

Scrutiny Committee – 3rd April 2012

1. Minutes

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on Tuesday 28th February 2012 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 12.15 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Dave Bulmer (Chairman)

Cathy Bakewell	Pauline Lock
John Calvert	Tony Lock
Marcus Fysh	Wes Read
Carol Goodall	Colin Winder
Tim Inglefield	

Also Present:

Councillors Mike Lewis, Tim Carroll, Ric Pallister, Sylvia Seal, Henry Hobhouse and Gina Seaton

Officers:

Steve Joel	Assistant Director (Health and Well-being)
Jon Batty	Housing Policy and Performance Officer
Jason Toogood	Customer Focus Support Manager
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

101. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 31st January 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

102. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sue Steele, Paul Maxwell, Graham Oakes and Martin Wale.

103. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Colin Winder declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10 – Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1st March 2012 in relation to Item 9 – Wincanton Car Parks – Income Compensation Scheme, as he was a member of Wincanton Town Council.

Councillor Carol Goodall declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10 – Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1st March 2012 in relation to Item 14 – Olympic Torch Relay, as she was a member of Ilminster Town Council.

104. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of the public at the meeting.

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

The Scrutiny Manager referred to the issue raised by Cllr. Sue Osborne at the last meeting regarding SCC's decision to cut bus transport services throughout the County. She informed members that there was a wealth of evidence available on SCC's website and it was clear that considerable consultation had taken place together with full equality impact assessments being completed. Area West Committee had also received an update report on SCC's proposal at their meeting on 15th February 2012. Scrutiny members were content that SCC had gone through a thorough process.

106. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager and Cllr. Sue Steele, Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee were absent from the meeting as they were attending a Scrutiny Workshop 'Making It Happen: Working Together with your Police and Crime Commissioner' in Exeter.
 - Cllr. Sue Steele attended the Special Meeting at Bridgwater on the Somerset County Council proposed cuts to Youth Workers. Somerset UK Youth Parliament attended and gave an excellent presentation on how they felt the SCC cuts would affect them. County Councillor John Osman, Portfolio Holder for Young People has since extended the time before the cuts take place.
 - Cllr. Sue Steele also attended the Somerset Together Assembly on Friday 24th February.
 - Emily McGuinness and Sue Steele were due to attend a South West Counties Networking Workshop in Taunton on 1st March 2012.
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107. Portfolio Holder Presentation (Agenda Item 7)

Cllr. Mike Lewis, District Executive Portfolio Holder for Area East and Customer Services gave a short presentation about the services within his portfolio.

Jason Toogood, Customer Focus Support Manager was in attendance to assist with answering members' questions.

During the presentation, members were informed of the following:

- The main priorities for Area East were: To develop clear Area East Community Plans in response to the Localism Act; To support practical ways for people to influence or take control of facilities and services and Complete Neighbourhood Plan pilot.
- Queen Camel were currently engaged in the Neighbourhood Plan pilot;
- Customer Services comprises the Contact Centre, which is currently run by 13 full time staff. The number of staff has steadily been reduced from 16 staff in 2009 and 30 staff in 2004;
- The Contact Centre was the first port of call for ensuring that customers have their queries answered rather than being referred;
- The Portfolio also covers scanning, printing and reception services which is currently covered by 6 full time members of staff;
- The performance targets for the Contact Centre of answering 80% of calls within 30 seconds and 90% of calls within 60 seconds have been achieved;
- The Council had achieved a 95% satisfaction rate taken from a survey of 200 random customers;
- If more cuts are required the main aim will be to keep satisfaction rates high but there may be a time when the speed of answering may need to be reduced;
- In order to try and adapt to the changing world, the opening times of the Contact Centre have been changed. No negative feedback has been received from making this change;
- Staff in the Contact Centre have a good relationship with internal and external partners;
- There are future plans to restructure the print, courier and scanning processes and to investigate partnership arrangements;
- On-line payments have been very successful and there were now more electronic online options available. In February 2011, 2,000 customers renewed / joined the garden waste scheme on-line;
- Officers were looking at whether savings could be created by changing the telephone system;
- Officers were in the process of producing and implementing a Customer Services Charter.

