

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of the meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on **Tuesday 4th January 2011** in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil

(10.00 a.m. – 1.05 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer
John Calvert
Carol Goodall
Pat Martin

John Richardson
Angie Singleton
Alan Smith
Martin Wale (until 12.40 p.m.)

Also Present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Peter Seib, Tom Parsley, Jo Roundell Greene and Sylvia Seal

Officers:

Vega Sturgess	Strategic Director (Operations and Customer Focus)
Rina Singh	Strategic Director (Place and Performance)
Donna Parham	Strategic Director (Finance and Corporate Services)
Martin Woods	Assistant Director (Economy)
Laurence Willis	Assistant Director (Environment)
Steve Fox	Landscape Officer
Sue Eaton	Performance Manager
Saveria Moss	LSP Co-ordinator
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

114. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2010, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

115. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Geoff Clarke, Tony Lock, Keith Ronaldson and Roy Mills.

116. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor John Calvert declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 5 – Issues Arising from Previous Meetings with reference to Transfer of Sport & Leisure Facilities – Selection of Preferred Bidder, as he was a representative on the Wincanton Community Sports Centre Board. He left the room for the duration of the item being discussed.

117. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

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

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

Transfer of Sport & Leisure Facilities – Selection of Preferred Bidder

Having declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item, Councillor John Calvert left the room.

One member questioned the implications of delaying the decision having been previously told that it was essential to consider the report to allow the strict timescales of ensuring a successful transfer of sport and leisure facilities to commence on April 1st 2011. In response, the Strategic Director (Finance and Corporate Services) reported that there were a number of issues with the bids requiring Officers to spend more time gathering further information. The decision would be delayed by about a month but the length of time of the contract would not change. She said that Officers needed to ensure that the bidders had been treated like for like. It was stressed that Officers were now satisfied that they had been through a thorough contract procurement process. It was imperative for the process to be robust and that it should stand up to scrutiny, as this was a major decision.

SCC Proposed Cuts to the Library Service and Adult Care

Cllr Carol Goodall reported on the meeting she had recently attended at County Hall about the proposed cuts to Library Services and Adult Care.

Library Service – The proposals included 4 hub libraries located in Bridgwater, Frome, Taunton and Yeovil, 6 market town libraries and 1 Community library.

Adult Care – There were currently 4 levels of care and at present SCC funded the first 3 levels. In future SCC is proposing to fund only critical and substantial care. Changes to adult care were due to be implemented from April 2011.

SCC's Cabinet will consider the outcome of the consultation process for libraries and adult care on 2nd February.

Copies of both consultation documents were available on the SCC website.

119. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman referred to the Committee having had a busy 12 months and thanked members for all their hard work.

The Chairman congratulated Cllr Carol Goodall on the presentation she had given at the South West Councils Scrutiny Meeting at the Winter Gardens, Weston-Super-Mare on 10th December. Her presentation outlined the Choice Based Lettings process and how this had worked with other authorities. The presentation was positively received. The Scrutiny Manager informed members that a copy of the report would be placed in the Members Room and on the SSDC website in due course.

Reference was made to the scrutiny briefing held on 9th December on the budget as being a useful meeting and a good basis for future scrutiny development. With regard to joint working with East Devon, Scrutiny will continue to monitor any work undertaken.

The Chairman referred to the work undertaken by the Adverse Weather Task and Finish Group, which had resulted in good reports. The Leader of the Council commented that there had been some issues around smaller extensions to strategic routes not being gritted in the recent period of snow and ice and that representations had been made to SCC. The weather also caused some disruption to waste and recycling collections and it was hoped that this would be resolved by the end of the week.

The Chairman concluded by reiterating her thanks to members and commented on the need to continue to encourage backbenchers to attend meetings of the Committee and Task and Finish Groups.

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

Partnerships

Cllr Martin Wale reported that the review was progressing well and that a template was being used to categorise each of the partnerships. The next meeting would be held on 13th January 2011. Scrutiny and District Executive would consider the final report in April.

