

South Somerset District Council

Draft minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 4 February 2014 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00am – 12.55pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (in the Chair)

David Bulmer

Pauline Clarke (to 11.00am)

Nick Colbert

Nigel Gage

Carol Goodall

Pauline Lock

Tony Lock

Nigel Mermagen

Graham Middleton

Sue Osborne

David Recardo

Martin Wale

Also present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Henry Hobhouse and Sylvia Seal.

Officers:

Vega Sturgess

Rina Singh

Donna Parham

David Julian

Jo Gale

Becky Sanders

Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus)

Strategic Director (Place & Performance)

Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services)

Economic Development Manager

Scrutiny Manager

Democratic Services Officer

113. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 7 January 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

114. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Paul Maxwell.

115. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

116. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

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

Free parking in SSDC pay and display car parks over the Christmas period 2013

When the item was considered on the District Executive agenda in December, Scrutiny

had sought clarification of the monitoring arrangements. The Chairman asked if monitoring had been completed. In response, the Strategic Director (Operations and Customer Focus) confirmed that monitoring had taken place but feedback was still awaited from some traders and also the Yeovil Chamber of Trade and Commerce.

118. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman reminded members that HRH The Prince of Wales was visiting the area that day to view the flooding and to meet with some of the people and communities directly affected. She congratulated members and officers who had been involved with the Joint Scrutiny Review of Flooding.

119. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 9 January 2014 (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.

120. Portfolio Holder Presentation (Agenda item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Property and Climate Change provided members with a verbal presentation on his portfolio, highlighting achievements to date, his aspirations for savings and efficiencies, and other matters he hoped to tackle in the future including:

- Delivery of thin client technology and new telephony
- Rationalisation of SSDC properties and offices
- Transfer or closure of public conveniences
- Ongoing maintenance of the old landfill site at Birchfield
- Assessing the heating and air flow arrangements for the Brympton Way offices
- Aspirations for a more paperless environment
- Working on a pilot project for transport in conjunction with South Somerset Together,
- Developing a policy regarding email retention guidelines
- Exploring ways of reducing postage costs

During a short discussion the Portfolio Holder responded to comments and questions raised by members. Regarding a specific question, the Strategic Director (Operations and Customer Focus) clarified that a car park order was being made so that car parking at Brympton Way was enforceable in the future, which would enable management and enforcement of the spaces when there were more staff in the building. She confirmed there were no plans specifically for councillor parking but there would be spaces dedicated to SSDC staff and SSDC visitors which councillors would be entitled to use. There would also be visitor spaces for members of the public with a short stay period.

At the request of the Portfolio Holder, the Strategic Director also provided members with a brief summary of the current civil contingencies response regarding the flooding situation.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending the meeting to update members.

ACTION: Members to note the presentation.

121. The Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) (Agenda item 9)

The Economic Development Manager presented the report as shown in the agenda and highlighted to members that the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was not a successor to the Regional Development Agency (RDA). He explained the background as to how the LEPs had been set up and they were a completely different way of doing things to the old RDAs. LEPs were strategic bodies with overarching economic goals, and not direct delivery organisations. One of their main areas of focus was to channel funding towards prioritised projects. It was noted that the Board was selected by sector and not by geographical area.

During discussion a number of comments and questions were raised by members. Responses from the Economic Development Manager, Strategic Director (Place and Performance) and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Spatial Planning included:

- Acknowledgement that board membership appeared weighted towards Devon, but this might be partly due to population and locations of larger businesses.
- The LEP was the channel for some European funding streams for the area.
- SSDC had only limited influence on the LEP and its programme of work.
- LEP were concentrating on more local transport initiatives rather than dualling of the A303.
- There appeared to be about 30 members on the business forum including the SSDC Portfolio Holder for Environment and Economic Development and an SSDC Economic Development Officer. Representatives from businesses in the SSDC area included AgustaWestland and the Yeovil Chamber of Commerce.
- A number of sub groups were up and running now, these were usually lead by private business, agencies or County Council representatives. South Somerset (the area) had representation on some sub-groups.
- Rural focus groups had yet to be constituted and it was unlikely there would be local authority representation. There would however be representatives at a county level.
- The Economic Development team had promoted the role of the LEP business forum to local businesses.
- There is confidence that there are now good lines of communication with LEP
- Further information was available from the website:
<http://www.heartofswlep.co.uk/home>

Members were in general agreement that there was a need to try and get local authority representation on the rural focus groups, and due to the geographical spread of the LEP that SSDC needed to fight for its portion of any available funding.

ACTION: Members to note the report.

122. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6 February 2014 (Agenda item 10)

Members considered the reports outlined in the District Executive agenda for 6 February 2014. It was agreed that the following comments would be taken forward to District Executive for consideration:

Somerset Waste Partnership – Draft Business Plan 2014-19 – item 6

- Appendix 1 on page 11, point 1.3 – Scrutiny queried how this would be implemented and enforced, and what the penalties could be. It was believed some other authorities had introduced fines which had been over-ruled by the DCLG.
- Appendix 1 on page 11, point 1.4 – Scrutiny queried if providing information through hospitals (maternity units and paediatrics) might be an option, as not all parents would approach children's centres for services
- Page 21, second para – Scrutiny queried why an option with free caddy liners had been explored, as free caddy liners were not available to other residents.