Members were provided with a graph showing call patterns over an average of four weeks.

Following the presentation, members were given the opportunity to ask questions, which included the following:

- What measures have you got in place to monitor whether the service is achieving the identified efficiency savings and increased income?
- What are the current opening hours of the Contact Centre?
- Will Area East Committee receive an interim report on the Queen Camel Pilot Project;
- What are the top priorities in the next year and are there any areas that you would welcome the input of the Scrutiny Committee?
- Do people still contact the Council by letter?
- Are the calls that leave the Contact Centre monitored?
- Do you get many offensive phone calls?

The Portfolio Holder responded to members' comments and questions. The following points were noted:

- Monitoring of the service is undertaken on a weekly basis;

- The current opening hours of the Contact Centre are 8.15am – 5.15pm. The main doors are closed at 5.15pm and staff have to leave by the side door after this time;
- One of the main priorities for Customer Services was to constantly obtain feedback from customers;
- He would discuss the issue of providing an interim report on the Queen Camel Pilot Project with the Area Development Manager. The end analysis would be very important;
- Letters were still received by the Council and these were disseminated to the relevant service for reply. It was down to each service to monitor responses and to ensure that letters are replied to within 10 working days;
- The national average for abandoning call was 5% or lower;
- Once calls have been transferred from the call centre it is down to the individual service to monitor these;
- Staff were asked to log extremely difficult calls and these are passed to a Senior Officer;
- There were methods in place for recording telephone calls and mechanisms to try and reduce difficult calls.

The Chairman thanked Cllr. Mike Lewis and the Customer Focus Support Manager for attending the meeting.

108. Park Home Site Management (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman welcomed Steve Joel, Assistant Director (Health and Well-being) and Jon Batty, Housing Policy and Performance Officer to the meeting.

Cllr. Ric Pallister, Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Policy introduced the report, which set out the position on the 15 areas identified by members of the Scrutiny Committee. He commented that the possibility of transferring the management of the sites to a Registered Social Landlord was not being considered at the present time and that there had been no expressions of interest. He said that many of the previous issues have now disappeared.

In response to comments and questions raised by members, the Assistant Director – Health and Well-being informed members of the following:

- The water authority bills SSDC for water usage at the site. As part of the site refurbishment a new water main has been installed with individual metres located on each pitch. The tenants are invoiced monthly based on what they have consumed and pay SSDC. There are no outstanding payments;
- The service transfers a sum of £27,724 from the rent charges on an annual basis into a specific Gypsy Site Reserve;
- There is a 30 year renewal programme which is updated on an annual basis and all costs are taken into account. He was confident that there would be sufficient funds to replace the park homes in the future;
- The Site Manager was present on the site at all times and would pick up any areas of over occupancy. There were no tenants in an overcrowded situation. Tenants were required to obtain approval if they wished to have a visitor for a short period of time;
- The Council has a legal requirement to ensure that water pump, gas and electricity checks are carried out on an annual basis and provisions for these costs are included in the rent. As landlord, the Council also has responsibility for heating and the cooker;

- With reference to the Ilton site, it was noted that all pitches were standard and could all accommodate park homes. It was important to have the capacity to accommodate families with their own provision. All 4 open provision pitches were occupied and there continued to be expressions of interest in these pitches.

Members requested to continue to receive 12 monthly update reports on the site management of the Gypsy Park Homes at Ilton and Tintinhull.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director (Health and Well-being) and the Housing Policy and Performance Officer for attending the meeting.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the report be noted;
 - (2) That the Scrutiny Committee continues to receive 12 monthly update reports on the site management of the Gypsy Park Homes at Ilton and Tintinhull.

*(Jon Batty, Housing Policy and Performance Officer)
(jon.batty@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462749)*

109. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 2nd February 2012 (Agenda Item 9)

Members noted the minutes from the District Executive meeting held on 2nd February 2012 as outlined in the agenda.

The following points were noted:

New SSDC Corporate Plan 2012-2015

Members were informed that the District Executive had accepted all the comments made and had also agreed Scrutiny's involvement in the formulation of the new performance indicators.

