

Scrutiny Committee – 1st September 2009

1. Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 13th August 2009** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 1.35 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

David Bulmer	John Richardson (until 12.25pm)
John Calvert	Jo Roundell Green
Geoff Clarke	Keith Ronaldson
Tony Lock (until 12.25pm)	Alan Smith
Pat Martin	Andrew Turpin
Roy Mills (until 1.15pm)	

Also Present:

Councillors Robin Munday, Martin Wale, Derek Yeomans and Tom Parsley

Officers:

Vega Sturgess	Corporate Director (Environment)
David Stapleton	Corporate Director (Health & Well-Being)
Ian Potter	Acting Head of Housing & Revenues
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

Also Present:

Steve Read	Somerset Waste Partnership
Bruce Carpenter	Somerset Waste Partnership

27. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 16th July 2009, copies of which had been circulated were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

Item 15 – Declarations of Interest

Councillor Tony Lock to be added to the list of members who were members of Yeovil Town Council.

28. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Derek Nelson and Tim Carroll.

29. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

30. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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

Councillor Pat Martin referred to page 3 of the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16th July and questioned whether an outcome was known from the Pioneer Somerset meeting held on 31st July. In response, the Scrutiny Manager informed members that the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive would update members on Pioneer Somerset at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 29th September. It was noted that there was also a briefing session arranged for all members on 3rd September.

Councillor Pat Martin also referred to page 7 of the minutes regarding the proposed new Scrutiny Committee dates and requested an update. The Scrutiny Manager reported that she had contacted Somerset County Council and that the only clash of meetings was on 1st September and 29th September and would therefore be proceeding with the original dates. She would liaise with County in the future to avoid clashes in meeting dates.

Reference was made to the clash between meeting dates for Scrutiny Committee and Licensing Committee. It was noted that meeting dates for the Licensing Committee would be rearranged.

It was noted that Portfolio Holders could only attend Scrutiny Committee meetings prior to 11.30am due to other meeting commitments.

32. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman reminded members that the new meeting dates would commence following this meeting and therefore the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 1st September 2009.

33. Update from District Executive (Agenda Item 7)

Members noted that the following reports had been considered by the District Executive at its meeting on 6th August:

- District-wide Garden Waste Service Roll-Out
 - Budget Monitoring Report
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- Capital Budget Monitoring Report
- District Special Interest Group
- Japanese Knotweed and other unforeseen development costs on the Foundry House and Mill Lane Site, Yeovil (Confidential)

The Chairman informed members that detailed information on the decisions was available on the website.

34. Bring Bank Provision (Agenda Item 8)

The Corporate Director (Environment) introduced the report, which outlined the current provision of bring banks across the district and recommended options for future provision.

She commented that in 2009/10 a budget savings target of £100,000 had been identified for waste services. She referred to the majority of the waste budget being tied up by contractual arrangements and that the bring bank service was one service still currently controlled by the Council. She commented that bring banks were provided to residents in 12 market towns and that recently they had been subject to rising concern due to increasing costs and significant anti-social behaviour and fly tipping and that anything left outside of the banks went to landfill. The cost to clean up the 12 banks provided was in the region of £60,000 per year and an additional £25,000-£30,000 dealing with anti-social behaviour. She further commented that Somerset was the highest ranked county in the country for recycling and that South Somerset was better than the Somerset average.

The Corporate Director (Environment) referred members to the four options outlined in the report for future provision of the bring bank service and asked members to comment on the merits of the options. It was noted that option 4 was the preferred option and would leave 4/5 bring banks to complement the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) ensuring that each market town would have some provision.

The Chairman welcomed Bruce Carpenter, Operations Manager and Steve Read, Managing Director from Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) to the meeting. Bruce Carpenter commented on the problems associated with bring banks and said that it was an expensive way of providing the service and that the kerbside collection was the most popular. He asked members to consider the costings in the report as indicative as they were subject to negotiations with contractors.

The Portfolio Holder (Environment and Property) stressed that the report was a guidance document before it was considered by the District Executive. This was stage one in progressing the Council towards the potential implementation of the Sort It+ Scheme.

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

- The success or failure of the service was dependent on the success of the Sort It+ service;
- Concerns over only one bring bank being provided per town and that there was likely to be problems with overflowing
- Concerns over the interim period;
- Had SWP looked into reducing bring banks but increasing HWRC?

- How well did SWP liaise with Dorset to make sure the right mix of services is provided across the border?
- How influential was the misuse of bring banks to the removal?
- Publicity was extremely important. The public needed to be encouraged to recycle;
- The HWRC were as good as anything we had on the continent;
- Concerns over the loss of the service and the need for something to replace it;
- Recycling was costly, not everyone could get to a HWRC. Public transport to the sites was also an issue;
- The need to educate and notify residents in order to reduce landfill;
- The majority of people embrace recycling and have responded well and therefore retaining only 4 or 5 banks wouldn't be an enormous problem;
- The ongoing costs were likely to escalate further in future years and therefore action needed to be taken;
- Parish Councils have been given Well-being Powers under the Health Act and it was felt there could be scope for parish/town councils to be involved and that this should be explored in the future alongside the possibility of residents paying for the service.

