

South Somerset District Council

Draft minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 2 July 2013 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00am –1.00pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Cathy Bakewell

Nick Colbert

Tony Lock

Dave Bulmer

Nigel Gage

Paul Maxwell

Pauline Clarke (from 10.10am) Carol Goodall

Martin Wale

Also present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Tony Fife and Angie Singleton

Officers:

Bruce Soord

Spatial Systems Manager

Kim Close

Area Development Manager (South)

Andrew Gillespie

Area Development Manager (West)

Catherine Hodsman

Performance Officer

Emily McGuinness

Scrutiny Manager

Becky Sanders

Democratic Services Officer

13. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 4 June 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

14. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Graham Middleton, Sue Osborne and David Recardo.

15. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Carol Goodall declared a personal interest in item 7, High Street Innovation Funding, as she was a representative for Ilminster on the Market Towns Investment Group.

Councillor Dave Bulmer declared a personal interest in item 7, High Street Innovation Funding, as he was a representative for Chard on the Market Towns Investment Group.

16. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

18. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman reminded members that South Somerset had won two categories in the Good Scrutiny Awards 2013 for the council tax reduction scheme and the flood summit. She congratulated and formally thanked the officers and members who had been involved with both reviews, and particularly thanked the Spatial Systems Manager who had made the video clips for the awards at short notice.

19. High Street Innovation Funding (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder (Yeovil Vision) and the Area Development Manager (South) introduced the Yeovil Vision aspect of the report as shown in the agenda. It was noted that since the Scrutiny review of partnerships, the work of the town centre partners had been rejuvenated and was now a Town Team, and there was now no risk or ongoing commitments to SSDC. The Area Development Manager briefly explained the situation regarding empty shops in the town, and the implications of some of them being in the ownership of investment companies.

During the discussion members raised several questions which were answered by the Area Development Manager and Portfolio Holder including:

Question / Comment:	Response:
Loyalty Scheme has been running for a while – how do the traders involved feel it's gone?	Only just at the end of the first tranche of offers, currently liaising with the traders. Work will continue with traders to develop new offers.
The Simon Lee Dicker Arts event – what's the latest update?	Event is going ahead, artwork is currently in the windows of vacant units in the Quedam. The project has been funded by Portas funding allocated to the Arts Council.
What research has been done to compare Yeovil with other towns to find out if and how they have been successful?	Research has been done through the Association of Town Centre Management. The number of empty units was more of a concern in Glovers Walk and the Quedam, and less so in Middle Street.
What part is the SSDC Economic Development team playing?	We are working closely together. The bus station was being closely monitored
What's happening about the cattle market site?	Owners were reconsidering the value of the site.
Issues around how rents were calculated and ownership of retail properties by investment companies would not be unique to Yeovil and needs lobbying	Lobbying was on-going. A councillor has already raised the issue with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.
Peoples disposable income was reducing	Data suggested that Yeovil is quite

	resilient. Need to also keep in mind that a significant MOD presence was due over the next few years.
Do we have some scope to do something about business rates?	There is a business rate relief policy, which will be reviewed shortly. It's hoped there may be some scope to help start up businesses.
Have there been any outcomes from the meeting at Deane House in June? (page 2 of agenda)	It had been an inspirational event, and meetings were taking place shortly with officers to look at how to implement some of the ideas.

Other comments included:

- Internet sales were predicted to increase significantly and would have an impact on town centres.
- Clearly defined town centres are required, and in the future these are likely to be smaller as internet trade increases
- Need to look at alternative uses for premises
- Issues around how rents were calculated and ownership of retail properties by investment companies would not be unique to Yeovil and needs lobbying
- Peoples disposable income was reducing

The Portfolio Holder (Market Towns) and the Area Development Manager (West) introduced the Market Towns Investment Group (MTIG) aspect of the report as shown in the agenda. It was noted that several Town teams had been established which included local traders. The Area Development Manager (West) commented there were similar issues in the market towns as in Yeovil but were different in scope and scale.

