

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on Tuesday 29th November 2011 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 12.40 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer
John Calvert
Carol Goodall

Pauline Lock
Tony Lock
Colin Winder

Also Present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Gina Seaton, David Norris, Jo Roundell Greene, Henry Hobhouse and John Dyke.

Officers:

Colin McDonald
Donna Parham

Strategic Housing Manager
Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services)

Jo Gale
Emily McGuinness
Jo Morris

Scrutiny Manager
Scrutiny Manager
Committee Administrator

71. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 1st November 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

72. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cathy Bakewell, Marcus Fysh, Tim Inglefield, Paul Maxwell, Graham Oakes, Wes Read and Martin Wale.

73. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

74. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of the public at the meeting.

75. Issues Arising from Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 5)

2011/12 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Quarter ending 30th September 2011

With reference to the Economic Development Balance, members were informed that the money was a run off from the old economic development programme and that if it was not spent by the year-end it would be returned to general balances. The money had been kept to support Into Somerset and the Innovation Centre.

76. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman announced that she would be taking agenda item 13 – Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1st December 2011 as the next agenda item.

The Chairman informed members that she had attended a Shared Services event with Cllr Jo Roundell Greene organised by South West Councils on 17th November 2011 in Taunton. The event was attended by both Officers and Members and provided an opportunity to explore the benefits, challenges and future developments of a shared service and shared management approach. The Chairman and Cllr Jo Roundell Greene said that it had been a very interesting event and they had gained lots of useful information that they felt could be taken forward and explored with officers.

Members were reminded about the budget scrutiny session being held on Thursday 15th December at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber. Members were encouraged to attend the session, which is open to all members. One member felt that it would be useful for members to be provided with a list of what areas are statutory and what are discretionary. The Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services) confirmed that she would be able to provide members with this information but it would only be a rough estimate.

Members were informed that the first meeting of the Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel was being held on 1st December in Taunton. It was reported that Sedgemoor District Council had decided not to participate and the impact of this would be discussed at the meeting. Somerset County Council had appointed John Dyke and John Woodman to the Panel and had not yet named a substitute.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman informed the Committee on the feedback given to the Leader following the Corporate Plan Workshop as follows:

Additional information needs to be provided to members re how Statutory Services can be prioritised in terms of level of service provided ('gold plated' services are sometimes provided way above what is statutory).

It needs to be clear that members are assessing the suggested priorities as a District Councillor, representing the area as a whole not in term of their individual parishes or wards.

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

Outside Bodies

Members were informed that Becky Sanders would be the officer leading on this review. The first meeting would take place on Thursday 1st December following District Executive. There had been a good take up with 8 members putting themselves forward to join the review.

Social Housing Fraud

Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager informed members that the Portfolio Holder and the Housing and Welfare Manager had attended the last meeting to answer questions on SSDC's approach to tackling housing fraud. A Scrutiny Inquiry day was being planned for 20th January to which the top seven housing providers were being invited to attend together with best practice authorities and a national fraud initiative representative.

Choice Based Lettings

Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager reported that she would be looking to see if the Task and Finish Review recommendations had been appropriately interpreted by the Homefinder Board. This would purely be a desktop exercise and she didn't envisage the need to recall the Task & Finish Group.

78. Feedback from Questioning Skills Training (Agenda Item 8)

Members were given the opportunity to reflect on the Scrutiny Committee Questioning Skills training held on 22nd November 2011, including key learning points and how Scrutiny Committee working practice should be altered as a result of the training.

During discussion the following issues were raised:

- As there were a number of members that were unable to attend the training session and were also not present at the meeting, it was felt that it would be useful if those members could be provided with a copy of the handouts from the training session;
- It was felt that one of the key points was to listen to others to avoid duplicating questions;
- All members enjoyed the training day and benefited from attending;
- It was suggested that all members of the Scrutiny Committee needed to be reminded of the importance of attending the half an hour pre-meeting;
- During the pre-meeting, members will plan and decide who will ask what questions;
- It was agreed that out of courtesy, those members who have attended the pre-meeting will be allowed to ask their questions first;
- It was suggested that it would be useful to offer the Questioning Skills training to other members of the Council.

RESOLVED: That the above points be noted and taken forward where appropriate.

(Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager)
(emily.mcguinness@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462566)
(Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager)
(joanna.gale@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462077)

79. Managing the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 9)

Members were informed that there had been developments in terms of best practice and that the selection criteria currently used for selecting items on the work programme would merit from being updated.

Members were shown a draft revised template based on the Centre for Public Scrutiny best practice. Following discussion members agreed the process for selecting items and the scoring template to be used in the future for selecting items onto the Scrutiny work programme.

At the March Scrutiny Committee meeting members will score the items put forward at the work programming session held on 30th August 2011.

Members supported the proposal to invite Portfolio Holders to attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committee on a rolling basis to give a ten-minute presentation on their key issues followed by the opportunity to ask questions.