Authorities Housing Monitoring Report 2012-13 – item 7

- Page 32 point 5.2 – Scrutiny asked if it was worth consulting to see if the information published to the public on this occasion provided what they wanted and was easily understood. The document needed to be in simpler and easier to understand English, in particular some sentences were very long and would benefit from additional grammar.
- Scrutiny particularly felt rec 2 was a very good idea
- Scrutiny felt the wording of rec 5 was difficult to understand.

Symphony Project – item 8

- Scrutiny queried why the funding was coming from the District Executive Contingency, and could not come from the wider health & Wellbeing budget
- The detail in the financial implications, para 7.1, seemed to not quite add up.
- Scrutiny noted in the recommendation that the lump sum would be spread over two years, but queried if instead we should budgeting for the year 2015/16.
- A map of the area covered by the project would be useful
- Scrutiny queried the relevance of the appendix – but acknowledged comments made later by the Strategic Director that the appendix had been included in error.
- Scrutiny, with some reservations, accepted the recommendation, but commented they felt the cost to SSDC would be higher when factoring in officer time etc.

2013/14 Revenue Budget Monitoring for Quarter ending 30 December 2013 – item 9

- Scrutiny sought clarification that figures in brackets on page 45 onwards were underspends and savings
- Page 35 of appendix pack - Scrutiny queried what the reserve for Eco-Town was for
- Page 21 of appendix pack – Scrutiny sought clarification regarding Rights of Way as other parts of the service had transferred back to County if this work was now discretionary for SSDC?

2013/14 Capital Budget Monitoring for Quarter ending 30 December 2013 – item 10

- Page 57 in the table – members noted that Font Villas was listed as being in East Coker when it's in West Coker.
- Page 57 in the table – Scrutiny queried what the intention was for the slippage in the hardware replacement programme and whether it would be returned to the 'pot'
- Page 61 in appx pack – Scrutiny queried the £97k remaining budget for the Reckleford Gyratory as it was believed the project was complete.
- Page 44 in appx pack (near bottom) – Scrutiny noted that there had been no loan spending for 'Loan Scheme for Somerset' and queried if the scheme was being promoted adequately.

Revenue Budget 2014/15 – Medium Term Financial Plan and Revised Capital Programme – item 11

- Page 69, point 38 - the report makes reference to a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, but it was noted this had only been to consider inescapable
- Page 61, rec (j) – members asked for more detail as there was little information in the report.
- Page 71, point 52 – members questioned whether the reference to Nov 2012 should have read Nov 2013.

Designation of Neighbourhood Area – Wincanton Parish – item 12

- Scrutiny made no comments

Listed Buildings in Disrepair – Policy and Procedure – item 13

- Scrutiny noted they had considered a similar report a few months previously
- Members also raised concern about action for un-listed buildings in conservation areas, and as the matter was subjective there were sometimes differences of opinions between officers.

Update on the Pilot Intern and Apprenticeship Scheme – item 14

- Members commented that the report had been enlightening, and the feedback comments were very encouraging
- Members acknowledged that some officers had concerns about the rates of pay for apprentices being low.

District Executive Forward Plan – item 15

- Scrutiny made no comments

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

The Scrutiny Manager updated members on the progress of current Task and Finish reviews.

National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR) – Discretionary Rate Relief

The group had met with Area Development Managers, representatives of the Economic Development Team and Patricia Marks of the Somerset Business Agency. Information

and evidence collected from the sessions, along with other work done, would inform some draft principles and proposals that would be circulated to members and relevant officers for comment, prior to a full consultation exercise with the SSDC community and business, charitable and not-for-profit representatives.

Choice Based Letting / Homefinder Somerset Follow Up

Due to external factors in the Housing team, this follow up work would not commence for a few weeks.

Somerset Strategic Housing Framework

The group had met twice and reviewed the document to formulate ideas and suggestions for the impending South Somerset Housing Strategy and Action Plan. They had also met with the SSDC Corporate Strategic Housing Manager to seek clarification on some elements of the framework document. The group had agreed the best way forward would be to support the recommendation that District Executive adopt the framework. They had also made suggestions to the layout and content of the South Somerset Housing Strategy and action plan that would be subsequently created.

Connecting Somerset and Devon Broadband

A meeting with representatives from the Connecting Devon and Somerset Project Team and both Somerset and Devon County Councils was held on 16th January. The meeting was well attended by members of the public from both South Somerset and East Devon. A presentation was given by BT and there was an informative question and answer session. As a result of the meeting, Connecting Devon and Somerset officers agreed to meet with officers from EDDC and SSDC to discuss how they could all work more effectively together in the future to represent the interests of residents and businesses without the need to sign a non-disclosure document.

In response to the update, members on the group commented that the size of the venue had been inadequate and were concerned as to how and why it had turned into what appeared to be an open public meeting. The Chairman noted that she would discuss the matter with the Scrutiny Manager for the review.

ACTION: Members to note the updates.

124. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 12)

The Scrutiny Manager provided the following update:

- A meeting of the Flooding Steering group had been arranged for the following day to discuss the recent flooding incidents and what, if any lessons had been learnt from the Flood Summit held in 2013.

ACTION: Members to note the update.

125. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

The Scrutiny Manager informed members that the Police and Crime Panel update item would be made to the July meeting, and not January as indicated in error in the agenda.

ACTION: Members to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

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

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

127. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 15)

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

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Chairman