

South Somerset District Council

Draft minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 7 January 2014 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00am –12.50pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (in the Chair)

David Bulmer
Pauline Clarke
Nick Colbert
Nigel Gage
Carol Goodall

Pauline Lock
Tony Lock
Paul Maxwell
Nigel Mermagen

Graham Middleton
Sue Osborne
David Recardo
Martin Wale

Also present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Ric Pallister, Jo Roundell Greene, Angie Singleton, David Norris and John Calvert

Officers:

Donna Parham	Assistant Director, Corporate and Financial Services
Saveria Moss	Programme Manager, South Somerset Family Focus Programme
Steve Joel	Assistance Director, Health and Wellbeing
Rina Singh	Strategic Director, Place and Performance
David Julian	Economic Development Manager
Kim Close	Asst. Director, Communities / Area Development Manager (South)
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Becky Sanders	Democratic Services Officer

99. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 3 December 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

100. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

All members were present.

101. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

102. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

104. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman reminded members that as the Budget Scrutiny meeting had been cancelled, discussion of the budget was now included on this agenda.

105. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 5 December 2013 (Agenda item 7)

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

106. Budget Scrutiny (Agenda item 8)

Referring to the report 'Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme Update' in the District Executive agenda, the Portfolio Holder (Finance and Spatial Planning) explained the background to the overall budget for 2014/15. He commented there was a strong indication that there would be no increase in Council Tax for the SSDC element. It was also noted that SSDC had been fortunate in bringing forward new housing growth and hence New Homes Bonus.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) summarised appendix A of the report which detailed the efficiency savings and unavoidable budget pressures. Responses by the Assistant Director, Portfolio Holder, Leader and Area West Chairman to issues raised by members included:

- Details on capping for parishes would not be known until later in January.
 - New Homes Bonus was under review and therefore future funding details were uncertain.
 - Taking away the underspend allocated to Birchfield Disused Landfill did not cause a risk and emergency funds remain available if required.
 - Savings associated with Tourism were due to monies no longer being required for maintenance of a premise as the Tourist Information Centre had moved out of the Old Coach House.
 - Savings identified were not a reduction in service delivery but were as a result of streamlining budgets.
 - Land drainage – efficiency savings were not being made beyond the ability to respond, however it was important to be clear where the statutory responsibilities laid.
 - A number of years again, before the current term of members, Area West Committee had agreed a reduction in grants over a four year programme.
 - Leaning of services would continue and would be done on a rolling programme
 - A corporate decision had been taken a number of years ago that SSDC would only maintain one public toilet facility in each town.
 - There needed to be consideration of whether the grant to parishes was reduced/ increased in line with the grant to SSDC from central government. It was only possible to use the data available and it was acknowledged that there might be more impacts on some communities.
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- Reduction in income from car park notices was partly due to less penalty notices being served and also more people using the phone and pay service.
- Flexing issues with some budgets made it difficult to have an accurate budget and a better way of reporting needed to be found.
- Reduction in the Careline income was mainly due to the budget not being accurate in recent years.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) informed members that a budget for business rates had not been set as no guidance had been received to date.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director and Portfolio Holders for attending the meeting.

106. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 9 January 2014 (Agenda item 9)

Members considered the reports outlined in the District Executive agenda for 9 January 2014. It was agreed that the following comments would be taken forward to District Executive for consideration:

South Somerset Family Focus Update – item 7

- Members acknowledged the work involved was very challenging but worthwhile
- Members expressed disappointment that it appeared multi-agency working may not be working as effectively as it could be, but acknowledged the responsibility for safeguarding children lies with SCC and that SSDC was doing everything possible to facilitate better multi-agency working.
- Scrutiny were concerned that funding for April 2014 had yet to be confirmed.

Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme Update – item 8

- Members sought clarification that the efficiency savings indicated in Appendix A would not lead to a reduction in service delivery and was only the streamlining of budgets.
- Members acknowledged that the budget proposals this year have limited, if any impact on public services but understand that there will need to be more fundamental service delivery discussions going forward and sought clarification as to how Scrutiny would be involved in this process.
- Members were concerned about the impact passing on future reduction/increases in South Somerset's grant to some of the smaller parishes.

