

Scrutiny Committee – 4 September 2012

1. Minutes

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of the **Scrutiny Committee** held on Tuesday 14 August 2012 in Council Chamber B, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00am – 12.15pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Cathy Bakewell
David Bulmer
Nigel Gage
Pauline Lock

Tony Lock
Ian Martin (sub)
Paul Maxwell

Graham Middleton
Martin Wale
Nick Weeks

Also Present:

Councillor Ric Pallister

Officers:

Rina Singh
David Julian
Rob Murray
Emily McGuinness
Jo Gale
Becky Sanders

Strategic Director (Place & Performance)
Economic Development Manager
Economic Development Officer
Scrutiny Manager
Scrutiny Manager
Committee Administrator

29. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

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

30. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carol Goodall, Peter Gubbins, Sue Osborne and Wes Read. (Councillor Ian Martin was substitute for Councillor Wes Read)

31. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

32. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

34. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman thanked members for accommodating the change to the meeting arrangements. She also noted that the Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services), wished to thank members of the Council Tax Reduction Task and Finish Group and the Scrutiny Manager for all their work and time to date.

35. Verbal Update on Reports Considered by District Executive on 5 July and 2 August 2012 (Agenda Item 7)

There were no verbal updates. It was noted that minutes of the meeting on 5 July had been circulated with the District Executive agenda for the meeting on 2 August 2012.

36. Health Inequalities Scrutiny Programme (Agenda item 8)

The Scrutiny Manager introduced the report as detailed in the agenda. She commented that ideally further members were needed for the Task and Finish Group and it would be a good opportunity to learn new scrutiny skills. In response, Councillor Paul Maxwell requested to be included in the group. It was noted that the work was time limited and needed to be completed by the end of September.

37. Draft Economic Development Strategy (Agenda Item 9)

In advance of the meeting, a list of questions (see appendix to these minutes) put together using best practice guides was forwarded to Scrutiny Committee members and appropriate officers in order that they could respond with the relevant information when addressing the Scrutiny Committee. The session took the form of an open discussion.

The Economic Development Manager introduced the draft Economic Development Strategy and set the context in which it needed to be considered, making reference to the Local Growth White Paper of October 2010. He also referred to the Local Enterprise Partnership, Local Infrastructure Plan and the SSDC Council Plan in which jobs featured as a key focus.

It was explained that the draft strategy had been prepared using evidence from two documents - 'The State of the Somerset Economy' (Ekosgen 2010) and an 'Economic Review of Yeovil' (Ekosgen 2010). Both studies and the draft strategy had involved, and continued to involve, extensive consultation with stakeholders, other SSDC services and officers. The aims of the strategy were around jobs, emphasis on a good economic environment and the support to new, existing and inward investing companies.

During a lengthy and lively discussion, scrutiny members raised several concerns, queries and suggestions, some of which included:

- Skills for the workforce and higher education were important for growth but didn't appear to feature prominently within the strategy
- Be useful to have a list of potential partners/stakeholders or what actions might be delivered through approaching the Local Strategic Partnership.
- Had consultees involved so far also been consulted on the draft strategy?
- Unclear exactly who the strategy was for, the main audience should be businesses.
- Some wording and terminology would benefit from being rephrased to make clearer and easier to understand.
- Concerns about third tier education and availability of courses locally had been discussed by the Local Strategic Partnership
- Concern that the strategy could become fragmented
- Strategy indicates what we will do but doesn't say how
- Might be useful to give the links to other strategies and also sources of business support
- Should be more SMART targets.
- Economic Development do excellent work but it's not mentioned in the strategy
- No mention of supporting exporting.
- Agriculture is important to South Somerset and the wording around it in the strategy needed to be strengthened.
- What would SSDC be doing about business rate retention?

