

Scrutiny Committee – 14th May 2009

1. **Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on Thursday 9th April 2009 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 11.55 a.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer
John Calvert
Geoff Clarke
John Hann
Tony Lock

Pat Martin
Derek Nelson
Keith Ronaldson
Alan Smith

Also Present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Robin Munday and Jo Roundell Greene

Officers:

Phil Dolan	Chief Executive
Sue Eaton	Performance and Communications Manager
Vega Sturgess	Corporate Director (Environment)
David Stapleton	Corporate Director (Health & Well-being)
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

108. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th March 2009, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

Agenda Item 9 – Procedure for Disposal of Assets – Land and Property

Resolution to be amended to read:

That the Portfolio Holders for Environment & Property and Health, Housing & Inclusion be made aware of Scrutiny Committee's views that agents advertising property should clearly state on boards and publicity material that tenure of the land is under shared ownership arrangements. The Portfolio Holders be asked to respond within 6 months.

109. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Andrew Turpin.

110. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

111. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

112. Issues Arising from Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 5)

There were no issues arising from previous meetings.

113. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman announced a change to the order of the agenda. She would be taking Agenda Item 10 - Strategic Improvement and Development Plan following Agenda Item 8 - Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

114. Update from District Executive (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman gave an update from the meeting of the District Executive held on Thursday 2nd April 2009. Members noted the following:

- The District Executive had considered the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2007/08. Scrutiny Committee would be considering the Inspection Letter at Agenda Item 8.
 - The Executive had approved the proposal for joint working between South Somerset District Council and the Public Fundraising Regulatory Association for an initial 12 month period. All areas would fall within the trial with the exception of Yeovil, which would remain under the control of Yeovil Town Council. The process would be thoroughly reviewed and compared with other authorities using the PFRA as well as Yeovil Town Council.
 - The Executive approved the transfer of public conveniences in Somerton and Langport to the Town Councils.
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115. Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2007/08 (Agenda Item 8)

The Leader of the Council introduced the report. He said that the Annual Audit and Inspection letter was a very pleasing report and that the Audit Commission had acknowledged the progress made by SSDC. In referring to Use of Resources he provided members with a paper outlining how SSDC had performed in relation to other authorities.

The Chief Executive echoed the comments of the Leader of the Council with regard to the Letter being very strong which was a reflection on the organisation. He said that the

Audit Commission had commented that the letter was one of the strongest in the South West. He referred to page 10 of the letter and commented on the areas of improvement. Members noted the following points:

- The Council had made some progress with regard to equalities and diversity and that an excellent officer was now in post.
- With regard to Outcomes, the Council was looking to introduce Outcome Based Accountability across the authority;
- Plans were in place to introduce performance management software to enable members to examine performance at any level.

Members were informed that the Council had been short listed for the 'Best Achieving Council Award in 2009' and that this was a reflection on how far the Council had progressed.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee expressed her thanks to the Head of Finance and the Audit Committee for achieving a score 4 in the Council's financial reporting.

During the discussion on this item, one Member referred to the Housing Service as being assessed as providing a 'fair' service with 'uncertain' prospects for improvement and felt that the Scrutiny Committee should be taking more of an interest in the service in order for a better result to be achieved in the future.

In response, the Leader of the Council said that he was disappointed with the result and explained that the Council had produced an Improvement Plan and suggested that the Scrutiny Committee should track progress against the Plan. The Chief Executive reported that there were plans in place to make some operational changes, which would be considered by Full Council. He commented that very few councils had scored higher than 'fair' and that no other district was providing more affordable homes than South Somerset.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the contents of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2007/08 be noted; and
 - (2) That the Scrutiny Committee monitor progress against the Housing Improvement Plan.

*Phil Dolan, Chief Executive – (01935 462101)
e-mail: Philip.dolan@southsomerset.gov.uk*

116. Outcome of Joint Scrutiny Exercises – Pioneer Somerset and Somerset Waste Partnership (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee introduced the report. She asked members to consider whether the Joint Scrutiny initiatives had been successful and whether any improvements could be made to the way joint scrutiny operated.

The Scrutiny Manager referred to recommendation 1.1 in the report and explained that the Joint Scrutiny Panel for Pioneer Somerset was not a standing committee under current legislation.

During the discussion on this item, members made the following comments:

- The Joint Scrutiny Review for the Somerset Waste Partnership had been very good and useful with pertinent questions being asked;
- The Scrutiny Review for the Somerset Waste Partnership had been more successful than the Pioneer Somerset review;
- Both elements had been extremely valuable, which had cut down on work and improved relationships with other area authorities;
- Members of the Joint Scrutiny Review for the Somerset Waste Partnership should continue to meet periodically;
- The Pioneer Somerset review was less focussed;
- There needed to be more of a positive lead from senior management/members with regard to Pioneer Somerset.

In response to a member question regarding Pioneer Somerset, the Leader of the Council explained that the next part of process involved Andrew Coleman of SOLACE liaising with each individual Chief Executive and Leader. He referred to the value of joint scrutiny and if this was to be removed, parties may be reluctant to look at radical proposals.

