

Scrutiny Committee – 2nd November 2010

1. Minutes

South Somerset District Council

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

(10.00 a.m. – 12.50 p.m.)

Present:

Members:

Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer	Roy Mills (until 12.00 noon)
John Calvert	Keith Ronaldson
Geoff Clarke	Angie Singleton
Carol Goodall	Alan Smith
Tony Lock (until 11.45 a.m.)	Martin Wales

Also Present:

Councillors Tony Fife, Jo Roundell Greene, Tim Carroll and Tom Parsley.

Officers:

Mark Williams	Chief Executive
Rina Singh	Strategic Director (Place & Performance)
Vega Sturgess	Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus)
David Julian	Economic Development Manager
Chris Cooper	Street Scene Manager
Phil Jones	Enforcement Supervisor
Donna Parham	Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services)
Ian Clarke	Assistant Director (Legal & Corporate Services)
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

62. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st August 2010, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Pat Martin and John Richardson.

64. Declarations of Interests (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

65. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

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

66. Issues Arising from Previous Meetings (Agenda Item 5)**Somerset Cultural Strategy**

Members noted that a report on the Somerset Cultural Strategy was included in the District Executive agenda for 7th October 2010.

67. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no announcements made by the Chairman.

68. Verbal Update on reports considered by District Executive on 2nd September 2010 (Agenda Item 7)**Local Enterprise Partnerships**

Following the last meeting, a number of issues were raised by members in relation to the decision taken by District Executive at their meeting on 2nd September. David Julian, Economic Development Manager updated members on the current position.

The Economic Development Manager advised that a letter had been received from the Government on 29th June 2010 inviting submissions for Local Enterprise Partnerships from local councils, which meant that the Council had to work within a narrow timeframe. The Government would accept bids from a combination of tiers of local government but they must be based on economic zones.

It was noted that consultation had been undertaken with several key businesses from the Private Sector and with the Chamber of Trade.

SSDC had submitted its bid proposing a local LEP with East Devon District Council together with supporting the Somerset wide bid, encompassing both the County and District Councils and Devon County Council. It was noted that South Somerset had been mentioned within the Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset LEP.

A copy of the letter received from the RT Hon Dr Vince Cable MP and the RT Hon Eric Pickles MP and the "An expression of interest for a Local Enterprise Partnership" were circulated to members at the meeting.

The Chairman requested that Scrutiny Committee members be kept informed of the situation.

South Somerset Core Strategy

It was noted that the Core Strategy would be looked at on a regular basis and refreshed and changed as appropriate.

With reference to the wording of market towns and service centres within the Strategy, Cllr. Tim Carroll was confident that the Portfolio Holder would use a satisfactory term that linked with central government policy.

69. Verbal Update on Task and Finish Reviews (Agenda Item 8)

Choice Based Lettings

Cllr. Carol Goodall explained that the scale of the project had been large with it going from just South Somerset to a county-wide project and that separating the work into themed areas had made the project easier to manage. She commented that Jo Gale had worked long and hard on the project, which at times was difficult and required lots of diplomacy, to achieve the end goal. The final report was submitted to the Homefinder Board on 27th September who considered a list of recommendations that were prioritised by cost and difficulty. The report was well received by the Board who acknowledged that it was not a process that they would have been able to undertake and asked if they could have access to the data. One of the recommendations related to changes to the website and it was acknowledged that the web needed to be tested by non-IT experts. Cllr Goodall reported that although the report had gone to the Board, there was still work to be done and that she had been asked to give a presentation at a scrutiny event being organised by REAP in December.

The Chairman thanked all members who took part in the review and in particular to Cllrs. Jo Roundell Greene and Carol Goodall for their involvement. It was noted that the Portfolio Holder for Housing had also welcomed the work. It was agreed to send a letter of thanks to Jo Gale for all her hard work.

Cllr. Jo Roundell Greene commented that the report covered all aspects that had originally been hoped for. She thanked Cllr. Carol Goodall for picking up the work and hoped that the Directory that was due to be produced would be very useful to people.

Adverse Weather

Cllr. Sue Steele informed members that the report of the Task and Finish Group was included in the agenda and would be considered alongside the Car Park Winter Maintenance report going to District Executive on 7th October 2010.

