

Scrutiny Committee – 3 July 2012

1. Minutes

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 3rd July 2012 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00 a.m. – 12.15 p.m.)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Cathy Bakewell	Peter Gubbins	Wes Read
Dave Bulmer	Pauline Lock	Martin Wale
Nigel Gage	Tony Lock	Nick Weeks
Carol Goodall	Sue Osborne	

Also Present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Henry Hobhouse, Ric Pallister and Jo Roundell Greene.

Officers:

Rina Singh	Strategic Director (Place & Performance)
Vega Sturgess	Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus)
Colin McDonald	Corporate Strategic Housing Manager
Jon Batty	Policy & Performance Officer
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Jo Morris	Committee Administrator

15. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 6th June 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Paul Maxwell.

17. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Cllr Sue Osborne declared an interest in Agenda Item 10 – Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5th July 2012 with reference to Item 12 – Commercial Property Disposal – Winsham Allotments and Band Hut, as the Ward member for Winsham.

Cllr Peter Gubbins declared an interest in Agenda Item 10 – Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5th July 2012 with reference to Item 8 – Replacement Cash Receipting System, as his daughter-in-law was the report author.

18. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

20. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Scrutiny Manager gave an update on the meeting of the Somerset Waste Board held on 29th June 2012. Members noted that Cllr Derek Yeomans was re-elected as Chairman and that all decisions had been agreed as recommended in the agenda. The next meeting of the Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel would be held on 26th July 2012. Items on the agenda for this meeting included a presentation on mixed plastic recycling and future budget proposals.

The Chairman gave a verbal report on the meeting she had attended in her capacity as a representative on the Board of Governors for Musgrove Park Hospital representing South Somerset and Mendip.

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 item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, i.e. "Information that is likely to reveal the identity of an individual".

21. Temporary Accommodation Strategy: Update Report (Agenda Item 7)

The Corporate Strategic Housing Manager introduced the report, which gave an update on the progress made on actions set out in the Temporary Accommodation Strategy since its adoption. He reminded members that the Scrutiny Committee had originally received a report in November 2011 and had requested an update on progress being made to implement the Strategy in 6 months time. He commented that progress had been made on the majority of the actions contained within the Strategy with the exception of one or two being delayed.

During the ensuing discussion, the Corporate Strategic Housing Manager and the Policy and Performance Officer responded to members' questions and comments. Points mentioned included the following:

- reference was made by a member regarding overlap between the Operational Team and the Strategic Housing Unit and whether the overlap could be reduced. The
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Strategic Housing Manager commented that the Operational Team was based at Petters Way dealing with the public and front line work and the Strategic Housing Unit undertook more specialist work involving external agencies. He hoped that the Temporary Accommodation Strategy set out clearly the distinction between the two teams. The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Policy commented on the benefits of the Strategic Housing Team being located in close proximity to the Planning Department. It was also important for the front line service to be located in the town centre. There was no duplication of work between the two teams. The two teams were retained under one Portfolio which was important and should remain in the future.

- with reference to strategic action six, it was noted that the Places for Change funding, which the Council was accountable for, was used for the refurbishment of the building which would enhance the services provided including additional bed space.
- a member referred to families staying in long term temporary accommodation and the importance of continuity for children. The Policy & Performance Officer commented that there was a range of temporary accommodation available and that the use of bed and breakfast accommodation was not used in the long term and that families tended to be placed in self contained units. The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Policy explained that one of the key reasons for having temporary accommodation was because of the rural nature of the district and by having a range of accommodation it meant that families could be placed in an area closest to their long term choice.
- with regard to a question raised in relation to increasing the number of private sector units, it was noted that due to a recent change in government policy, the Council now has the ability to discharge duty into the private sector without the homeless households' consent. The Council had a good record of placing people in the private sector compared to other local authorities although some private sector landlords were cautious about taking on some tenants.
- the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Policy commented on the proposed changes to the way in which housing benefit is administered which was likely to have an affect on the private sector market and may take some time for uncertainties to be overcome.

The Chairman thanked the Corporate Strategic Housing Manager for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted.

(Colin McDonald, Corporate Strategic Housing Manager)
(colin.mcdonald@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462331)

22. Portfolio Holder Presentation (Agenda Item 8)

Councillor Jo Roundell Greene, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Economic Development gave a short presentation to update members on the challenges and opportunities facing the services within her portfolio comprising Waste and Recycling, Street Scene, Economic Development, Regeneration and Equalities and Diversity.

