

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday 5th January 2010** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 2.00 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer	Pat Martin
John Calvert	Roy Mills
John Vincent Chainey (until 12.20 p.m.)	Keith Ronaldson
Geoff Clarke	Jo Roundell Greene
Tony Lock (until 1.35 p.m.)	Alan Smith

Also Present:

Councillors Lesley Boucher, Tim Carroll, Tom Parsley and Sylvia Seal

Officers:

Phil Dolan	Chief Executive
Vega Sturgess	Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus)
Rina Singh	Strategic Director (Place & Performance)
Donna Parham	Assistant Director
Sue Eaton	Performance Manager
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator
Mark Williams	Chief Executive, East Devon District Council

94. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 1st December 2009, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

95. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carol Goodall and John Richardson.

96. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Dave Bulmer declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10 – Capital Programme 2010/11 to 2014/15, as he was a town council representative on the Market Towns Investment Group.

97. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

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

The Scrutiny Manager referred to a previous member request for information on the Council's use of consultants and informed members that she had now received this information and would programme an item into the Scrutiny Work Programme.

She reminded members about the need to complete and return the personal evaluation forms issued to members at the last meeting.

With regard to the Wind Turbine, the Scrutiny Manager explained that a written report had not come forward to this meeting as the Council was still awaiting a contractor's response. She explained that the Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus) and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Property would give a verbal update on the situation.

Councillor Tony Lock referred to the specific questions raised at the last meeting and expressed his disappointment over a written report not coming forward and the wind turbine still being out of operation.

Councillor Pat Martin also expressed her disappointment at not receiving a written report at this meeting. She said it was important to have the answers in writing and for the relevant officers to attend. She requested that a written report be submitted to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus) updated members on the latest position with regard to the wind turbine. Members noted the following:

- A problem with hinges on a turbine located in Cornwall had resulted in Proven switching off all of their wind turbines. There were no problems with SSDC's turbine however the company was acting cautiously and would be upgrading all of their turbines with new hinges.
- Members were reassured that Officers were working hard to resolve the problems. Meetings had been held with the Council's Health and Safety Advisor and the Procurement and Risk Manager.
- A number of options had been considered with regard to the future of the wind turbine and it had been discussed and agreed with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to insist upon an early upgrade to the wind turbine.
- A letter had been sent to Proven on 14th December (a copy of which was circulated to members at the meeting) followed up by two further e-mails.
- The refurbishment programme would start in February and be completed by mid summer. As previously mentioned SSDC were pushing to be at the top of the list for refurbishment.

It was confirmed that a full written report and update would be submitted to the next meeting. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Committee would compile a detailed report request for the Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus).

99. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman reported that a Task and Finish Review would be arranged, as part of the Scrutiny Work Programme, to look at the arrangements for a joint Chief Executive for South Somerset District Council and East Devon District Council.

100. Verbal Update on Task and Finish Reviews (Agenda Item 7)

Cultural Strategy

Councillor Dave Bulmer, Chair of the Review, reported that the group are currently looking at what mechanisms were in place to monitor the Cultural Strategy and the relationship with the People, Places and Spaces report.

Choice Based Lettings

Councillor Jo Roundell Greene, Chair of the Review, reported that a meeting had been held with the other districts and they were keen to join in with the review. The next meeting would be held on 26th January in Taunton. A lot of work had been done and they were gaining pace well. The next stage was to go out to consultation.

101. Working in Partnership (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman welcomed Mark Williams, Chief Executive of East Devon District Council the Council's prospective partner in the shared services initiative. He addressed members on the benefits of working in partnership from the East Devon perspective. During his presentation members were informed of the five pull and push factors identified by East Devon as to why partnership working should be investigated and was a good thing to take forward.

Following the presentation, members were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Members noted that a final decision on working in partnership with East Devon District Council would be made by Full Council in February.

102. Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman referred to the issue of Scrutiny not following up on whether performance checks were making a difference and said that this comment referred to a past period and that Scrutiny members had worked hard to improve the processes used.

In response to a member question regarding responsibility for the Recession Strategy, the Chief Executive informed members that the Assistant Director (Economy) had responsibility for ensuring delivery of the Recession Strategy, which included a number of actions under the areas of Benefits and Development Control.

The Leader of the Council reported that South Somerset District Council was the top scoring council in the South West. He paid tribute to the efforts of the Chief Executive, who had done a marvellous job in getting the Council to this position.

The Leader of the Council provided members with details of how the Council had performed in relation to the other councils in Somerset.

It was agreed that members would be provided with a copy of East Devon District Council's Comprehensive Area Assessment at the Member briefing meeting being held later that week and also by e-mail.

The Chief Executive said that it was excellent to have such a positive report and that this reflected the hard work undertaken by both staff and members in delivering the results. He reiterated the point that the scrutiny comment referred to a different time and different arrangements and shouldn't be taken as how scrutiny works now.

Members noted that South Somerset was one of five councils in the South West and the only district that had scored 3 across the board. South Somerset was the 13th highest scoring district in the country.