121. Finance Update (Agenda Item 8)

The Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) updated members on the current position of the Medium Term Financial Plan and the impact of recent government announcements and consultation papers. She referred members to the report included in the District Executive agenda for 6th January 2011, which outlined information relating to:

- The Government Grant Settlement. The settlement for 2011/12 and 2012/13 was considerably less than expected. This was due to 'damping' which had removed funding from authorities considered to be less dependant on government funding and passed it to authorities considered more dependent;
- The Localism Bill was currently going through Parliament – A lot more information would be known in the summer;
- Somerset County Council cuts affecting libraries and waste;
- The authority may have further funding streams in future due to New Homes Bonus, Fees & Charges and Business Rates.

One member questioned whether the Council had budgeted to increase fees and charges. In response, members were informed that no increases had been included with the exception of planning fees. The Leader of the Council commented that the changes would come into effect in 2012/13 including the new homes bonus.

RESOLVED: That the update reports on the Capital Programme 2011/12 to 2015/16 and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2011/12 as outlined in the District Executive agenda for 6th January 2011 be noted.

Donna Parham, Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services)
(donna.parham@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462225)

122. LSP Review of Sustainable Transport (Agenda Item 9)

Prior to the start of the meeting members received a report from the LSP Coordinator outlining what the LSP has achieved to improve accessibility and maximising green travel.

The LSP Coordinator gave a presentation, which covered the following points:

- The LSP was key in delivering the Sustainable Community Strategy. Strategic Priority 13: Support the development of integrated, low carbon transport infrastructure in respect of two aspects; improving accessibility and maximising green travel;
- When the SCS was adopted in 2008, the LSP set up seven pump-priming projects, one being to consider improving transport. A resource of £8,900 was identified, and SCC Connecting Somerset agreed to be the lead partner to research and improve Community Transport Schemes in the District;
- In addition, the LSP also commissioned a task & finish group to look at increasing the number of voluntary car schemes especially in rural isolated areas. The Group failed to secure a funding package to deliver the original outline of the project, which included setting up a support network and having a paid coordinator for 18-24 months. A scaled down approach would be going ahead in Areas East, West and North with schemes set up where needed and volunteers recruited through existing channels;
- What the LSP partners have achieved to maximise green travel particularly the work on the Wessex Rail Partnership feasibility study to improve services at Pen Mill Station;
- The work the LSP has undertaken to revise the evidence base to support the SCS called the Trends and Issues 2010.

In response to a member question, the Leader of the Council referred to the Voluntary Hospital Scheme and the problems of administration. It was noted that the Primary Care Trust do not fund the administration charge and that this is falling to the operators to cover.

One member questioned whether the LSP had identified some form of transport to the SSDC Offices, as at present she could only access the offices by taxi or getting a bus part way and then walking the remainder of the journey. The LSP Coordinator noted that the LSP would not be able to address specific issues in this way, but that the new Task & Finish Group made up of a number of key Yeovil-based employers including SSDC's Transport Officer would be able to work together to find workable options to reduce one-person car travel to work in Yeovil.

Members noted the work that could be achieved with the funding already secured as follows:

1. **Voluntary Car Scheme Network:** The ambitious plan was to set up a district wide support network for these small voluntary car schemes, which was the biggest cost of the project. LSP Partners agreed that there do exist support/advice networks both with the Mendip Network and the development team of Connecting Somerset, which despite funding cuts and structure changes will still be offering a service to scheme operators;
2. **Areas East and South** are relatively well served by existing Community Transport Schemes and the SSDC Area Committee funding allocated for Local Service

Enhancements could be used to work with these providers to develop voluntary car schemes in less accessible areas like Queen Camel, Sparkford and Ilchester;

- 3. Areas West and North** have a number of transport services which could be improved to increase access further by either strengthening existing schemes or supporting the creation of a small number of voluntary car schemes from the Areas' Local Service Enhancement funding secured and a SCC grant to SSVCA (£3,000 granted in 2009/10 for this project). Local mechanisms exist that could assist with the recruitment of volunteer drivers for new schemes.

RESOLVED: (1) That the report and presentation outlining the work of the LSP in improving accessibility, increasing the number of voluntary car schemes and maximising green travel be noted.

