

## South Somerset District Council

**Draft Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held at the **Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil BA20 2HT on Tuesday 4 August 2015.**

(10.00 am - 12.25 pm)

**Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Jason Baker	Tony Lock
John Clark	Sue Osborne
Gye Dibben	Garry Shortland
Val Keitch	Rob Stickland

**Also Present:**

Mike Beech	Tim Inglefield
Neil Bloomfield	Ric Pallister
Henry Hobhouse	Angie Singleton

**Officers**

Rina Singh	Strategic Director (Place & Performance)
Vega Sturgess	Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus) / Interim Chief Executive
Donna Parham	Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services)
Roger Brown	ICT Manager
Jason Toogood	Customer Focus Support Manager
Paul Wheatley	Principal Spatial Planner
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager

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**26. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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**27. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clare Aparicio Paul, Dave Bulmer, Tiffany Osborne, David Recardo and Martin Wale.

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**28. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)**

There were no declarations of interests.

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**29. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)**

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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**30. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 5)**

There were no issues raised.

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**31. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)**

The Chairman informed members that she had attended the Somerset Rivers Authority Stakeholder event – the results of which would be discussed later in the agenda.

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**32. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 2 July 2015 (Agenda Item 7)**

In relation to the special District Executive meeting held to discuss the Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband, the Chairman commented that Scrutiny hoped that SSDC was now actively involved in the re-tendering of the project bearing in mind the authority has now signed the Non-Disclosure Agreement.

The Scrutiny Manager informed the Committee that in response to Councillor Andrew Turpin's Motion - Reinstating Member representation on the South West Home Safety Partnership at Full Council on 16 July 2015, officers confirmed this did not form part of the detailed Outside Body Review and therefore have sought an update on the latest position and will report progress back to the Committee in due course.

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**33. SSDC Telephony Response (Agenda Item 8)**

The Customer Focus Support Manager introduced the report to members. He informed the Committee that in preparing the report, officers had addressed each of the points raised by Scrutiny in their report request. He explained that his team not only answered the telephones in the Contact Centre but also had to staff the Brympton Way Reception.

He explained that the service is characterised by peaks and troughs in demand and was not staffed to cope with the peaks in demand. He commented that recently there always seemed to be 'peaks' such as Council Tax Summonses and Electoral Registration. These peaks in demand combined with technical issues had resulted in lower performance than usual within the service.

Some work has already been done with services to minimise the impact on the Contact Centre by providing direct dial numbers where appropriate, all staff and Councillors are asked where possible to avoid using the 462462 number as a switchboard.

The ICT Manager told the Committee that the current dip in performance was a complex combination of capacity and technical issues. He assured members that the major technical issues had been addressed but there was still some work to do. Recent testing had identified only 2 problems calls for one adviser over three days. This was during a quieter period on the phones but still reflected an improvement in the reduction of instances.

The Interim CEO (and Strategic Director for Operations & Customer Focus) said that it had been a very difficult time for staff within the Contact Centre as they were having to deal with some very upset customers but she commended the way the Customer Focus and IT teams had worked together to try and move forward and improve the situation.

Following comments raised during discussion, responses provided by officers and a portfolio holder included:

- The lack of performance data made it difficult to 'manage' the service and it was hoped that the new software to enable this would be installed by September.
- The Service Manager was having to balance the need to provide high call quality to customers with the need for an effective Call centre system but that the new software would facilitate both whilst also providing performance management information.
- The temporary additional resource was now starting to have an impact.
- A full and detailed procurement system had been gone through prior to purchasing any software.
- Once all phones and related systems are working completely reliably, we will review the project and seek lessons learnt for the future. It is a corporate priority to encourage more customers to 'self-serve' via the website.

**Action:** That an update report be presented to Scrutiny in December 2015, covering the impact of the new software due for installation in September.

