

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on Tuesday 1st May 2012 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 12.40 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Cathy Bakewell	Pauline Lock
John Calvert	Tony Lock
Carol Goodall	Paul Maxwell

Also Present:

Councillors Tony Fife, Peter Seib, Henry Hobhouse and Sylvia Seal

Officers:

Rina Singh	Strategic Director (Place & Performance) (For Item 7)
Kim Close	Assistant Director (Communities) / Area Development Manager (South) (For Item 7)
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

130. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 3rd April 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

131. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dave Bulmer, Tim Inglefield, Graham Oakes, Wes Read, Colin Winder and Martin Wale.

132. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

133. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

135. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman informed members that the Scrutiny Work Programme Selection Item had been deferred until the June meeting to take account of any changes in committee membership which may arise following Annual Council in May.

136. Portfolio Holder Presentation (Agenda Item 7)

Cllr. Tony Fife, District Executive Portfolio Holder for Yeovil Vision and Community Safety gave a short presentation updating members on the challenges and opportunities facing those services within his Portfolio area.

During his presentation, members were informed of the following:

Yeovil Vision

- Phase 2 of the Princes Street Enhancement Scheme was due to commence shortly;
- The Milford Project was a great success and the area was now a thriving community;
- The Glove Factory Development was nearing a successful completion and 20 properties had been sold;
- Promotion of the town was being undertaken through Go Yeovil, which was a Town Centre Partnership Initiative. The Yeovil Town Centre Partnership was split into three groups – Promotion Group, Community Safety Group and Town Centre Initiative Group;
- The Council was awaiting the outcome of a bid submitted to the Mary Portas Phase 1. The town had already been successful in securing funding through Mary Portas Phase 2 and the money would be distributed through the Market Towns Investment Group;
- Acquisition of the Box Factory Site would be concluded shortly;
- Priorities for the coming year include:
 - Initiate enhancements to the bottom end of Middle Street
 - Supporting the development of Yeovil Town Centre Partnership
 - Adventure Play Area at Milford Hall
 - Work to reduce the number of shop vacancies and encourage new businesses to Yeovil

During discussion members made the following comments:

- Concerns were raised over the number of properties closed in Princes Street particularly the smaller individual shops, due to the massive hike in rent;
- A question was raised relating to what leverage the Council has with landlords to get them to set more realistic rent charges;
- Members strongly supported the need to look after the town centres in South Somerset;
- Town Centres were having to compete with the internet and out of town shopping developments;

- It was important for Yeovil Vision to have an up to date website.

Community Safety

- Government funding for Community Safety is currently passed from the Home Office to Somerset County Council. Following the forthcoming election in November 2012, the money will be passed to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Avon and Somerset;
- Key priorities for the coming year include:
 - Trying to influence the Crime Commissioner pre and post election including the production of a manifesto;
 - Seeking greater clarity on the budget;
 - The need to protect police levels in Somerset;
 - To take on an influential role in order to achieve and maintain local delivery.

The Scrutiny Manager informed members that there was a meeting of Somerset County Council's Scrutiny Committee on 29th May at which community safety issues would be discussed. Members of SSDC's Scrutiny Committee would be attending to take forward the issues raised in the District Executive report in relation to the pilot Safer Somerset Partnership.

The Portfolio Holder commented that Somerset County Council had chosen to spend the community safety funding without any consultation and that the money was not specifically ringfenced for Community Safety projects or Safer Somerset Partnership priority areas.

The Chairman thanked Cllr. Tony Fife for attending the meeting.

137. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 3rd May 2012 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports outlined in the District Executive agenda for 3rd May 2012. It was agreed that the following comments and questions would be taken forward to District Executive for consideration.

Community Safety Update

There is a meeting of Somerset County Council's Scrutiny Committee on May 29 at which Community Safety issues will be discussed. Members of the Scrutiny Committee will be attending the meeting and will take forward the issues raised in the DX report in relation to the pilot Safer Somerset Partnership.

Performance Indicators Refresh

Members sought clarification on how Economic Development performance would be measured in-year. They noted that there were annual indicators but felt that there needed to be some way of monitoring trends throughout the year.

Street Naming & Numbering

Members were happy to support the recommendations providing that there is an element of flexibility in appropriate circumstances and that the policy is used as guidelines.

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).

Disposal of Surplus Property – Former Public Conveniences at Stoke Sub Hamdon

Members supported the recommendations outlined in the report.

138. Draft Guidance for Overview and Scrutiny Substitute Members (Agenda Item 9)

Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager introduced the report which asked members to consider draft guidance for substitute members of the Scrutiny Committee. She explained that she had looked at best practice from other authorities and that it was important for the guidance to be as brief as possible and should focus on appropriate behaviours (non-political, non-adversarial etc). The document will be circulated to all non-executive members who may be called upon to act as substitute members of the Scrutiny Committee.

During discussion, members felt that the guidance should include that all members are welcome to attend any Scrutiny Committee meetings. Members also commented on the need for more public engagement in Scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That the Draft Guidance for Substitute members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be agreed subject to any amendments submitted by the Vice Chairman.

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(Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager)
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139. Verbal Update on reports considered by District Executive on 5th April 2012 (Agenda Item 10)

Members noted the draft minutes from the District Executive meeting held on 5th April 2012 as outlined in the agenda. Many of the comments raised by Scrutiny were noted in the minutes.

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

Outside Organisations

The Task and Finish Group have considered about 70% of the current appointments to outside bodies. The final report will be delayed for a few months as one of the

main concerns of the group is the potential conflicts of interest for some members due to their role/position on some outside bodies. As members will be aware the current Standards regime is being abolished and new guidance regarding the new proposed Ethical Standards regime and its implications for members interests is unlikely to be due before the end of July 2012.

Social Housing Fraud

The final report of the Social Housing Fraud Task and Finish Group will be submitted to the June meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Council Tax Support

The Task and Finish Review Group have met on four occasions and are currently in the process of reviewing different options for amending the current Council Tax Benefit scheme in terms of fairness.

Review of the Department of Work & Pensions Decision Making Process

Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager explained that Cllr. Ric Pallister had put forward a suggestion for a Task and Finish Review to look at the impact of the incorrect assessment of the Department of Work and Pensions benefits on the Welfare Benefits Team.

She explained that from preliminary discussions with the Welfare Benefits Team there appeared to be a particular problem with the process for people claiming Employment Support Allowance. She provided examples of the impact this process was having on some South Somerset residents.

Members felt that this subject was an area that the Scrutiny Committee could assist with and make a difference.

It was agreed that the best way forward was for an Officer to conduct some research and collaborate with the Welfare Benefits Team to evidence the problems being experienced by residents and compile a report and potentially some draft recommendations with a lead scrutiny member who has a particular interest in this area.

141. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

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

Members noted that the presentation from Cllr Jo Roundell Greene, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Economic Development would be deferred to the July meeting, to coincide with consideration of the Economic Development Strategy.

RESOLVED: That the Scrutiny Work Programme be noted subject to the update outlined above.

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

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

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

143. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Wednesday 6th June May 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