*Saveria Moss, LSP Coordinator
(saveria.moss@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01963 435004)*

123. Open Spaces Strategy (Agenda Item 10)

Cllr Tom Parsley, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Property introduced the report, which asked members to consider and comment on the contents of the Open Spaces Strategy to be used throughout the Council in terms of the management of existing space and the provision of new areas.

The Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus) drew members' attention to recommendation 3 which requested endorsement for adoption by Full Council and the delegation of any major changes or updates to the strategy and the action plan to the District Executive, and any minor operational changes or updates to the Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Property and the Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus).

During discussion on the report, members raised the following issues:

- With reference to Appendix A Principal Open Spaces, one member questioned why Yeovil Recreation Centre was included on the list as it was primarily a sports facility;
- One member questioned when should a playing field be classed as an open space and that clarification was needed;
- Concerns were expressed over the Strategy's link to the ongoing Local Development Framework;
- Reference was made to Brympton Way being listed as a major open space and that it should only be classed as a curtilage to a building;
- There was no link between the original evidence and the case you would make to a developer;
- Concern was expressed over the figures listed in Appendix C for average walking speed and average cycling speed and it was felt that they should be decreased;
- Reference was made to 2.04 in the Action Plan and clarification was sought over the major development figure which was shown as over 25 houses and whether this was correct;
- Clarification was needed on the legal side of the planning implications.

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

- Appendix A to the report was out of date and would be amended prior to Full Council. Yeovil Recreation Centre was a multi function facility and would be removed from the list;
- An officer from the Planning Policy Team had been part of the project team from the outset. A robust meeting was held where a Planning Policy officer had made assurances that there were no problems from planning policy;
- The walking speed and driving speed figures contained within Appendix C were the national guidance figures although the cycling speed was not relevant and would be deleted from Appendix C;
- Appendix A to the report should not be used as a basis for standards and could be removed;
- All of the actions within the Action Plan could be undertaken within existing resources unless it stated that a capital approval was required;
- The next stage on from the audit was to produce and publish PPG17 assessments for each type of open space;
- Planning Policy were happy with the way the document addressed future provision of open spaces.

Members requested that a member of the Planning Policy Team attend District Executive to give assurances that the Strategy was a robust enough document and adequately addressed the future provision of open spaces.

RESOLVED: (1) That the comments raised by the Scrutiny Committee be forwarded and considered by the District Executive at their meeting on 6th January 2011.

*Steve Fox, Landscape Officer, Streetscene
(stephen.fox@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462828)*

124. Quarterly Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – 2nd Quarter 2010/11 (Agenda Item 11)

The Performance Manager introduced the performance monitoring report covering the period to the end of the second quarter of 2010/11. She reported on the following indicators that were below target:

N157a – Processing of Major planning applications determined in 13 weeks – Members noted that the quarterly and performance to date figure was more than 10% below target. This was due to some lengthy 106 agreements and an increase in the number of applications received. It should be noted that the SSDC target is more stretching than the National target and that performance on other applications had continued to improve which was a positive outcome bearing in mind the recent ‘lean’ restructure of the service accompanied by an increase in planning applications.

LI006 - % of calls to contact centre resolved in the contact centre – This indicator was slightly under target due to a downward trend for the first quarter when more queries are resolved due to Council Tax annual billing. Members noted that the indicator was on track to achieve the annual performance target.

LI021 – Working days lost due to sickness absence – The figure for sickness is 4.1 per FTE against a target of 4. The quarterly figure is above target at 1.78 against a target of

2 days per FTE. It was noted that for various reasons the 6 worst attendance performers had left the authority.

One member felt that the wording in relation to long-term absence cases should be presented in a more sensitive manner. The Strategic Director (Place and Performance) agreed to pass this comment forward to the Assistant Director (Legal and Corporate Services).

Members agreed that Scrutiny Committee would consider future quarterly performance and complaints monitoring reports as part of the District Executive agenda and any comments forwarded to District Executive. Any feedback from District Executive would be reported back to Scrutiny members at their Committee meetings.

Members noted that complaints have reduced significantly in the second quarter including a drop in waste complaints.