During the presentation, Members were informed of the following:

Economic Development

- With regard to the main budgetary issues facing the service area over the next 12 months, reference was made to the difficulties faced in the current financial climate. Discussions would be held in the coming weeks regarding the use of funding in order for it to benefit the most people possible.
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- SSDC were now running the Yeovil Innovation Centre which was just beginning to come into profit. There was currently 60% occupancy of the building. A tenant was still required for the first floor. The Centre was working well and it was hoped that it would continue to make a success.
- The Economic Development Service would be looking at ways of working more closely with the Area Development Teams.
- Future priorities would be set out in the Economic Development Strategy due to be considered by District Executive in September.
- Priorities for the coming year included:
 - Supporting new and small businesses
 - Supporting start up, relocation and expansion of businesses
 - Increasing inward investment through working with the Board of Into Somerset
 - Progressing work in the market towns including the Regeneration of Chard
 - Support for small businesses
 - Working in partnership to progress the Lufton Phase 3 site
 - Supporting the Superfast Broadband Project
- The Business Plan for the Yeovil Innovation Centre would be considered by Scrutiny in the future.

The Portfolio Holder responded to members' comments and questions. Points mentioned included the following:

- An update on current progress of the A30/A303/A358 initiative was given by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Spatial Planning. It was noted that two workshops had recently been held and that Somerset County Council had produced a survey targeted at businesses.
- With reference to there being adequate signage at the Innovation Centre, the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Economic Development agreed to look into this matter.
- In response to a member question concerning how help can be provided to communities that have industrial land allocated within the development area for business use, members were informed that any applications received from interested developers would be fast tracked through the planning process and that advice was also available from the Economic Development and Area Development Teams.

Waste and Recycling

- The amount of waste in bins had decreased and the satisfaction of the refuse collection and recycling service was high.
- With reference to the collection of fly tipping, the Council had received compensation from Somerset County Council for the collection of extra fly tipping. The situation wasn't nearly as bad as members had been led to believe.
- The Streetscene Team worked extremely hard to ensure that the area was clean and tidy for the Queen's visit. The Streetscene Team had also been involved with planting bulbs in the villages, Yeovil in Bloom and community litter picks.

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

- With reference to there being noticeably more grass and weeds growing on the road and the kerb area, it was noted that this was due to Somerset County Council cuts to the highway maintenance service. A new brush had been purchased for the street cleaning vehicle, which should pull up some of the weeds;
- The Streetscene Team employed seasonal agency workers as and when required.

Equalities

- The Equalities Strategy was now complete and monitoring of the Strategy was available on the Council's website.
- There had been some changes to the Steering Group, which was working well. The Steering Group has been involved with looking at the Council's policies and strategies including the Economic Development Strategy.
- There would be a role for Scrutiny in the future to review the Equalities Strategy.

The Chairman thanked Cllr. Jo Roundell Greene for attending the meeting.

23. Verbal Update on reports considered by District Executive on 7th June 2012 (Agenda Item 9)

Members noted the draft minutes from the District Executive meeting held on 7th June 2012 as outlined in the agenda. Comments raised by Scrutiny were noted in the minutes.

With reference to the report on the SSDC Workplace Nursery, Scrutiny had requested that regular monitoring of the service provider take place.

24. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5th July 2012 (Agenda item 10)

Members considered the reports outlined in the District Executive agenda for 5th July 2012. It was agreed that the following comments and questions would be taken forward to District Executive for consideration.

Annual Performance Report 2011/12

Page 2 – Under Complaints – 2011/12

Members queried the use of the word maintained as it gave the impression of trying to maintain complaints rather than aspiring to reduce them.

Somerset Tenancy Strategy

Page 5 – How will you ensure that lifetime tenants understand the implications of no longer having a lifetime tenancy?

Page 13 – Under 1.2.1 – ***“...- there is an expectation that social landlords will protect existing tenants' security as far as the regulations will allow”***

It was felt that the 3rd bullet point was open to misinterpretation by landlords – either intentionally or unintentionally.

Page 15 – 1.2.7 reference to Hinkley Point – reiterate the significant impact this will have not only on those authorities mentioned but on all Somerset authorities because of displacement issues.

