

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of the meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 16th July 2009** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele

David Bulmer	Roy Mills (until 12.30am)
John Calvert	Derek Nelson (until 12.50am)
John V Chainey	Keith Ronaldson
Geoff Clarke	Alan Smith
Tony Lock	Andrew Turpin (until 12.20am)
Pat Martin (until 12.25am)	

Also Present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Robin Munday and David Recardo

Officers:

Philip Dolan	Chief Executive
Sue Eaton	Performance and Communications Manager
Rina Singh	Corporate Director - Communities
Roger Brown	Technical Support Manager – e-Government and Technology
Charlotte Jones	Head of Area Development (North)
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

13. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18th June 2009, copies of which had been circulated were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jo Roundell Greene.

15. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

The Committee Administrator advised that members would be considering an item on Service Level Agreements (SLA) and working relationships with Third party organisations in particular Yeovil and Chard Town Councils and that it should be noted that the following members were also members of either Yeovil or Chard Town Councils:

Councillors Pat Martin, John V Chainey, David Recardo, Tony Lock, Alan Smith and Dave Bulmer.

The members were advised that they did not need to declare an interest as no decision was being made.

16. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

In response to a number of questions raised by a member of the Committee, the Scrutiny Manager:

- Informed members that she was proposing from September to hold Scrutiny Committee meetings on the Tuesday prior to meetings of the District Executive. A timetable of proposed dates would be presented to members under agenda item 12 on the Work Programme.
 - Confirmed that the Briefing Notes template had been e-mailed to all members on the same day as the dispatch of the Scrutiny Committee agenda.
 - Informed members that Pam Harvey, Emergency Planning & Business Continuity Manager would be attending at the close of the meeting to give members a briefing on the current swine flu outbreak.
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18. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman said that as the proposed Scrutiny training day on 22nd July appeared to be clashing with other meetings at Somerset County Council, the Scrutiny Manager would look at an alternative date for the training. Members would be advised of any new date at the Full Council meeting being held later that day.

19. Update from District Executive (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman said that she didn't proposed to discuss this item as members would be advised at the Full Council meeting being held that evening of the decisions made by the District Executive at the meeting held on 9th July 2009.

20. Pioneer Somerset – Programme Management Arrangements (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman welcomed the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to the meeting.

The Chief Executive introduced the report and updated members on developments since the last report to District Executive in May. Members noted the following points:

- Pioneer Somerset was still in the process of playing catch up and that other authorities were now beginning to grab the headlines;
- He was pleased to report that the governance arrangements had now been agreed;

- Work was currently being undertaken on the themes. SSDC was leading on the operational housing/strategic housing functions theme, which was now moving quickly. Work was also being progressed in the area of civil parking enforcement;
- It was important for Pioneer Somerset to get clarity from the new administration at SCC as to the future position of Pioneer Somerset;
- Members were reminded of the schedule of costs for each authority;
- If SCC were to decide that Pioneer Somerset was not a priority there would be a huge question mark over the future of the project.

The Leader of the Council commented on the work progressing in other authorities namely Gloucestershire and Dorset. He reiterated the need for clarity on the county position. He informed members that a meeting involving Leaders, Deputy Leader and Finance Portfolio Holder was due to be held on 31st July and it was vital that the situation on the future of Pioneer Somerset was known prior to this meeting.

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

- SSDC was not relying on Pioneer Somerset and had already approached Dorset who had made significant progress with regard to partnership working. The Council would also be actively seeking to work collaboratively in other areas and were open to all options;
- The level of savings required could only be achieved by looking at alternative options.
- The Leader of the Council agreed to provide members of the Committee with regular updates on the project plans;
- Joint Scrutiny would continue alongside arrangements for Pioneer Somerset on an ad hoc basis;
- The Leader and the Chief Executive would be giving a member briefing every two months following District Executive meetings to ensure that all members are kept informed of strategic initiatives.

A further update report was requested by Members for consideration at the November meeting or earlier if appropriate.

RESOLVED: That a further update report on Pioneer Somerset be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee in November or at an earlier meeting if appropriate.

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

21. Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – 4th Quarter 2008/09 (Agenda Item 9)

The Leader of the Council introduced the report.

The Corporate Director – Communities commented that the report included an overview of complaints, which included how many the Council had received and the categories for each complaint.

The Performance and Communications Manager drew Members attention to the Appendix summary, which detailed the National Indicator performance of the District Council in various areas of work for the 4th quarter of 2008/09. Members noted the following:

- The reduction in household waste composted (NI192) was due to the usual seasonal reduction in garden waste;
- Although the number of affordable homes delivered was below target, this was part of a 3 year target of 597 and, in the current economic climate, was still an acceptable result;
- The number of sickness days per full time employee had decreased from the previous year and that HR were monitoring the way the Council complies with stage review.

She also drew Members attention to the section on complaints monitoring for the whole of 2008/09. Members noted that 415 complaints had been received with 374 complaints being dealt with at stage 1 which demonstrated that the Council's complaints process was very effective. The top three services that received the most complaints in 2008/09 were Waste (SWP), Development and Building Control and Streetscene and Horticultural.

The full summary of complaints for the year 2008/09 is attached to these minutes for information.

Councillor Tom Parsley commented that the majority of complaints received for Waste were about policy and the Council not rolling out green bins across the whole of the district. The Corporate Director – Communities commented that some authorities did not count the issue of policy as complaints but this Council had chosen to include policy issues to highlight areas for future policy formation.

The Corporate Director – Communities said that the test of a good procedure showed the majority of complaints being dealt with at stage 1.