One member complimented the Scrutiny Manager for all her hard work and said that Scrutiny had really moved forward.

One member referred to the website being mentioned in the report and that this was an area of concern for the Committee and that they would be requesting a report in the near future on this topic.

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive reported that the Council had received publicity at a local level as being best Council in the South West.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

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

103. Capital Programme 2010/11 to 2014/15 (Agenda Item 10)

The Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services introduced the report and explained that the report was also being considered by the District Executive later that week followed by Full Council in February. Scrutiny members were being asked to consider all the bids and whether the processes followed were robust. The scoring methodology had been considered by a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and this had worked well.

During consideration of the report, the following comments were made:

Birchfield Park, Yeovil

With regard to the bid for Birchfield Park, Yeovil, some members considered this to be a priority and that the Council had a duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act. They felt that the scheme was too ambitious and that only lighting and maintenance to the path was necessary. Members were disappointed that the bid did not contain some elements and felt that this could have altered the scoring. Under the corporate theme 'Enhance the environment, address and adapt to climate change' the Council should be looking to reduce the necessity for the use of vehicles and this pathway provided a vital link to the Children's Centre and the extended doctors surgery.

The Leader of the Council said that this was a local priority issue and that discussions were underway with regard to funding the scheme from Area South.

Henhayes Sports and Community Centre

Members felt that it was unfortunate that funding had to be committed to this capital scheme as it could be potentially delayed into future financial years. Clarification was also sought over the town green application process.

Members questioned why only one estate agent estimated the value of the West One Centre, given it was a risk not to receive this value.

Carbon Efficient Vehicles x 3

Members questioned the purchase of 2 Econetoc Transit vehicles when the paper refers to a degree of risk due to the unproven technology and using the purchase to explore this technology. Councillor Tom Parsley reassured members that these particular vehicles had been trialled and proven robustness.

Sports Zone

Scrutiny Committee supported the proposals to delay and review the set up of a reserve for the Sports Zone.

Appendix A

Members noted that some schemes (e.g. Revenues and Benefits – NNDR System and Property services Extension to Brympton Way) had an original budget allocation but had no estimated spend and questioned why this was the case. In response, the Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services that this maybe due to the funding being between years and that she would amend the report.

Appendix D

In response to a member question, the Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services said that officer time was not taken into consideration when calculating partnership funding percentages.

Members noted that if partnership funding was not forthcoming, the bid would come back and be re-scored.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the Scrutiny Committee's comments on the proposed recommendations for approval for inclusion in the revised capital programme be forwarded to the District Executive;
 - (2) That the proposals to delay and review the set up of a reserve for the Sports Zone be supported by the Scrutiny Committee; and
 - (3) That the no change in the available funding from the ICT reserve be noted.

*Donna Parham, Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services – (01935 462320)
e-mail: donna.Parham@southsomerset.gov.uk*

104. Medium Term Financial Plan (Agenda Item 11)

The Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services introduced the report, which advised members of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the current position on the MTFP (Revenue Budgets for 2010/11 to 2014/15). She explained that the Council was

already a long way ahead in finding savings and still had £400,000 to find but were well on the way to bridging the gap.

During consideration of the report, members made the following comments:

Scrutiny Committee supported the proposed allocation from general fund balances to the Voluntary Redundancy fund of £250,000.

Members supported the proposed capitalisation of redundancy costs where approved by the Government Office.

With reference to Appendix A – Efficiency Savings and Appendix C – Other Savings, members noted that there were no savings for Area West. Members were informed that savings for Area West had now been provided and the report would be updated for February.

In response to a comment made with regard to the Council needing to achieve 0.5% from working in partnership and that at present this had not been fully achieved in 2009/10, the Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services informed members that the only savings that had come forward were from the removal of the bring banks and that the £70,000 shortfall would go back into the MTFP for next year.

Members questioned why the figure for sports, arts and leisure efficiencies savings was not in brackets and therefore not a saving. In response, the Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services explained that some savings occur and then there are further costs and therefore are not fully achieved. She agreed to look up the history on the figures.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the Scrutiny Committee comments on the current position be forwarded to the District Executive;
 - (2) That the proposed allocation from general fund balances to the Voluntary Redundancy Fund of £250,000 be supported by the Scrutiny Committee; and
 - (3) That the proposed capitalisation of redundancy costs where approved by the Government Office be supported by the Scrutiny Committee.

*Donna Parham, Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services – (01935 462320)
e-mail: donna.Parham@southsomerset.gov.uk*

105. Quarterly Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – 2nd Quarter 2009/10 (Agenda Item 12)

The Performance and Communications Manager introduced the performance monitoring report covering the period to the end of the second quarter (1st July – 30th September). She updated the report and highlighted the areas where performance was below target and the reasons for variances in performance. Members noted the following:

NI157a – Processing of Major Planning Applications determined within 13 weeks – this indicator continued to be in the red. The number of cases would be included in future reports as requested at District Executive. It was reported that the actual figure for this quarter was 5 out of 15 cases and this was not considered to be a high number. The reason was due to the on-going downturn and significant reduction in the number of

applications submitted. Members were informed that the number of backlog cases were included in the figures.