The Scrutiny Manager made the following comments:

- There had been no additional work in organising the joint scrutiny reviews;
- The need to work more effectively together on a joint basis, as officers did not have time to attend 6 meetings;
- The Council had not incurred any additional costs through conducting joint scrutiny reviews.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the final report of the Joint Scrutiny Review of Pioneer Somerset and the final report of the Joint Scrutiny Review of the Somerset Waste Partnership be noted together with members comments as detailed above; and
 - (2) That the following recommendations contained within the reports be noted:
 - 1.1 each council agrees to appoint two members to a new permanent joint scrutiny panel for Pioneer Somerset, to review the implementation phase;
(this has already been agreed by Council on 19/02/09 so Scrutiny members are asked to note this recommendation only)
 - 1.2 the new joint scrutiny panel should choose which aspects of the programme should be reviewed and when;
 - 1.3 for continuity, the first meeting of that panel should be chaired by the existing joint scrutiny panel chairman – Nobby Turner from Sedgemoor.
 2. That in line with the recommendations of the Joint Scrutiny Review of the Somerset Waste Partnership, a similar, time limited joint panel is formed on annual basis, following the same principles as used in this review, to ensure effective scrutiny of the Somerset Waste Partnership from the perspective of all 6 local authorities.

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

117. Strategic Improvement and Development Plan (Agenda Item 10)

The Chief Executive introduced the report. He explained that there was no statutory or mandatory requirement for the Council to produce a Plan. The document pulled together all the recommendations from the Audit Commission in one place. The Plan allowed Senior Management to monitor progress and check that identified actions were being completed. The Scrutiny Committee would receive future reports on a 6 monthly basis.

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Improvement and Development Plan be noted

*Phil Dolan, Chief Executive – (01935 462101)
e-mail:Philip.dolan@southsomerset.gov.uk*

118. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report (Agenda Item 11)

The Performance and Communications Manager introduced the report. She explained that the report had been revised following the deletion of many BVPIs and the introduction of National Indicators (NIs). Where appropriate the BVPIs had been replaced by their equivalent NIs. The report was an interim arrangement and the scorecard would be fully revised upon completion of the Corporate Plan refresh and target setting process.

The Performance and Communications Manager highlighted the performance exceptions where performance was below target levels.

With regard to a member comment concerning the turnaround of data needing to be quicker, the Scrutiny Manager referred to Scrutiny needing to have more of an active role in performance management and that nationally Scrutiny were looking at best practice. In response, the Leader confirmed that he was happy to table information ahead of any report being available.

Reference was made to the fall in the Quarter 3 figure for household waste sent for reuse, recycling and compost and in response to a member comment, the Corporate Director – Environment commented that because of the current economic climate people were not throwing away so much. She explained that recycling was an additional indicator and that the main indicator was to reduce residual household waste per household.

In response to a member question regarding enforcement monitoring, the Leader of the Council reported that enforcement targets were monitored internally and that the Joint Area Committees should receive six monthly reports. He suggested that where members had concerns with outstanding enforcement issues these should be sent to the Project Management Board.

With regard to a member question concerning the figure for the processing of major planning applications and whether it reflected insufficient resources being available, the Performance and Communications Manager explained that the fluctuation in figures from

one quarter to another was due to some being tied up with S106 agreements and legal negotiations. The Leader of the Council commented that major planning applications required a lot of work.

RESOLVED: That the quarterly performance monitoring report for the third quarter 2008-09 be noted.

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

119. Scoping the report on the Yeovil Vision (Agenda Item 12)

Members requested that the Scrutiny Committee should consider the Yeovil Vision report that had been submitted to Yeovil Town Council relating to future management and governance arrangements of Yeovil Vision.

RESOLVED: That a report on the Yeovil Vision be submitted to the May Scrutiny Committee meeting.

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

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

A report on the Yeovil Vision would be considered by Members at the May Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Scrutiny Manager was asked to chase up a report on the issue of existing SLAs between ICT and various outside organisations such as Town Councils.

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

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

121. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that due to the forthcoming elections on 4th June, the June meeting of the District Executive would be held on Thursday 10th June. The Scrutiny Committee will meet on 18th June.

The Leader of the Council referred to the Gov Connect initiative and reported that there was likely to be some software and cost implications for the Council.

Members were informed that the report on Members Allowances would now be considered by the District Executive in September in order to allow a restructure of the portfolios.

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

Ian Clarke, Head of Legal & Democratic Services – (01935) 462184

e-mail: ian.Clarke@southsomerset.gov.uk

122. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 15)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Thursday 14th May 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.

123. Confidential Item

The Committee agreed that the following items be considered in Closed Session by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A under Paragraph 3: "Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)". It is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption from the Access to Information Rules outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Wincanton Community Sports Centre (Agenda Item 16)

Members requested that the lessons learnt report on the Wincanton Community Sports Centre, which is due to be considered by the Scrutiny Committee in July, should include comprehensive financial information.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

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Chairman