In response to member's questions, the following was noted:

- Retaining the current bring bank service would not generate the required savings;
- The weight recycled by bring banks was minimal compared to the weight generated from black boxes. Everything collected on the bring bank was divertible into the black box with the exception of plastic. Those people that were responsible are likely to continue to recycle;
- The Sort It+ Scheme had been programmed into the SSDC 2009/10 budget, when headroom was identified, but this had not occurred yet because of continuing uncertainties in the budget;
- With regard to the Sort It+ Scheme it was never envisaged that there would be different districts moving forward at different levels. Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane had both agreed to proceed. The cost for South Somerset with regard to supplying additional boxes was approximately £68,000. SCC has agreed a 75% contribution towards these costs. Somerset Waste Partnership would be doing some work over the next few weeks to give SSDC a price for joining the Scheme;
- 90% of residents were situated within 5km of a HWRC. The Chard HWRC was due to open next month. At a capital cost of £1.3 m they were not cheap to provide. HWRC were extremely good and popular. Very positive feedback had been received regarding the service but it was not feasible to put in a large amount of HWRCs;
- Somerset was undertaking preliminary discussions with Dorset to explore providing a mix of services across the border. SWP were keen to explore but it was early days;
- Anti social behaviour at the bring banks was only by a minority but from a small sector of the community who were actually using them;
- If the sites were withdrawn the driver would re-TUPE to prevent redundancy costs;
- Bring banks were often used by small businesses to dump their waste and they needed to be educated to use other channels;

- If the decision is taken to remove bring banks following DX then an information campaign will happen at the current bring bank sites and through newsletters.
- Option 4 would minimise the impact of complaints. Due to budget constraints the introduction of the Sort It+ scheme and the removal of bring banks could not be done simultaneously;
- The publicity costs had been factored into the budget;
- Option 4 would maintain a level of service balanced against the financial needs of the District Council;
- The Council/SWP could offer advice and support to any town and parishes wishing to operate a bring bank service;
- It would cost £6 per year per household to introduce the Sort It+ Scheme, in the best possible scenario of all 5 districts signing up to Sort-It+.

Following further discussion members concluded:

- That Option 4: Retaining 5 of the plastic bottle sites was the preferred option of the Scrutiny Committee;
- That the preferred site in Yeovil for a second plastic bottle bring bank was at Lyde Road;
- That publicity was crucial and should be undertaken through newsletters and also at the Bring Bank sites.

The Chairman thanked Bruce Carpenter and Steve Read for attending the meeting.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That Option 4: Retaining 5 of the plastic bottle sites as outlined in the report was the preferred option of the Scrutiny Committee;
 - (2) That the Portfolio Holder takes forward the comments of the Scrutiny Committee to the District Executive.

*Vega Sturgess, Corporate Director (Environment) – (01935 462200)
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35. Communities and Local Government – Local Democracy Consultation (Agenda Item 9)

The Scrutiny Manager introduced the report, which advised members of the publication of a consultation paper on local democratic renewal issued by John Denham, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. She explained that the Scrutiny Committee was being asked for their comments/answers to the questions outlined in Appendix A to the report.

Members divided into small groups to consider the questions and were then given the opportunity to feedback their answers. The Scrutiny Manager agreed to collate a response from the comments given at the meeting and to circulate this to members for their final comments to go forward for consideration by the District Executive at its meeting on 3rd September.

- RESOLVED:** That the Scrutiny Committee's response to the consultation questions as outlined in Appendix A of the report be forwarded to the District Executive meeting being held on 3rd September 2009.

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

36. Strategic Housing Inspection Improvement Plan (Agenda Item 10)

The Scrutiny Manager explained that the Scrutiny Committee was being asked to look at the Housing Inspection Improvement Plan to monitor progress made and compare this with weaknesses identified in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2007/08. She referred Members to the Plan for July 2009 as outlined in Appendix A and provided further explanation on the tasks outlined, in particular those that were not on target.

The Director (Health & Well-being) and the Acting Head of Housing & Revenues answered members' questions. The following points were noted:

- Service quality and consistency with cost was difficult to measure. A survey had been undertaken with the Councils 'family group', which gave a better picture of some housing services and it is intended to report this to the Portfolio Holder discussion group at a future date. It was felt that the cost base was fairly good;
- In terms of operational housing performance and quality had improved significantly;
- The Council had very limited powers in controlling the size of floor area of social housing properties;

Over the past 3 to 4 months the service has been able to clear the backlog of homelessness cases. There were approximately 25 homelessness cases currently outstanding. 3 years ago this figure was in the region of 200. Officers were able to pick up cases earlier (from when first contact is made) now that the backlog had been cleared which is likely to result in more cases of homelessness being prevented;

- The homelessness service was much better now than in 2006. A Baseline customer survey had been undertaken last year. The results have showed a significant improvement in satisfaction levels. Plans were in place to compile some of the comments and key data to be published on the website to show what people think of the service;
- With reference to HMOs, a huge amount of work has been undertaken resulting in a robust inspection regime now being in place. All programmed HMOs had been inspected and have been all risk assessed;
- SSDC was probably in the top 5% in the country for providing affordable housing. On average 172 properties have been provided per year. Over the last five year period. Between 25-30% of these properties have been in rural areas.

Members of the Scrutiny Committee were content with the progress made against targets in the Strategic Housing Inspection Improvement Plan and that the output/outcomes were in line with the weaknesses identified for the Strategic Housing Service in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2007/08.

RESOLVED: (1) That progress made against the targets in the Strategic Housing Improvement Plan be noted;
(2) That the Scrutiny Committee were content that the output/outcomes identified in the improvement plan were in line

with the weaknesses identified in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2007/08.

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

37. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

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

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

38. 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*

39. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted that the date of the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 1st September 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