Partnerships

Cllr Martin Wale reported that the first meeting of the Partnerships Task and Finish Group had been held the previous month. He stated that the review was likely to be a longer task than first anticipated, as further input was required from the Area Development Managers to define the list of Council Partnerships. The next meeting would be held on Thursday 21st October 2010.

Inescapable Bids

Cllr. Sue Steele reported that she had chaired a meeting on 22nd September 2010 and that the notes from this meeting had been circulated to all members.

Cllr Tony Lock referred to the notes of the meeting and the comments made under Growth Bid G1 in relation to the Community Safety and requested a further explanation. In response, the Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) commented that members have to make a decision whether to recommend additional funding or maintain the current service within the existing budget. It was noted that the District Executive was also due to consider a report on the outcome of the Community Safety Review Panel at their meeting on 7th October.

It was noted that the District Council were in negotiations with Somerset County Council and other statutory bodies regarding funding level issues for community safety and that the outcome of these negotiations were not yet known. In view of this and imminent legislative changes to the structure of Community Safety Partnerships a decision on whether to join a single County-wide Community Safety Partnership was being deferred.

Cllr Tony Fife highlighted that the District Council was the statutory authority charged with the delivery of community safety through the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Capital Strategy

Members noted that a meeting of the Capital Strategy Task and Finish Group would be held on Friday 8th October at 10.00am in the Corporate Meeting Room. Cllr Martin Wale expressed his interest in joining the Group.

70. Verbal Update on the Joint Integration Committee (Agenda Item 9)

Joint Integration Committee

Members noted that the Joint Integration Committee met on 9th September 2010 to consider the draft Business Plans for the services identified as being suitable for joint working and that no decisions were made.

Exclusion of the Public

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Committee resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, i.e. "Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Joint Scrutiny Panel

Members were informed that the Joint East Devon and South Somerset Scrutiny Panel last met on 23rd September and considered the findings of the research carried through contact with other authorities. The meeting was extremely positive and all members worked well together. The draft minutes from the meeting had been circulated to all scrutiny members.

It was agreed that the following recommendations from the meeting of the Joint East Devon and South Somerset Scrutiny Panel would be submitted to District Executive for consideration:

1. that consideration be given to having an independent element for the recruitment process for populating the revised management structure, in the interests of providing objective advice and perspective;
2. that a timeframe and process for harmonising terms and conditions across the two authorities be provided, as this has not been clearly identified in documentation to date;
3. that evidence be produced to prove that sufficient in-house capacity to support both authorities through the transition stage will be in place;
4. that evidence of clear project management for the implementation of a shared management structure (if approved) and the implementation of shared services be provided;
5. that each Executive of the respective District Councils consider holding simultaneous Executive meetings when considering recommendations from the JIC, in the interests of expediency and allowing members to discuss issues collectively;
6. that the appointment of the Shared Strategic Directors be carried out as a first step to allow them to help form the Assistant Director tier as they deem appropriate for the emerging shared service; and that clarity be provided on the Assistant Director tier to establish what their role involves in terms of strategic and operational level; and what capacity those roles hold to manage the change, as well as continue delivering day-to-day services.

In addition to these recommendations and following discussion at the meeting members agreed a further recommendation to be presented to District Executive for consideration:

That an item is added to the agenda for the meeting of the Joint Integration Committee on 28th October for members to fully discuss the role of the Chief Executive on the Appointments Panel for tier 2 managers. This discussion should be based around the findings from the recent research carried out by members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel and focus on the need for transparency.

71. Finance Update (Agenda Item 10)

The Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) updated the Committee on the budget situation. She mentioned a number of issues including the following:-

- The comments of the Scrutiny Task & Finish Reviews for Inescapable and Growth bids would be submitted to District Executive at their meeting on 7th October for consideration;
- The Eco Homes funding of £750,000 had been received;
- The government had announced that a system of "Universal Credits" would be introduced. If administration of housing benefits is moved to another agency it will have a financial impact on the authority;
- Managers have now completed their savings proposals and approximately £950,000 of savings have been put forward against an original target of £800,000;
- Savings achieved through the Lean Programme, Asset Management and Partnership Working with East Devon District Council;

- The results of an exercise carried out with members to look at priorities within discretionary services would be presented to District Executive on 7th October.
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72. Quarterly Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – 1st Quarter (Agenda Item 11)

The Performance Manager introduced the performance monitoring report covering the period to the end of the first quarter of 2010/11 (1st April – 30th June 2010). She reported on the following indicators that were below target:

LI021 – Working Days Lost Due to Sickness Absence (BV12)

NI195 – Improved street and environmental cleanliness (levels of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly posting) – This was the first of 3 inspections to be carried out in 2010/11. The first inspection was conducted in the summer months and tended to be higher.