NI191 – Residual household waste per household (quarterly) – The figure for quarter 2 was 98.68

NI192 – Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting (quarterly) – The figure for quarter 2 was 42.17% and in the red. The Performance and Communications Manager had been told that the reason was due to the recession but she would be seeking a further explanation on this.

NI195 – Improved street and environmental cleanliness – the second survey was currently taking place. It was hoped that the results would show an improvement in performance.

Members commented on the number of complaints for the Streetscene service and that the number could be effected for example by a member of the public ringing to request a service (i.e. grass cutting) and it being logged as a complaint. It was felt that on the whole 65 across the district was a small number of complaints.

A request was made for Scrutiny members to receive a breakdown of components under indicator NI192. The Performance and Communications Manager agreed to take this forward for future reports.

In referring to indicator NI192, one member commented that when the bring banks were removed at the end of the month this could have an effect on the target and that the figures should be compared like for like for the first three months.

One member referred to indicator NI195 – Improved street and environmental cleanliness and queried where the inspections were carried out. In response, members were informed that they were carried out in random areas and that the Scrutiny Committee could request a report from the Service to obtain specific information.

With reference to indicator LI021 Sickness days per FTE, the Performance and Communications Manager provided members with comparison figures against other Somerset authorities and authorities within the Council's family group as well as the Federation British Industry and the CIPD. It was noted that for last year SSDC's figure was higher than the average across Somerset authorities.

One member referred to indicator LI009 - % of new starters who would recommend SSDC as an employer and questioned why the Council asked starters and not leavers. In response, the Performance and Communications Manger said that information from leavers was gathered and assessed through the exit interview process.

Members were provided with an update on the number of complaints received. It was noted that the same services, namely Streetscene, Waste and Development Control were receiving the most number of complaints and that 94% of complaints were resolved at stage 1.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the performance monitoring report be noted including those areas highlighted under 'performance exceptions' where performance is below target; and
 - (2) That the summary of complaints for the second quarter 2009/10 be noted.

*Sue Eaton, Performance and Communications Manager – (0193335 462565)
e-mail: sue.eaton@southsomerset.gov.uk*

106. Verbal Update on Issues Raised by the Scrutiny Committee at the District Executive meeting held on 3rd December 2009 (Agenda Item 13)

The Chairman updated members on the issues taken forward to the District Executive meeting on 3rd December 2009. Members noted the following:

Quarterly Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – 2nd Quarter

It was noted that as requested by Scrutiny an additional column would be added to Theme 1 to detail the number of planning applications as well as the percentages.

Allocation of Local Authorities Business Growth Initiative Funding to support Yeovil Innovation Centre

The issue of improved signage at the Innovation Centre had been raised with the District Executive.

Issues and Options Report: Report on the Core Strategy Consultation Responses Received

The Scrutiny Committee would be provided with the workshop attendance figures.

Request for funding to Remove Asbestos Contaminated Building Material at the Former Poultry Units, Water Street, Martock

Members were advised that the report had been withdrawn.

107. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7th January 2010 (Agenda Item 14)

Comments to be taken to District Executive on 7th January 2010

Annual Monitoring Report 2008-2009

Page 51 of the Annual Monitoring Report – H6: Housing Quality – Building for Life Assessments states that there is no data available for this monitoring year for the 11 key indicators for housing quality but arrangements are in place to redress this issue. What arrangements are in place and when can we expect to collect the data?

The Scrutiny Committee notes that overall progress in the monitoring year was limited for a number of reasons as stated on page 33 of the report. Can the Scrutiny Committee be assured that the staff resource and management issues will be addressed?

Page 14 of the Annual Monitoring Report refers to the district having a lower proportion of young people and that young people are leaving to pursue higher education and not returning, contributing to a shortage of high skilled young graduates entering the local workforce – What action are we taking to address this issue?

Page 28 of the Annual Monitoring Report states that South Somerset performs less well than the South West Region as a whole with the number of South Somerset residents with 'NVQ4 and above' – What action area we taking to address this issue?

108. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 15)

Members noted the following updates to the Scrutiny Work Programme:

- A written report on the Wind Turbine to be submitted to the February Scrutiny Meeting;
- Feedback reports on the Task and Finish Reviews of the Joint CEO and the Equalities Strategy to be added to the Work Programme for February;
- A report on the management structure and licenses/tenancy agreements for the Park Homes at Ilton & Tintinhull Gypsy sites to be submitted to Scrutiny Committee in February prior to it being considered by District Executive;
- The report updating members on the impact of the Procurement Strategy to be deferred to the March meeting;
- The Scrutiny Manager to check whether a report in February was required on the Medium Term Financial Plan and the Revised Capital Programme;

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*

109. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 16)

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

*Angie Cox, Democratic Services Manager – (01935 462148)
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110. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 17)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 2nd February 2010 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