings and the review of the Somerset Waste Partnership was limited to two meetings.
- 1.1 The Committee had agreed that Mr Paul and Mr Nelson would represent the Council on the joint scrutiny panel to review the Phase 1 of the Pioneer Somerset Programme, and the Environment Scrutiny Sub-Committee had nominated Mr Yeomans and Mr Tully to the joint scrutiny panel reviewing the first twelve months of the Somerset Waste Partnership.
- 1.2 When agreeing to participate in the joint reviews the Committee had decided that before agreeing to further joint scrutiny they wished to evaluate how the panels had worked. This was to consider if improvements could be made to the way joint scrutiny operated and what resources had been required or would be necessary in future.
- 1.3 Members noted that it had taken some time before all the Councils had nominated their representatives, consequently the joint scrutiny panels did not hold their first meetings until October 2008 at which they finalised their objectives. Each panel then held meetings that were open to the press and public with relevant executive Members and lead officers before concluding their scrutiny toward the end of 2008. The brief for each panel, copies of the minutes from their meetings and their final reports had been attached as appendices to the report.
- 1.4 Both panels comprised two Members from each participating council, and elected their own chairman before agreeing how they would operate. Each panel had a scrutiny officer and a committee administrator allocated for the reviews, provided by the County Council and South Somerset District Council, with meetings held at District and County Council premises in Bridgwater, Shepton Mallet and Taunton.
- 1.5 The Committee invited contributions from those Members who had served on both panels and the Committee heard from Mr Turner a Member of Sedgemoor District Council who had chaired the scrutiny panel reviewing Pioneer Somerset and Mr Yeomans a County Council Member who had chaired the panel that had considered the first year of operation of the Somerset Waste Partnership.
- 1.6 Mr Turner reflected that his panel's main concerns with Pioneer Somerset had been about Programme Management and Communications, particularly the information available/relayed to elected Members. The panel had made a number of recommendations to the Leader's Group and they hoped that those would assist the next phase of the programme to move forward quickly and

securely.

- 1.7 The Pioneer Somerset scrutiny panel had thought that scrutiny in some form should continue in the future and this was supported by the Leaders and Chief Executives who attended their meetings. Mr Turner noted that each Council had been identified as the lead for a specific area of the Pioneer Somerset programme and he suggested that future scrutiny could focus on how each Council had progressed on its specific area of responsibility. Mr Turner thanked the Council's Service Manager – Scrutiny for all his efforts in arranging the meetings and bringing all the necessary people together, and it was with that previous increased workload in mind that he proposed the single issue reviews for the future as they might be less demanding on Member and officer time.
- 1.8 There was a general discussion of the Pioneer Somerset project as well as the work of the joint scrutiny panel and a recurring theme was that many Members had felt that Pioneer Somerset was 'unitary by the backdoor'. However many Members noted that improving co-operative work and partnerships between the Councils was important and necessary to improve services and achieve efficiencies and joint scrutiny was a useful way of building working relationships.
- 1.9 The Committee heard that the original scope of Pioneer Somerset that included 9 workstreams had been too ambitious however a subsequent and more streamlined programme had been agreed by all 6 Councils and a SOLACE consultant was completing a 'stock-take' to identify barriers for the future so momentum could be enhanced for Phase 2. It was acknowledged that all of the Councils worked differently; for example although some of the District Councils used the same computer software, they were each using and operating it differently.
- 2.0 Members thought that encouragement could be drawn from this initial phase of scrutiny that had widened Members knowledge and awareness of issues in Councils other than their own. On a wider point it was also noted the despite differences of opinion on occasion the Councils were still working together on Pioneer Somerset and scrutiny would be a useful tool to help identify problems areas and highlight the successes of the Pioneer Somerset project in future.
- 2.1 The Chairman invited Mr Yeomans to address the Committee and Members heard that originally his Panel had been tasked to include Kerbside recycling as part of the waste review, but some districts had chosen to do this work locally. His panel had held two meetings and at the second meeting a series of questions were addressed to the Members and officers of the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP).
- 2.2 It proved to be a constructive, interesting and worthwhile exercise for 'both sides' with all of the panel's questions being answered to their satisfaction and its Members believed the joint scrutiny approach had been successful. His panel had not identified any issues that required further review, but indicated that should an issue arise in future it may be beneficial to reconvene at such a time.