The Scrutiny Manager explained that the HR Manager had submitted the following information in relation to sickness absence:

- About 20% of staff were over the target of 8.3 days with 80% of staff falling within target;
- There was a dedicated HR resource in place to look more closely at the 20% of staff with the poorest sickness records;
- Managers were being provided with monthly reports about staff who were not hitting the target and to ensure that appropriate action is being taken;
- Three members of staff who were in the bottom 20% had now left the authority.

The Scrutiny Manager agreed to circulate the annual comparison figures for the Council's Family Group.

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

- The Council employed approximately 560 people;
- District Councils didn't normally apply the Bradford score a lot and tended to look at pattern recognition;
- Under current policy, the Council followed a stage process for the management of sickness. Staff that have had 10 days sick or been sick on more than four instances would go forward to the second stage of the process;
- The target for staff sickness was 8 days per year the equivalent of 2 days per quarter;
- It was noted that analysis of absence records have been undertaken over a 4 year period and that the HR Manager would attend a future meeting to present the information.

With reference to NI195 – Improved street and environmental cleanliness, one member referred to the high amount of detritus and weed growth in the gutters in Crewkerne. In response, the Streetscene Manager said that he would arrange for an Officer to meet the member to look into the problem.

The Performance Manager stated that she had taken on board the comments raised at District Executive and circulated a new appendix showing the previous 4 quarters data

as a comparison for members to identify any rise or drop in performance over the year. This information would be included in future reports.

Reference was made to the complaints received by the Council as outlined in Appendix B. Members noted that the 9 complaints received by the Arts & Entertainment Service related to one particular performance at the Octagon Theatre and that the issue had been addressed.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the performance monitoring report for the 1st quarter be noted including those areas highlighted under 'performance exceptions' where performance is below target; and
 - (2) That the summary of complaints for the 1st quarter 2010/11 be noted.

*(Sue Eaton, Performance Manager – 01935 462565)
(sue.eaton@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

73. The Introduction of Dog Control Orders (Agenda Item 12)

The Streetscene Services Manager introduced the report, which set out the introduction of Dog Control Orders for South Somerset using powers defined in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

In response to questions, Members were informed that:

- There were no extra duties as a result of introducing the new Dog Control Orders and that powers would be brought under one control;
- That guide dogs were exempt from the regulations;
- It would be possible for a designated person from a town or parish council to be an authorised officer;
- The only area exempt from an Exclusion Order was Forestry Commission land, otherwise the orders would apply in respect of any land that is open and to which the public are entitled or permitted to have access. If it was necessary in future to extend this to private land further approval would be required by District Executive.

Members requested that if any additional signage was erected that the appropriate town and parish councils should be kept fully informed.

Scrutiny members supported the recommendations contained within the report.

- RESOLVED:** That the recommendations contained within the report due to be considered by District Executive on 7th October 2010 be supported by the Scrutiny Committee.

*(Chris Cooper, Streetscene Services Manager – 01935 462870)
(chris.cooper@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

74. Results of Staff Survey (Agenda Item 13)

The Chief Executive introduced the report, which advised members of the recent staff survey that was undertaken at the request of the Scrutiny Committee. He commented that although the participation rate had been relatively low, it had resulted in some good

learning points such as the need to improve the speed in which information gets out to staff and the need for a consistency of message across both organisations.

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

- There were systems that could be put in place that would allow you to identify at which level in the authority staff had responded from and that this could be introduced for future surveys;
- All Managers have a responsibility to keep their staff informed;
- The outcomes of the survey could be placed on Insite as part of keeping staff up to date on the process;
- There had been 625 logins to the survey, which meant that a lot of people had chosen not to answer it. It was felt that this may be due to the survey being carried out too early on in the process of joint working;
- Hard copies of the survey were sent to staff that don't have access to a computer;
- It was felt that there was no difference between morale in South Somerset and East Devon and that it was fairly poor across both authorities.