In response to the above comments made the Leader, Strategic Director (Place and Performance) and Economic Developer Manager clarified or noted that:

- It was acknowledged that skills and education were a key to growth, however they were functions which SSDC did not have a statutory responsibility to deliver and were delivered by other organisations; therefore it featured as a low priority for direct delivery by SSDC. Addressing the skills agenda needed a high-level partnership response with responsibility resting with the Local Strategic Partnership. This did not mean that SSDC would not be trying its best to influence.
- It was a strategy for SSDC, which would be delivered with partners for the benefit of everyone in South Somerset. Anyone could read the document to see what we intended to deliver in terms of the strategy. The strategy was about delivering the aims outlined in the Council Plan. The strategy provides a District response to the Government White Paper 2010 and the LEP Business Plan 2012 and contextualised SSDC's role in maintaining an attractive local economy.
- The strategy was SSDC's Economic Development Strategy to deliver for the residents and businesses of South Somerset. There was a recognition in the strategy that Economic Development in the District could not be delivered by SSDC alone. Working with partners and LSP was key. SSDC already had a Sustainable Community Strategy which was a partnership strategy, where all the actions were owned by the partners. All actions of the Economic Development Strategy are owned and due to be delivered by SSDC be it with partners.
- The draft strategy focussed on and prioritised what could be directly delivered or influenced by SSDC. With the resources available, SSDC would be unable to deliver the skills agenda, but will have a role to facilitate through the Local Strategic Partnership.
- The same process and format for developing the strategy had been followed as for any other key SSDC strategy or plan i.e. when producing the Corporate Plan we had member workshops after which a draft was circulated, amended and finally presented to and approved by District Executive. The final copy was sent to external partners. The process for the Economic Development Strategy has been no different.

- Undertaking a skills audit was not a role for SSDC but could be put to the Local Strategic Partnership.
- That work on presentation and layout needed to be redone after content was agreed and acknowledged some phrasing needed to be changed, in particular with regard to the 'we wills' and 'endeavours'.
- Detailed tasks would be part of service plans not the strategy. This was a headline action plan.
- Would look at putting in a reference to the action plan in the 'we will' column from page 8 onwards. The Strategic Director (Place and Performance) to discuss with Cllr Martin Wale outside of the meeting.
- A list of stakeholders could be provided as a separate document but it would be preferential not to include as part of the strategy, as not all partners would be involved in every action. Reference to the Partnerships Register could also be included.
- Agreed that exporting should be added to the strategy. Exporting is viewed by the government as an activity best co-ordinated at central government level.
- Full details of the business rate retention scheme were still emerging and the Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) to lead on this. Reduction in business rates cannot be included in the strategy as no decision made and is part of the budget discussion.

Following the discussion, the Strategic Director (Place and Performance) summarised the main actions to be taken by the Economic Development team as:

- Add in references to exporting
- Liaise with Councillors Martin Wale and Ric Pallister regarding changes to the wording of the 'we wills' to 'plain English' and presentation of the document.
- Liaise with Councillor Cathy Bakewell regarding performance indicators and SMART targets.
- Liaise with Councillors Nick Weeks, about strengthening the wording around agriculture. Although the action plan would remain constrained by existing resources.
- The Leader and Portfolio Holder to finalise wording of the strategy before re-circulating prior to District Executive.

Members were content that during the course of the discussion the questions circulated to officers prior to the meeting had been addressed. The Chairman thanked the officers for attending the meeting.

38. Verbal Update on Task and Finish Reviews (Agenda Item 10)

Council Tax Reduction

The Scrutiny Manager reported that the task and finish group had worked incredibly hard to agree a draft scheme to go out to consultation. Originally it had been an ambition to produce a single scheme across Somerset, not all the authorities agreed on an exact same scheme to consult on so SSDC had to produce their own survey, this was now live on the website and members would be receiving an information pack to show what was being sent out to households.

The task and finish review group have a break now until the results are in and ready for analysis.

Budget – Inescapable Bids

The Scrutiny Manager reported that the first meeting would be on 5 October and would also look at additional income streams.