RESOLVED: That the scoring template as attached to these minutes be used for selecting future items for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme.

(Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager)
(emily.mcguinness@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462566)
(Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager)
(joanna.gale@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462077)

80. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 10)

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

(Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager)
(emily.mcguinness@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462566)
(Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager)
(joanna.gale@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462077)

81. Somerset Waste Board – Forward Plan (Agenda Item 11)

RESOLVED: That the Somerset Waste Board Forward Plan be noted as outlined in the agenda.

82. Verbal Update on Reports considered by District Executive on 3rd November 2011 (Agenda Item 12)

The Chairman gave an update from the District Executive meeting held on 3rd November 2011. Members noted the following:

Report from Yeovil District Hospital

The Outside Bodies Task and Finish Review would be looking at the process of appointing a representative to an outside body where the representative is not a current serving member.

Changes to Housing and Council Tax Benefits

District Executive welcomed the suggestion of establishing a Task and Finish review to monitor the changes to Housing and Council Tax Benefits as part of the Government's Welfare Reform Programme.

Appointment of Substitute Members – Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Members noted that the decision to appoint substitute members to Committees was deferred until January 2012. The Leader was proposing to widen the allowance of substitute members to all Committees with the exception of District Executive and Area Committees.

Economic Development Strategy

District Executive welcomed the suggestion of establishing a Task and Finish review to look at the Economic Development Strategy.

83. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1st December 2011 (Agenda Item 13)

This item was taken prior to agenda item 7.

Members considered the reports contained in the District Executive agenda for 1st December 2011.

Quarterly Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – Second Quarter 2011/12

The following questions comments would be taken forward to District Executive on 1st December:

Why has NI195 – Improved street and environmental cleanliness been removed? What rationale was used, why this one and not others?

N157a – processing major planning applications – the reason for underperformance is identified as being staff shortages. The service has recently been through the Lean Process – is there a link?

Performance Indicators: Scrutiny Committee seek assurance that the Committee will be actively involved, perhaps via a Task & Finish Group, in establishing an effective performance management targets and indicators. Members are aware that such arrangements cannot be made until the Corporate Plan has been updated but request timely scrutiny involvement.

Members raised several concerns regarding the increase in fly tipping. They were informed that the issue would be discussed at the next meeting of the Waste Board. Members requested a report back to Scrutiny Committee following the meeting of the Waste Board in December.

What sum of money has the Council received to date from Somerset County Council for the collection of fly tipping?

Will County Council reimburse all costs incurred in full?

Draft National Planning Policy Framework Consultation Response

Members noted the proposed responses to the Government's consultation on the Community Infrastructure Levy detailed proposals and draft regulations for reform.

Yeovil Town Centre Partnership Update Report

The following questions comments would be taken forward to District Executive on 1st December:

Members raised concerns over the workings and deliverability of the Yeovil Town Centre Partnership.

How can the Partnership be driven by the Board when it only meets every six months?

When the decision was taken to delete the Town Centre Manager post was a full risk assessment undertaken considering all aspects of the role and how this would be delivered in the future?

What monitoring arrangements are in place for the new structure and how will these work?

How many bodies will be on the Partnership Board? What is the criteria for becoming a member of the Board?

Is a list of all voting members available? Please can this be forwarded to Jo Gale?

Temporary Accommodation Strategy

The Corporate Strategic Housing Manager attended the meeting to answer members' questions on points of detail.

Members noted that the majority of the strategic actions listed in the Action Plan would require a report back to District Executive or the Portfolio Holder before any decision can be made.

Members requested an update report on the strategic actions contained within the Temporary Accommodation Strategy in six months time.

Members noted that the Equalities Group would complete the formal Equality Analysis at its meeting on 13th December.

The following comment would be taken forward to District Executive on 1st December:

In the event that the strategy is adopted the Scrutiny Committee seek re-assurance that any decisions arising from the strategic actions will still be considered by the relevant member body.

Annual Audit Letter

Members noted the report.

Windows 7 Upgrade

In response to a member question, the Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services) reported that there would be a separate project for member laptops and assured members that in the meantime they would have the ability to convert between the old and new version of windows.

Medium Term Financial Plan Update

The Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) gave a brief presentation on how the budget is set. A copy of the presentation slides are attached to these minutes for information.

Community Governance Review – First results of Consultation in Stoke Trister with Bayford and Pen Selwood Parish Councils

Members noted the report.

District Executive Forward Plan

Members noted that the Economic Development Strategy would be coming forward for approval in June and that specific time would be built into the process for a Task & Finish Review.

Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager agreed to obtain further information on the Review of South Somerset Together (LSP) report, which was listed on the District Executive Forward Plan for Scrutiny Committee consideration in February 2012.

84. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 3rd January 2011 at 10.00am in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

Members of the Committee are invited to attend at 9.30 a.m. to scope questions on the reports in the agenda.

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Chairman