Review of the Council Tax Reforms – Empty Homes Premium – item 9

- Members asked if the costs of administration for a charging order minimal compared to the Council Tax Charge?
- Scrutiny were content with the recommendation

New Build Empty Property Relief from Business Rates – item 10

- Scrutiny were content with the recommendation

Replacing the Corporate Telephone System with Microsoft Lync (Phase 3 of the Microsoft Lync Project) – item 11

- Scrutiny sought re-assurance that there were adequate measures available to mitigate any issues
- Members queried how or if the system would affect the way they are contacted.
- Members also questioned if officers were confident that existing cabling for the system had capacity

SSDC Development Valuer – creating a full-time permanent post – item 12

- Members acknowledged that recommendation 2 should read that the total figure stated would be split between the two financial years
- Scrutiny commented that it would have been useful to have had comparative information from previous years about how much had been spent on valuer services
- Members had sought detail about the savings achieved by having the post, and acknowledge the comments made by the Leader and Strategic Director (Place and Performance) as when this post was first created, it was intended that a significant part of the post would be self-financing?

District Executive Forward Plan – item 13

Scrutiny queried the item on the Forward Plan for February - Historic Buildings Policy Review – as this showed as being a Scrutiny report, the Scrutiny Manager undertook to clarify the nature of this report.

CONFIDENTIAL - 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).

Yeovil Country Park Education Centre and Ranger Base Project Capital Financing – item 15 (confidential)

- Members made comments in closed session

Review of Councillor Representation on Outside Bodies – item 16 (confidential)

- Members made comments in closed session

107. Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel (PCP) (Agenda item 10)

Councillor Tony Lock, SSDC representative on the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel provided members of a brief update and made reference to the documents detailed in the agenda report. He noted that it had recently been announced that a major restructure of the Avon and Somerset Constabulary was taking place in order to help tackle a financial deficit. He informed members that detail about budgets would be known at the next meeting of the PCP in February.

During a brief discussion, some members expressed their concern that the PCP appeared to be morphing into something may be it shouldn't, with sub groups being evolved to do various things.

- ACTION:**
- Members to note the update
 - Democratic Services to add to add next update to the Work Programme for July 2014.
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108. Verbal Update on Task & Finish Reviews (Agenda Item 11)

National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) – Discretionary Rate Relief

The Scrutiny Manager updated members that the group were in the process of mapping all of the grants, reliefs, guidance and advice that is available to businesses, not-for-profit organisations and charities by SSDC and other organisations across the district. Meetings had been scheduled with the Economic Development team, representatives from the Areas and the Somerset Business Agency throughout January.

Connecting Somerset and Devon Broadband

The Scrutiny Manager, advised members that the next meeting would take place in Honiton on 16 January, to which representatives from BT, relevant portfolio holders from both councils and a director of Connecting Somerset and Devon broadband would be attending. The meeting would provide an opportunity to raise questions about the roll out of rural broadband across both South Somerset and East Devon.

Choice Based Letting / Homefinder Somerset Follow Up

The Scrutiny Manager advised that following a comprehensive review several years ago, some members of the original group would be working with officers to assist with the development of the Homefinder Somerset website, information leaflets and forms.

Somerset Strategic Housing Framework

Members were informed by the Scrutiny Manager that a draft Strategic Housing Framework document was now available and needed to be reviewed by a Task and Finish group to ensure that it would work for SSDC. An initial meeting had been arranged for 14 January 2014.

- ACTION:** Members to note the updates.
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109. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 12)

The Scrutiny Manager provided the following updates:

- The Flooding Steering Group was due to be reconvened in the near future to assess the impact of the recent flooding incidents and to consider to what extent the recommendations
- A meeting of the Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel was held in December to consider the service changes planned by the Somerset Waste Board in response to budget reductions from Somerset County Council. Ongoing support arrangements for the Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel had yet to be agreed.

- ACTION:** Members to note the updates.
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110. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

There were no updates to the Scrutiny Work Programme,

ACTION: Members to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

111. Somerset Waste Board – Forward Plan (Agenda item 14)

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

112. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 15)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 4 February 2014 at 10.00am in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman