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

- Whenever Partnerships were introduced, it was a known fact that complaints would increase;
- The figure of 415 was for the whole of the year, which was considered to be very good;
- Complaints received by members and passed on to the relevant officer were included in the figures;
- The Corporate Director – Health and Well-Being was pushing to get the target for affordable housing agreed in the LAA readjusted. The target figure was for the period April 2008 – 2011.

In response to a question from the Chairman, members were informed that the NI185 CO2 reduction from local authority operations was a complicated indicator to measure and that data would be available soon.

Councillor Tom Parsley commented on the differences between complaints and enquiries and said that the two should be handled differently. The Corporate Director – Communities confirmed that this was the case and that there was a clear difference in how they were dealt with.

The Performance and Communications Manager advised that she was currently implementing the performance management software called 'TEN' and hoped to have this completed by the end of August and that officers were being trained to input information. The Corporate Director – Communities explained that the key difference in

terms of scrutiny was that members could look at reports immediately through the web browser and wouldn't have to wait for the information as they currently did.

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

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

22. Service Level Agreements (SLA) and Working Relationships with Third Party Organisations (Agenda Item 10)

The Technical Support Manager, e-Government and Technology introduced the report, which asked members to defer the detailed review of the ICT support with third party organisations until after the implications of Government Connect have been fully assessed and discussed with the affected organisations.

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

- Reference was made to the onerous security requirements of Government Connect which also needed to be transferred to 3rd party organisations;
- Some of the policy requirements were around who 3rd party organisations allow to use the network, what software they would be allowed to install and how they would connect to the SSDC network;
- A number of policies would need to be signed off and adhered to by the organisations;
- All staff that have access to the network would need to declare a lot of information, and this was a big process such as security checks etc.
- Discussions with 3rd party organisations would be held by October. In response, Councillor Tony Lock said that it was imperative for discussions to be held with Town Councils prior to their budget setting process;
- Member workshops on the obligations of Government Connect as well as Data Protection would be arranged for all members. It was felt that the training should be mandatory and that it would be helpful for members to have a one page guide.

The Theme Advisor – E Government commented on the requirements placed on the Council by the Government and that these must be complied with in order for services to be provided to the public such as revenues and benefits. He also said that Government Connect was a Council wide initiative and not just an area for IT.

The Theme Advisor suggested Government Connect as a future topic for a Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED: That the detailed review of the ICT support arrangements with third parties organisations be deferred until after the implications of Government Connect have been fully assessed and discussed with the affected organisations.

*Roger Brown, Technical Support Manager, e-Government and Technology – (01935 462632)
e-mail: roger.brown@southsomerset.gov.uk*

23. Rural Perspective (Agenda Item 11)

The Head of Area Development (North) gave a presentation to introduce the concept of a 'Rural Impact Assessment' as part of the Rural Perspective. A copy of the presentation slides are attached to the minutes.

Councillor John Calvert congratulated the Head of Area Development (North) on her presentation which he felt should be used as an exemplar for future meetings.

During the discussion on this item members commented on the complexities of the Rural Perspective.

Members agreed to trial and evaluate the assessment tool while undertaking work in the forthcoming year.

RESOLVED: That the Head of Area Development (North) and the Scrutiny Manager compile a sample rural impact assessment to be used as a trial for an appropriate future topic in the Scrutiny Work Programme.

*Charlotte Jones, Head of Area Development (North) – (01458 257401)
e-mail: charlotte.jones@southsomerset.gov.uk*

24. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

Members were content to note the District Executive Forward Plan as outlined in the agenda.

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

*Angie Cox, Democratic Services Manager – (01935 462148)
e-mail: angela.cox@southsomerset.gov.uk*

25. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

The Scrutiny Manager advised members of the following:

- The report on the Frontline Grants Scheme due to be considered at the August meeting had been removed from the Work Programme as a decision had already been made to withdraw the funding for the Scheme.
- The following items were due to be considered at the August meeting:
Future of Recycling bring bank provision / SORT It Scheme – Vega Sturgess, Corporate Director - Environment
Update and Impact of Procurement Strategy – Gary Russ, Procurement and Office Services Manager
Monitoring the Housing Improvement Programme – Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager
- The report on the lessons learnt at Wincanton Sports Centre expected at the September meeting would now be considered by Scrutiny in November.
- An item on the Cultural Strategy would be added to the Work Programme for September.
- Changes to the Scrutiny page on the website would be going live by the end of next week.

- She was due to attend an officer meeting on 21st July to discuss progression of the Recession Strategy. This could be a potential topic for a Task and Finish Group.
- A number of changes had been made to the members web pages including the introduction of Call In procedures for Area Committees and an online interactive form for any member to complete to put forward suggestions to Scrutiny.
- Members were advised that there would be no further revisions to the Corporate Plan and that the final version had now been published.
- There were no provisions in the Constitution for substitutes to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings. If substitutes were to be introduced this would need to apply to all Committees and would be quite an undertaking. There would also be issues around the minimal level of attendance at meetings required by members.
- Informed members of the following dates being proposed for future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee to accommodate meetings being held following the dispatch of the District Executive agenda but prior to District Executive meetings:

Tuesday 1st September 2009
 Tuesday 29th September 2009
 Tuesday 3rd November 2009
 Tuesday 1st December 2009
 Tuesday 5th January 2010
 Tuesday 2nd February 2010
 Tuesday 2nd March 2010
 Tuesday 30th March 2010
 Tuesday 4th May 2010

It was noted that some of these dates clashed with meetings of Somerset County Council's Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Manager agreed to clarify the situation and report back to members.

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

*Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager – (01935 462077)
 e-mail: Joanna.gale@southsomerset.gov.uk*

26. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

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