The Strategic Director (Place and Performance) reported that the government were consulting on some new indicators and that 15 indicators (7 of which were new) were under consideration. She indicated that she would keep members informed and bring a report to Scrutiny in due course.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the performance monitoring report for the 2nd quarter be noted including those areas highlighted under 'performance exceptions' where performance is below target; and
 - (2) That the summary of complaints for the 2nd quarter 2010/11 be noted.
 - (3) That Scrutiny Committee consider future quarterly performance and complaints monitoring reports as part of the District Executive agenda.

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

125. Verbal Update on Reports considered by District Executive on 2nd December 2010 (Agenda Item 12)

There were no updates to report.

126. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6th January 2011 (Agenda Item 13)

Members referred to the reports that were to be submitted to the District Executive on 6th January and made the following comments:

Open Spaces Strategy

During consideration of this report, the following issues were raised:

Members requested that a member of the Planning Policy Team attend District Executive in order to give assurances that the document was robust and adequately addressed the future provision of open spaces.

Members agreed with the Officers' suggestion that Appendix A should be removed from the document.

Clarification was required over the definitions of open spaces and playing fields

With reference to Appendix C Average travelling speeds and distance conversations used for the formulation of the standards, it was noted that the figures were taken from national guidance and that average cycling speed would be deleted from the document.

South West Councils

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee recently attended a Scrutiny Network meeting hosted by the South West Councils. Both members and officers find this network a useful way of sharing information and advice and were concerned to hear that it's future is under threat.

There was some discussion of alternative hosting arrangements following the demise of South West Councils at the last network meeting, but members of the Scrutiny Committee wish to recommend that if SSDC continues to subscribe then consideration could be given to South West Councils continuing to host the Scrutiny network.

District Executive Forward Plan

Members questioned whether there was a District Executive meeting scheduled for 7th April, as there were no reports listed on the Forward Plan.

Reference was made to the Car Park Strategy and what would be the scope of the review and the timescales.

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 items in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 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).

Somerset Waste Partnership – Business Plan

During consideration of this report, members endorsed the Somerset Waste Partnership's Draft Business Plan and the extension of the Waste and Recycling Collection Contract but raised the concern that the financial risks were considerable and that the situation could get worse. Members also questioned what would happen if a district was unable to continue in the Partnership and assurances were given on the situation.

Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) – Out Sourcing of Enforcement

Members considered the options outlined in the report and unanimously voted Option Three – Support SCC's application for CPE but not to accept the current offer for off street enforcement as their preferred option.

127. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 14)

Reference was made to the agenda report, which informed members of the Scrutiny Work Programme. Members noted the items for consideration at the February meeting as follows:

- Review of Park Homes Site Management Arrangements
- Budget Setting Reports
- Website Review – members were asked to forward any questions to the Scrutiny Manager in advance of the meeting (Post meeting note – this has now been deferred to the March Scrutiny meeting due to staff leave)
- Report outlining savings achieved to date through partnership working with East Devon District Council – members requested the report to include a review of costs involved
- Scope Task & Finish Review on the Volunteer Policy

It was agreed that the item on Community Transport would be considered at the March meeting.

The report on Transfer of Sport & Leisure Facilities – Selection of Preferred Bidder would be considered in February as part of the District Executive papers.

Task and Finish Reviews

The Scrutiny Manager reported that reviews to be established in the future were the Impact of Localism Bill and Volunteer Policy.

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

(Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager)
(Emily.mcguinness@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462566)

128. Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 15)

The Committee noted the details of the District Executive Forward Plan as attached to the agenda for the meeting to be held on 6th January 2011.

Members queried whether there was a meeting of the District Executive on 7th April 2011 as there were no items listed on the Forward Plan for that date. The Scrutiny Manager agreed to let members know the situation.

Reference was made to no date being set for consideration of the Car Park Strategy. One member questioned what would be the scope of the review and the timescales involved. The Scrutiny Manager agreed to report back on this issue.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Plan be noted as outlined in the District Executive agenda for 6th January 2011.

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

129. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 16)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 1st February 2011 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