Student Engagement

The Scrutiny Manager informed members that the first meeting would take place in October.

39. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

Reference was made to the agenda report, which informed members of the Scrutiny Work Programme. The Scrutiny Manager noted that the next meeting would include a Portfolio Holder presentation and reminded members to forward any questions or suggestions to the Scrutiny Manager, for matters they would like to be discussed with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture.

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

(Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager)
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(Jo Gale, Scrutiny Manager)
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40. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 4 September 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

Appendix to minute 37 Draft Economic Development Strategy

Questions circulated in advance of the meeting

In advance of the meeting, a list of questions put together using best practice guides was forwarded to the appropriate officers in order that they could respond with the relevant information when addressing the Scrutiny Committee. The questions were:

1. Have all the 'key players' been identified and effectively consulted during the policy development process?

Best practice examples identify the following key players in local authority Economic Development:

- other tiers of local government
- Health bodies
- Further / Higher Education establishments
- Utility bodies
- Chambers of Commerce
- Large private businesses
- SME representatives
- Voluntary and Community Groups

2. Through consulting with these groups, have their likely interests been identified as well as the resources each stakeholder has available to contribute?
3. To what extent does the strategy support the approach set out in the LGA document "Local Leadership, Local Growth (June 2012) - The 21st century approach is about working with partners to create the right environment for business growth?"
4. Has the professional expertise of the business and voluntary sector been fully exploited?
6. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee have stated that, '...while the aspirations for community-led regeneration are in place, the practical mechanisms are lacking.' (2011). Does the SSDC ED Strategy adequately detail the practical mechanisms necessary to achieve its ambitions?
7. Are there clear arrangements in place for the on-going engagement of all the identified stakeholders in the implementation of the strategy?

Local Economy Assessment

8. Is the strategy based on a sound and current assessment of the local economy and has a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) assessment of the South Somerset economic situation been undertaken and has this information been used to inform the strategy?

Strategy Development Process

9. Does the document correspond with the Local Development Plan for SSDC?
10. Have the Planning, Housing and Finance team been consulted/involved in the creation of this strategy?

11. What is the 'vision' of the Strategy – if the strategy is successfully implemented, is it clear what the economic landscape of South Somerset will look like?
12. Is this vision shared and agreed by all the relevant stakeholders?

Action Plan

13. Is each goal / action underpinned by SMART targets?
14. What are the goals of the Strategy?
15. Is responsibility for each action / goal clearly shown?
16. Are there targets in terms of outputs/funding/timing etc against which progress can be measured?
17. The LGA Local economies, local growth report identifies several key actions they are planning to take forward over 2012-13 to promote local economic development. One of these actions is to encourage local authorities at all levels to develop more effective relationships with local educational establishments to ensure a closer match between education and skills provision and the needs of local businesses. How is this issue addressed in the ED Strategy?

Other

18. Does the strategy clearly show how each action will be funded through to completion?
19. Is the strategy sufficiently ambitious in terms of identifying all potential funding streams, even in the current economic climate?
20. Does the strategy enable SSDC to deliver what members understand to be the local economic development ambitions of the authority?
21. The purpose of local economic development is to build up the economic capacity of the local area, to improve its economic future and the quality of life for all. It is a process by which public, business and community sector partners can work collaboratively to create better conditions for economic growth and employment generation. Does this strategy:
 - support small and medium sized enterprises?
 - Encourage new enterprise?
 - Attract, where possible, external investment?
 - Identify hard infrastructure initiatives?
 - Identify soft infrastructure targets (education, skills, regulatory issues etc)
 - Recognise the role and different needs of key economic 'groups' (rural economy / tourism etc)?
 - Provide employment opportunities for all?
22. Does the strategy make adequate reference to the regional context? Does it 'fit in' with the aims and objectives of the Heart of the South West LEP, therefore ensuring that South Somerset is able to access all available funding from this source?