With the aid of photographs, the Area Development Manager (West), gave more detail of some projects delivered, or being delivered, through the MTIG Portas Investment Programme.:

- Trees outside the Guildhall in Chard were causing issues as they were obscuring the Guildhall, hindering where the market stalls were set up and roots had caused the pavement to become uneven. The trees had now been replaced with a more appropriate species.
- Traders advertising board had been developed and installed outside Sainsbury's, and been produced in collaboration with them
- Stringfellow Gallery had a low occupancy and the building was looking a little tired. The shop front has been revamped and the premises are now an incubation site for start-up businesses and marketed through the Pop Up Britain website.

During discussion members raised comments including:

- Another benefit of the tree project in Chard was that more could be seen on the CCTV.
- MTIG is important to the market towns
- Some towns have found the priorities of the Portas funding a little restrictive
- Many towns are working themselves to promote their area as a tourism destination
- Bus and coach parking was a challenge that needed to be addressed
- A suggestion that there is a single leaflet promoting markets, including farmers markets, for the whole district
- Disappointment at the amount of towns where information or a revised proposal was still awaited

- Location of trees needed to be carefully considered, roots not the only issue but also leaves in the autumn
- New businesses relocating to towns often attracted others.

In response to some of the comments made, the Area Development Manager (West) commented that the market towns app was about to be soft launched, and that it would be more appropriate to discuss the Stop Line at meetings of the Chard Regeneration Board.

Scrutiny requested a further update in 12 months time. The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holders and managers for the report.

- ACTION:**
- Members to note the report.
 - An update report be added to the work programme for July 2014

20. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 6 June 2013 (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman noted that all the Scrutiny comments had been considered and were included in the District Executive minutes that had been circulated.

21. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 4 July 2013 (Agenda Item 9)

Members considered the reports outlined in the District Executive agenda for 4 July 2013. It was agreed that the following comments and questions would be taken forward to District Executive for consideration:

Report from Yeovil District Hospital – item 6

- Members commented that these regular reports were good and informative, and felt similar reports should be received regarding Musgrove Park Hospital
- Page 3 – Emergency Dept Pressures - Members asked if more detail was known about why ambulances were unable to reach the ambulance station
- Members queried the absence of MRSA and C.difficile figures as they thought they were quarterly statistics

SSDC Annual Performance report 2012/13 – item 7

- Members commented that for indicators below target it would be useful to have the actual figures as well as %, as in some circumstances the individual figures may be small although the % may appear to be quite high
- PI 003 (appendix A) – members commented on the figure for appeal decisions allowed and the associated costs. Members felt it would be beneficial to know an estimate of the costs involved, and also the actual number of appeals and whether the planning decision had been made by committee or delegated to officers.

Community Right to Bid – Nomination Received for Assets of Community Value – item 8

- Some members noted when the item had been considered at Area North there had been queries about the relevance of the small areas outlined in black on the map, and the ownership of those areas

- It was also suggested that the map should be annotated and have a compass indicator (to indicate north)

Disposal of Land at Larkspur Crescent, Yeovil – item 9

- Rec 2 - Scrutiny sought clarification about where the £82,000 grant subsidy would be allocated from.

Review of the work of the SSDC Development Valuer – item 10

- Scrutiny noted that the financial implications paragraph was missing from the report, and so they were unable to make a comment about if the role was providing good value to SSDC. When the decision was taken to appoint the Development Manager, it was stated that whilst this post was not being put forward on a spend to save basis, over a period of time, cost recovery would be possible. Progress against this aspiration would be useful.

District Executive Forward Plan – item 11

- October 2013 – Scrutiny sought more information regarding what the item ‘SSDC Health & Wellbeing Audit Action Plan’ would be about.
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22. Somerset Flooding Summit – Draft Final Report (Agenda Item 10)

The Scrutiny Manager presented the report as shown in the agenda. She commented that Sedgemoor District Council had considered the report the previous day and the other districts and county council would do so over the next few weeks. The Steering Group were of the opinion that the Somerset Water Management Partnership (SWMP) should be the lead group to take things forward, although concern had been raised about governance. Recently new governance had been discussed and a revised constitution was being drafted.