Revenue Budget 2012/13, Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and revised Capital Programme

District Executive noted that the Car Park Strategy was due to expire in 2012 and although discussions had taken place, a full review would take place later in the year after the Local Development Framework Consultations.

Proposed Introduction of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Portfolio Holder for Democratic and Regulatory Services noted that the Scrutiny Committee had proposed some positive amendments to the recommendations, which he was pleased to support. The amended recommendations were forwarded to Full Council for consideration.

110. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1st March 2012 (Agenda Item 10)

Members considered the reports outlined in the District Executive agenda for 1st March 2012.

It was agreed that the followings comments and questions would be taken forward to District Executive for consideration.

Proposed declaration of Ham Hill Country Park as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

What are the benefits of designating those areas of Ham Hill Country Park in SSDC's ownership to a Local Nature Reserve? It is not clear from the report that there will be any difference from what currently exists.

With reference to the map outlined on page 6 of the report, what is the difference between the red outline area and the three pink filled in areas?

Statutory Pay Policy Statement for Senior Officers

Tim Carroll agreed to seek clarification as to whether Councillors should be included within the Councils definition of 'lowest paid employees'.

Members felt that it would be useful for the report to incorporate information on pension benefits.

Clarification was sought on whether the current Redundancy and Severance Pay Policy was available on the Councils website.

Community Health and Leisure Facilities – Standards of Provision

How often will these standards be reviewed by District Executive and what will be the process?

With reference to Developing a local standard for equipped play areas and Youth Facilities, why has age of population not been taken into consideration?

Wincanton Car Parks – Income Compensation Scheme

In response to a member question, it was noted that this provision would be offered to all Town Councils in the future.

Scrutiny members supported the recommendations outlined in the report.

Final Recommendations of the Community Governance Review of Stoke Trister with Bayford and Pen Selwood Parish Councils

Scrutiny members supported the recommendations outlined in the report.

Final Recommendation of the Community Governance Review of South Cadbury Parish Council

Scrutiny members supported the recommendations outlined in the report.

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 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).

Olympic Torch Relay

Scrutiny members supported the recommendation outlined in the report.

The acquisition (by South Somerset District Council) of a site in Yeovil as part of a property exchange

The costs of the relocation of the Resource Centre were discussed and questions would be taken forward to the District Executive.

Scrutiny members supported the recommendations outlined in the report.

111. Verbal Update on Task and Finish Reviews (Agenda Item 11)

Outside Organisations

It was noted that the Outside Organisations Review was progressing well and that to date they had reviewed 11 partnerships. The next meeting will be held on 13th March 2012 to consider further reviews.

Social Housing Fraud

Councillor John Calvert the Task and Finish review Chair informed members that the review group held a very successful Housing Inquiry Day on Wednesday 22nd February. There were representatives from the Chartered Institute of Housing and some Local Registered Social Landlords talking about how they test and deter housing fraud. A further meeting is scheduled to take place on 9th March 2012 to draft a report and recommendations.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager, Councillor Carol Goodall the Task and Finish review Chair and Councillor Dave Bulmer attended a meeting on 28th February 2012 with Councillor Tim Carroll - the responsible portfolio Holder, Donna Parham - Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate services) and representatives from the Revenues and Benefits Team to discuss how in practice the Task and Finish review can operate on an on-going basis and effectively contribute towards the policy development.

Homefinder Review

Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager and Councillor Carol Goodall the Task and Finish Review Chair will be discussing their findings of the review to date with the Housing Portfolio to agree the best way forward.

Performance Management

All members were invited to attend a Task and Finish Review Meeting on Friday 16th March at 2.30pm in Committee Room 4.

112. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

Reference was made to the agenda report, which informed members of the Scrutiny Work Programme.

It was agreed that the following items would be added to the Scrutiny Work Programme:

- The Scrutiny Managers to prepare draft guidance for substitute members to be considered at the May meeting.
- Tony Fife, Portfolio Holder for Area South; Yeovil Vision and Community Safety to be invited to give a presentation at the May meeting.

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)

113. Somerset Waste Board – Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

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

114. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 3rd April 2012 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