During discussion, members recommended that an item be placed on Insite stating that the Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and management response to the issues raised by the survey. Members felt that another survey should be undertaken in 6 months time and that the Scrutiny Committee should look at the questions to be asked to ensure that they reflect the right issues. Members requested that the responses to the next staff survey should be broken down into further detail to show at which level in the authority the responses have been received from.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the outcomes of the survey be noted;
 - (2) That another survey be carried out in 6 months time;
 - (3) That the questions to be asked in the survey be presented to the March Scrutiny Committee meeting prior to it being circulated to staff;
 - (4) That an item be placed on Insite stating that the Scrutiny Committee have considered the report and the management response to the issues raised.

Ian Clarke, Assistant Director (Legal & Corporate Services) – 01935 462184
(ian.Clarke@southsomerset.gov.uk)

Exclusion of the Public

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Committee resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, i.e. "Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

75. Adverse Weather (Ice and Snow) – Task and Finish Review Conclusions (Agenda Item 14)

(The Chairman changed the order of the agenda and this item was taken following Agenda Item 10 – Finance Update)

This report was considered in conjunction with the Car Park Winter Maintenance (Gritting) Policy that was due to be considered by the District Executive on 7th October 2010.

The Strategic Director (Operations and Customer Focus) introduced the Car Park Winter Maintenance Policy, which outlined changes to the Council's current winter maintenance arrangements in order to increase operational efficiency and to minimise risks associated with severe ice and snow weather conditions. The proposals only related to SSDC owned public car parks and SSDC staff car parks. It was explained that the Council's insurers had recently changed from a stance of 'do nothing' to requiring a risk based approach.

During discussion, some members expressed disappointment over the exclusion of pre-salting along some prominent routes in Yeovil and Chard. Cllr Tony Lock agreed to take forward members comments to a workshop he was due to attend at County Hall.

With reference to private car parks and pavements, one member felt that shopkeepers needed to be informed that they were allowed to clear snow and ice from in front of their properties.

Members supported the recommendations contained within the report.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the recommendations of the Task and Finish Review be endorsed for consideration as part of the SSDC Car Park Winter Maintenance Policy; and
 - (2) That the recommendations contained within the Car Park Winter Maintenance Policy due to be considered by District Executive on 7th October be supported by the Scrutiny Committee.

76. Verbal Update from the Local Strategic Partnership (South Somerset Together) (Agenda Item 15)

The Chairman reported that she had been unable to attend the LSP meeting on 24th September and therefore an update was not given.

It was noted that the Local Strategic Partnership (South Somerset Together) Annual Review report would be submitted to the 30th November meeting.

77. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7th October 2010 (Agenda Item 16)

Draft Proposals of the Community Governance Review of Langport and Huish Episcopi

Members raised concerns over the amount of money in terms of SSDC officer time, that has been spent on the review and whether it has been worthwhile.

78. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 17)

Reference was made to the agenda report, which informed members of the Scrutiny Work Programme. The Scrutiny Manager updated members as follows:

- The report expected on 2nd November relating to Civil Parking Enforcement would not be available, as the report was being re-written by Somerset County Council. Members requested that Vega Sturgess, Strategic Director (Operations and Customer Focus) be invited to attend the next meeting to give a verbal update.
- The Draft Redundancy Policy report would not be available at the 2nd November meeting but would be kept on the Work Programme and come forward when available.
- Dave Norris and Neil Waddleton will attend the 2nd November meeting to update and answer members' questions on S106 agreements.
- Keith Wheaton Green will attend the 2nd November meeting for the item on Wind Turbine Statistics.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Work Programme be noted subject to the following updates being taken into account.

*(Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager – 01935 462566)
(emily.mcguinness@southsomerset.gov.uk)*

79. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 18)

The Committee noted the details of the District Executive Forward Plan as attached to the agenda for the meeting held on 7th October 2010.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

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

80. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 19)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 2nd November 2010 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 reports in the agenda.

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Chairman