Page 26 - 3.6.2 - It was felt that six months notice was a long period of time particularly if there were anti social tenants and sought assurances that the current multi-agency approach to dealing with anti-social tenants would be maintained?

Page 26 – 3.6.3 – Members would like a specified amount of notice for Housing Options teams to be informed if tenancies are to expire to give enough time to make appropriate arrangements – ‘advance warning’ is too vague.

Could we require landlords to adopt the Council's Equality Strategy to ensure a consistent approach to Equality and Diversity?

There are no references within the Strategy for provision for people with disabilities – i.e. those requiring suitably adapted homes.

Page 22 – Point 3.3 Vulnerable Groups – there is no mention of young people

Page 27 – 3.8.1 – Who will ensure that the policies and procedures are clear and understood by the public. Are we going to ensure that there is some commonality between social landlord policies and procedures?

Can the length of tenancy be made longer than the stated 5 years?

Page 45 – support for protected groups was really important. The Strategy states that, “...the Strategy actively supports the need to treat all groups equally...” – members highlighted the fact that treating all groups equally is not the same as providing them with the support they need.

Have the Executive considered the possibility that lifetime tenants will not move if it means changing to a fixed term tenancy - this may be a barrier to releasing under occupied properties?

Replacement Cash Receipting System

Members supported the recommendations in the report.

Funding for Internet Connection at Lufton Depot

After seeking clarification from the Portfolio Holder that the annual sum of £10k was the market rate, members supported the recommendations.

Investors in People Award

Members sought assurances that the Council is pursuing IIP accreditation to demonstrate to staff their importance to the organisation rather than purely to seek an external award?

Emergency Funding for urgent works to a dangerous listed building at Ash House, Angel Lane, Wincanton

Members supported the recommendations and were glad to see that payment of the invoice would be pursued through the courts if necessary.

Commercial Property Disposal – Winsham Allotments and Band Hut

After seeking clarification that in this case 'less than best consideration' meant 'giving it away at no cost', members supported the recommendations.

25. Verbal Update on Task & Finish Reviews (Agenda Item 11)

Council Tax Reduction

Cllr Carol Goodall, Chairman of the Task & Finish Review reported that a member workshop was being held that afternoon to consolidate the work undertaken to enable them to be in a position to move forward. Cllr. Sue Osborne thanked Cllr Carol Goodall for chairing the meetings and for the work she had undertaken.

Social Housing

The Scrutiny Manager informed members that Councillors John Calvert and Cathy Bakewell would present the findings of the Social Housing Fraud Task and Finish Review to Council on 19th July 2012.

Employment Support Allowance

The Scrutiny Manager reported that she would bring a report to the September meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Gypsy and Traveller Health Inequalities

The Scrutiny Manager reported that SSDC had been selected by the Centre for Public Scrutiny to become a Health Development Area looking at health and equalities faced by the gypsy and traveller community. She would bring a report to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Student Engagement

Members were informed that the Student Engagement Task and Finish review would commence in October 2012.

Outside Organisations

Cllr Martin Wale, Chairman of the Review Group reported that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 5th July at which they would be reviewing the remainder of the partnerships. They were still awaiting guidance on the new regulations regarding members' interests.

26. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

A request for a report from the Yeovil Vision Board and the Market Towns Investment Group regarding what work they have done or intend to do with their share of the funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) High Street Innovation Funding was supported by members of the Scrutiny Committee.

Members also supported a Task and Finish review of the Market Towns Investment Group, as recommended by the Partnerships Task and Finish Review Group, to assess its structure, reporting, resources and ability to deliver given the current financial climate.

Members were informed that the annual Budget Scrutiny Event would be held on Wednesday 12th December 2012. The Budget Scrutiny Event will be an opportunity for Portfolio Holders to discuss proposals for the 2013/14 budget as well as considering performance against budgetary targets for 2012/13. The format and timings of the event would be discussed and agreed nearer the time.

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

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(Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager)
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27. Somerset Waste Board – Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

The Chairman reminded members that the next meeting of the Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel would be held on Thursday 26th July 2012. Members were asked to contact Cllrs Carol Goodall or Paul Maxwell with any issues that they would like to have taken forward.

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

28. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 31st July 2012 at 10.00am in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

Members of the Committee were invited to attend at 9.30am to scope questions on the reports in the agenda.

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Chairman