- 2.3 The Committee also heard from Mr Read – Managing Director of the SWP who indicated his willingness to participate in future scrutiny panels should they meet again when issues were identified and merited further deliberation. Mr Read thought the panel had made a good start in reviewing many subjects at a strategic level. He felt the panel could in future consider fewer topics but cover those topics in more depth perhaps holding workshop style reviews.
- 2.4 Mr Yeomans noted that the scrutiny of the SWP had progressed smoothly and in contrast to the Pioneer review had been apolitical, and the SWP itself, along with the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP), provided evidence that more could be achieved through collaborative working amongst the Councils.
- 2.5 Members heard from the County Council’s Service Manager – Scrutiny who stated that future scrutiny reviews could add value if they did not duplicate the work of others; including Local Strategic Partnerships, participating Councils, public inspectorates and existing any scrutiny arrangements. It was noted that Councils in other areas had formed a joint scrutiny chairs network and this had helped to focus attention on meaningful reviews.
- 2.6 Regarding adding value there was a question about the cost/resource implications of the scrutiny reviews and it was noted if each council had considered the same topic on its own, this would have taken more officer and Member time. However it was also recognised that all the Councils had to provide lead Members and officers to attend the panel meetings and this required a time and diary commitment that had not been planned in advance and might be difficult to sustain if there were more joint reviews. The Scrutiny Manager noted that considerable time for preparation and support work had been required to ensure the joint reviews were successful, more than would be required to support a similar individual Council’s scrutiny.
- 2.7 Members noted the report and were encouraged with the positive start joint scrutiny had made in providing a critical friend role in two important areas.

**385 2008/09 Performance monitoring report – Quarter 3 – agenda item 6**

- 1.0 The Committee considered this report about how the Council had performed in its important areas of business. It was explained that the way the Council monitored its performance had been streamlined, and the report summarised by exception performance of the annual plan against actions undertaken and outcomes achieved.
- 1.1 It was explained that the National Indicator Set (NIS) had replaced the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPs) and the introduction of the National Indicator Set (NIS) which were cross cutting and focused on the performance of an area rather than individual organisations. The Council had reviewed its monitoring arrangements so that they aligned more closely with its various partner organisations. The key differences to the reporting framework included; changed quarterly reporting, and different performance alerts/symbols that were based on a 4 banded “traffic light” scheme.

- 1.2 Members heard that the quarterly reports would be: Quarter 1: June/July – primarily a highlights report to look forward to next year, with targets set against the indicators and action plans put in place for poor performing indicators; Quarter 2: October/November – progress against the criteria target, direction of travel and benchmark based on latest performance available; Quarter 3: January/February – as quarter 2; Quarter 4: June/July – summary of progress against the three criteria, with the report looking at the performance of the previous year.
- 1.3 There was a question about maintaining and ensuring continued good quality data, for reliable and robust decision-making. For the performance monitoring reports it was stated that improved data quality was ensured as only authorised and validated data was used after a series of checks and authorisations had been made at service level and centrally before data was available for wider usage. This had been achieved by using a process known as “workflow” using the performance management system Performance Plus (P+).
- 1.4 Attention turned to the performance dashboard that provided a strategic overview of performance to allow for better understanding of how the Council was doing. It was noted that the number of actions that would be measured had been cut from 124 to 50, and the Council was expecting to complete 86% of actions in the annual plan.
- 1.5 There was a brief discussion about the use of the new 4 banded ‘traffic light’ symbols to show performance. It was explained that the Council and its partners had spent time working on the system so that LAA performance would be reported in the same way. The Committee agreed to consider the report in further detail by looking at the performance in turn of each Directorate.
- 1.6 The Corporate Director – Children and Young People Directorate (CYPD) highlighted some of the achievements in his Directorate and Members were encouraged that the number of school days missed due to absence in both primary and secondary schools had continued to fall. It was also noted that there had been a marked reduction in the overall number of permanent exclusions. Regarding a question about the level of funding available to Foundation Schools from the Council it was explained that this was no different to the funding for any non-Foundation School and the Corporate Director - CYPD agreed to write to the Member who had raised this issue.
- 1.7 Members then heard from the Corporate Director – Resources who began by explaining the annual efficiency statement and target for 2007/08. Although the efficiency annual target was showing as a red triangle (below target) on the performance dashboard the Council had forecast a saving of £6.281m and this represented a 27% increase in the level of cashable savings achieved last year. Also Members were pleased to note that whereas last year the Council had been criticised for having a general reserves balance that exceeded the £10m maximum, in the latest assessment it was noted that reserve fund balances had been maintained within target levels.
- 1.8 There was a question about the projected capital slippage that was showing as

likely to exceed 10% and the Portfolio Holder – Strategic Resources and Finance explained that to date £5.3m of the total slippage of £7m had been due to delays arising on a limited number of large schemes, as a result of circumstances that were difficult to control.

- 1.9 The Committee heard from the Corporate Director – Community who explained that Officers in her Directorate were currently predicting that good performance would be sustained or improved across the majority of activities for 2008/09. However Members heard that the number of physical visits to Libraries continued to fall and although this indicator was going to be removed in future it may affect the ‘culture score’ of the CPA assessment. It was noted that the number of ‘virtual visits’ to Somerset Libraries had increased by 72% to 1.7 million.
- 2.0 There was a question about the place survey and it was stated that the results were being analysed as the weighting that had been applied had to be verified. There was a brief discussion about the employee volunteering policy and it was acknowledged that progress had been slow, mainly because the Council was already stretched for capacity in many areas and services were unable to release staff to participate. It was reported that options were being reviewed within the Community Directorate to support this further and it could be a way of helping unemployed people back in to work.
- 2.1 Attention turned to the performance of the Environment Directorate and Members heard from Head of Highways and Passenger Transport and he began by stating that good performance had been maintained with all environment targets likely to be achieved.
- 2.2 Members heard that 90% of the Environment Directorate’s Annual Plan actions were on target to be achieved, with only ‘Increase access to Affordable Housing’ at risk. It was thought that the impact of the economic downturn would have a significant effect on the Council’s ability along with partner bodies to achieve the challenging targets that had been agreed through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) process. However as there was no data to demonstrate the tangible effect of the recession, the government had advised the Government of South West (GOSW) that the target should not be included in the LAA refresh process, and it would therefore remain unaltered.
- 2.3 It was noted that the information regarding people killed and seriously injured (KSI), including children KSI and also slight injuries, had shown that these numbers had reduced on last years figure. Although no longer a nationally presented indicator Members were pleased to note that the first two (of four) survey results for BV178, Footpaths and Rights of Way accessibility were encouraging with results of 76.8% and 70.9% respectively.
- 2.4 There was a brief discussion about a lack of feedback from the Highways department in the Environment Directorate, particularly after a fault or problem had been reported, and often when the fault had been remedied this was not communicated. Members heard that electronic methods were mostly used to feedback progress made when complaints were raised, and the customer

access team were currently undertaking a project to examine how to improve the information that was provided to Members, including providing updates and feedback when complaints were received.

2.5 There was a brief discussion about the 'red routes' and the road signs used along those routes that had proved to be an effective part of a wider campaign using engineering, education and enforcement to reduce accidents across Somerset on dangerous roads. Members were informed that extra teams of repair gangs had been deployed to make good damaged road surfaces in places the Council had been notified about problems, including pot-holes.

2.6 The report was accepted.

**386 Executive Board forward plan – agenda item 7**

1.0 The Committee considered this report and noted that an incorrect version of the Executive Board forward plan had been circulated. Members agreed to consider this item at the next meeting.

**387 Scrutiny work programme – agenda item 8**

1.0 The Committee considered and noted the scrutiny work programme, the next meeting scheduled for Tuesday 17 March 2009 at 10:00 in the Luttrell Room. The Chairmen of the Community Sub-Committee and the Environment Sub-Committee advised Members that the work programme did not reflect their Sub-Committee's future agenda items.

**388 Summary of outcomes from the Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings – agenda item 9**

1.0 The summary of outcomes from the following meetings were noted:

1.1 Children and Young People Sub-Committee – 22 January 2009;  
Health Sub-Committee – 26 January 2009.

**389 Any other business of urgency – agenda item 10**

1.0 There were no items of urgency.

(The meeting ended at 13:07)

**Scrutiny Committee Chairman  
Andrew Govier**