It was suggested that the steering group continues to meet, possibly twice a year, to monitor the progress of outcomes and to keep the momentum for action going. She noted that the leaders of the Somerset councils had met to consider the report and had fed back some comments. Members discussed the comments and the Deputy Leader, briefly explained the reasoning for some of them.

The Scrutiny Manager explained that at this stage Scrutiny members were being asked to endorse the Scrutiny recommendations, but they could be amended if they wished to incorporate some of the comments suggested by the leaders. Members unanimously agreed that the report be recommended to District Executive with the original Scrutiny recommendations.

The Chairman thanked the Scrutiny Manager, and SSDC members on the steering group – Councillors Dave Bulmer and Paul Maxwell, for their work with the flooding review.

ACTION: Members to note the draft final report on the Somerset Flooding Summit, and to recommend it to District Executive for consideration.

23. Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel (PCP) (Agenda Item 11)

Councillor Tony Lock, as the SSDC representative on the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel gave a verbal update to members which included:

- The PCP was not a direct replacement for the Police Authority. Its role was to scrutinise the budget and the Police Plan, and to monitor complaints against the Commissioner
- The Chief Constable would be making a presentation to Council on 19th September
- The PCP had raised concerns about PCSOs and whether they were losing their effectiveness.
- Highlights from meetings about the Police Plan, including detection rates for burglaries were not improving.

During discussion members raised several points including:

- Due to the amount of information, written reports would be preferred
- Would be interesting to know how many Special Constables there are in our area
- Concern at the lack of funding for the PCP
- Concerns about policing in rural areas needed to be acknowledged, concern that many issues and topics were Bristol centric
- More local policing is required with officers who know the local communities and characters
- The role of the PCP was not clear to the public
- Figures for crime rates were misleading as the criteria and calculations for statistics keep changing

In response to a comment regarding the future of Yeovil Police Station, as seen in the recent press, the PCP representative suggest a letter was written to the Commissioner to ask for more information.

In response to the request for written reports, the Scrutiny Manager suggested that in future, the minutes of the PCP meetings could be included in the Scrutiny agenda for information.

The Chairman thanked the councillor for his report and requested that a further update report be made in writing around Christmas or New Year.

- ACTION:**
- Members to note the report
 - An update report be added to the work programme for Dec '13 / Jan '14
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24. Verbal Update on Task & Finish Reviews (Agenda Item 12)

Council Tax Benefit Changes

The Chairman of the Task and Finish group commented that officers were pulling together a monitoring report for consideration by the group in July to see if there are any areas of concern or if the scheme might need to be altered in any way for the forthcoming year.

Countywide Review of the Homelessness Strategy

The Chairman of the group noted that various issues had been raised by the group including that the strategy was too long, repetitive and not easy to understand. The strategy had been compared with other local authority strategies. Suggestions had been

made, which the Housing and Welfare Manager had taken away and would report back to the group.

Business Rates – Discretionary Rate Relief

No update since the last meeting.

County Wide Review of Flooding

The Scrutiny Manager commented that the original Task and Finish had finished. The steering group would meet again in September, and then it was hoped monitoring would transfer to the Somerset Water Management Partnership.

ACTION: Members to note the updates.

25. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 13)

The Scrutiny Manager provided two updates:

- Health Scrutiny – Somerset County Council now had a new Scrutiny structure in place with two Scrutiny committees. She suggested that members waited for six months to see what items were on SCC Scrutiny work programme before raising any issues or concerns. She commented that there were concerns about the implementation, roles and capacity at SCC.
 - Connecting Somerset and Devon Broadband – been approached by East Devon District Council about doing a joint review of the broadband project. She commented that she would do a viability report to Scrutiny in September to see if members wished to go ahead with the review.
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26. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 14)

The Scrutiny Manager suggested discussing a refresh of the programme at the next meeting.

ACTION: Members to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

27. Somerset Waste Board – Forward Plan (Agenda Item 15)

ACTION: Members to note the Somerset Waste Board Forward Plan.

28. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 16)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 30 July 2013 at 10.00am in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman
