

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 12th March 2009** in the **Main Committee Room**, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 12.05 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer	Derek Nelson
John Vincent Chainey	Tom Parsley
Geoff Clarke	John Richardson
John Hann	Keith Ronaldson
Tony Lock	
Pat Martin	

Also Present:

Councillors Tim Carroll and Jo Roundell Greene

Officers:

Brian Tufton	Head of Engineering and Property
Alice Knight	Voluntary Sector Development Officer
Vega Sturgess	Corporate Director (Environment)
David Stapleton	Corporate Director (Health & Well-being)
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

96. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th February 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the inclusion of Councillor John Richardson being included under the list of members present at the meeting.

97. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Andrew Turpin and Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager and Acting Democratic Services Manager.

98. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

99. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

100. Issues Arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 5)

Members were informed that West Somerset District Council had re-engaged with the Pioneer Somerset initiative.

101. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

102. Update from District Executive (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman updated members on the meeting of the District Executive held on Thursday 5th March 2009. She made the following points:

- South Somerset was the joint top scoring authority in the South West in an assessment by the Audit Commission of how it used its resources in 2008.
 - The Executive approved matters relating to the proposed governance arrangements for the Into Somerset inward investment initiative;
 - District Executive confirmed its support for retaining the quarterly performance monitoring arrangements and for the provision of an enhanced performance management software system to provide detailed performance information;
 - The Executive received a petition requesting first hour free parking in Crewkerne Town. The petition was rejected, as there was significant free on-street parking in the town already.
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103. South Somerset Voluntary & Community Action (SSVCA) (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman welcomed Sam Healy, Chief Officer of South Somerset Voluntary & Community Action and Alice Knight, Voluntary Sector Development Officer to the meeting.

Members received a presentation on the work of the SSVCA. She explained:

- the aims of the organisation;
- the main aims and progress over the last two years of the following projects:
 - Furnicare;
 - Community Transport;
 - Community Car Scheme;
 - South Somerset Links;
 - Talking Computers;
 - Computer Recycling;
 - Volunteer Centre – South Somerset;
- the five core services of a CVS
 - services & support
 - liaison
 - representation
 - development work
 - strategic partnerships
- the achievements over the last two years and future projects.

Members commended the work of the organisation and thanked Sam Healy and her team for all hard work they had undertaken.

Following the presentation, Members put forward a number of questions and in response the Chief Officer reported:

- that the Community Transport project received no revenue support but did receive a grant from Area North Committee;
- the concessionary fares scheme had no affect on the Community Transport project as the service was aimed at customers who were unable to access mainstream transport;
- a grant of £430,000 had been received to bring the Somerset CVS's to a similar level of service;
- the overall core costs for the running of SSVCA was in the region of £130,000;
- that the SSVCA employed in the region of 60 – 70 members of staff who were mostly part-time;
- that work was currently being undertaken on updating the database to ensure that the information for each organisation was correct and once completed it would be fairly easy to produce a directory;
- the current economic climate was not having much effect at present, however groups were more likely to be hit in the future because of decreasing government funding;
- that she was trying hard to get groups to be more proactive and to share resources such as minibuses and volunteers;
- that all the projects were financially sustainable;
- that the voluntary and charity sector were one and the same.

One member commented on there being no sharing of best practice and hoped that this could be overcome. He queried whether the SSVCA would be able to give a steer as to whether an application for SSDC funding was good or not. In response, the Chief Officer said that this would be difficult as it wouldn't be fair to the organisations that she wasn't aware of and that there were over 500 organisations in existence.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Officer and the Voluntary Sector Development Officer for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the content of the presentation be noted.

*Alice Knight, Voluntary Sector Development Officer – (10963) 435061
e-mail: alice.knight@southsomerset.gov.uk*

104. Procedure for Disposal of Assets – Land and Property (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Property introduced the report, which outlined the Council's policies and procedures in relation to the disposal of assets as requested by Members of the Scrutiny Committee at their meeting in December 2008.

The Head of Engineering and Property referred Members to the Property Book that included basic details of the Council's buildings and car parks, which was available in the Members Room.

In response to a member question regarding whether there was a case for external consultation, the Head of Engineering and Property explained that he had regular contact with the County Corporate Property Manager to share information. He also carried out checks with other public bodies where the Council had surplus accommodation or property.

Members were informed that receipts for small pieces of land valued under £10,000 were returned into the service department budget as anything less than £10,000 was not regarded as capital. It was not viable for the money to go into a central account as the receipts were only for small amounts and there was not much remaining once the admin costs had been taken out.

In response to questions, members were informed that:

- Selling land did not automatically mean that the development would go ahead, they were always subject to planning permission being obtained;
- Greater delegated powers were given to Portfolio Holders in 2002 allowing the Portfolio Holder to approve all disposals where the property value is less than £10,000, however it could be debated that £100,000 in the case of land transfers to Registered Social Landlords could be too high in the current climate;
- All disposals where the value is estimated to exceed £10,000 (£100,000 in the case of land transfers to RSL's) are approved by the District Executive;
- There was an option for the Council to go externally for legal work when there were peaks in workload.

In response to a member comment regarding land being given at nil consideration, members were informed that the Council don't take any receipt and that the value of land is included as a grant. It was felt that public perception was very different and it was difficult to make people understand the process. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Property explained that the Council consulted on pieces of land that were available. Members felt that where land had been gifted to RSL's any subsequent agents advertising property should clearly state shared ownership arrangements and this should be conveyed to the Portfolio Holder for Health, Housing & Inclusion and the Registered State Landlords.

In response to a member question concerning the role of obtaining commercial advice, the Head of Engineering and Property advised that the Council was not bound to use the District Valuer and that the Council did use a commercial valuer for a second or alternative opinion when necessary particularly for cases where the market was volatile.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Engineering and Property for attending the meeting. She also thanked him for all the hard work he had undertaken during his time with South Somerset, as this was his last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee before his retirement.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holders for Environment & Property and Health, Housing & Inclusion be made aware of Scrutiny Committee's views that where land has been gifted to RSL's any subsequent agents advertising property should clearly state shared ownership arrangements. The Portfolio Holders be asked to respond within 6 months.

*Brian Tufton, Head of Engineering and Property – (01935) 462279
e-mail: brian.tufton@southsomerset.gov.uk*

105. Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/09 (Agenda Item 10)

Councillor Tom Parsley referred to the quarterly monitoring performance reports and asked whether reports could be brought to the Scrutiny Committee more quickly. In response, the Corporate Director (Environment) reported that Management Board were meeting to discuss how performance was presented in the future.

Councillor Tom Parsley requested a report on the future of Yeovil Vision. It was noted that this would need to be a confidential report.

A report on the future of recycling bring bank provision was added to the Work Programme for June prior to it being consider by District Executive in July.

Members expressed concerns over the lack of information coming forward on the Pioneer Somerset initiative. It was noted that an update report was due to be considered by the District Executive in June followed by Scrutiny in July.

A report on the lessons learnt at Wincanton Sports Centre was added to the Scrutiny Work Programme for July.

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

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

106. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted that the item on the proposal to indemnify members/officers as a consequence of a change on the legal position in respect of serving on outside bodies would be considered by the District Executive in July.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Plan be noted as outlined in the agenda with the update as above.

*Ian Clarke, Head of Legal & Democratic Services – (01935) 462184
e-mail: ian.clarke@southsomerset.gov.uk*

107. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Thursday 9th April 2009 at 10.00am in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

Members of the Committee are invited to attend at 9.30am to scope questions on the report in the Agenda.

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Chairman