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#### **34. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6 August 2015 (Agenda Item 9)**

Members considered the reports outlined in the District Executive Agenda for 6 August 2015. It was agreed that the following comments would be taken forward to District Executive for consideration:

##### **The Somerset Rivers Authority and Flood Action Plan (item 6)**

- Scrutiny Committee members support the recommendation that creating a separate precepting body is the preferred option for sustainable funding of the SRA.
- Members sought clarification as to how the SRA would be funded in the interim, whilst a long term solution is formulated. The current funding is only in place for 2015/16 and it anticipated that at least 2 years' funding will need to be identified.
- Members questioned the impact of creating a new precepting body on SSDC's Council Tax Support scheme? Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) kindly clarified if the requirement was to raise £2.7 million the cost to SSDC would be approximately £270,000.
- The report states that progress against delivery of the 20 Year Levels and Moors Action Plan is currently being reviewed – Scrutiny members requested that the findings of this review be reported to SSDC Members.

##### **Approval of Local Development Scheme (2015 – 2018) – (item 7)**

- Members noted that the funding for the external resources identified in the report would be coming from the Local Plan Reserve and that it was most cost effective to use consultants.

### **Draft Asset Management Plan 2015-16 (item 8)**

- Scrutiny members endorsed the inclusion of the cemetery within the Asset Management Strategy and noted the improved layout and format of the report.
- Members would like clarity on the current position of the Car Parking Strategy, in particular, when does the current strategy run out and what plans are in place to draw up the successive strategy?

### **2015/2016 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30 June 2015 (item 9)**

- Members questioned the position regarding Broadway Farm in Merriott and why the £240k had been moved back to reserves?

### **2015-2016 Revenue budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30 June 2015 (item 10)**

- No Comments.

### **Commercial Property Disposals – Land at Lakefields, West Coker (item 11)**

- Members asked if the residents would be charged for the permit parking proposed in the report and suggested that the legal agreement should specify how any profit made would be allocated.

### **Commercial Property Disposals 1 – 4 St Johns Cottages, Charlton Musgrove (item 12)**

- Again, members questioned if there were to be any charges applied by the Parish Council to allotment holders, and if so, the legal agreement made reference to how any profits would be allocated.

### **Monthly News Snapshot (item 13)**

- Members would like to commend the Development Management Service for the improved performance relating to number of planning decisions overturned at appeal.

### **Disposal of the former Grove Alley Public Conveniences in Bruton (Confidential) (item 17)**

- Members had no comments.

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## **35. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 10)**

The Scrutiny Managers updated members on the progress of the two current Task and Finish Reviews:

**Council Tax Reduction** – the proposed Scheme was currently out for consultation and there been a positive response rate so far.

**Licensing Fees and Charges** – The first meeting of this Task and Finish Group had gone well with the review Terms of Reference now agreed – the next meeting would be held on 16<sup>th</sup> September.

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### 36. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 11)

A report to July Council outlined the broad parameters of exploring potential joint management arrangements with Mendip District Council and others. Members discussed this and felt that this was a significant matter for the authority and felt that Scrutiny had an important and valuable role to play in establishing a shared understanding of SSDC's aims and objectives in moving forward.

Scrutiny Committee members agreed that Scrutiny was not looking to comment on the substance of the proposals at this stage and would be focussing on the processes and methodology being applied to assess potential joint management arrangements, and as such requested that the Leader respond to the following points in order to enhance member engagement and understanding in this important matter.

- What criteria will a potential arrangement with Mendip, or others, be assessed against and how was this criteria arrived at?
- Scrutiny at SSDC has always adopted a strong evidence based approach to its work, in terms of this issue, what evidence will be gathered to underpin any recommendations for change and how will this evidence be reported to members **prior** to any final decision being taken?
- What measures have been put in place to ensure **all** potential options are considered and evaluated simultaneously (against the agreed rationale for change)?
- How are the risks associated with this kind of project being actively managed?
- What are the specific arrangements for the working group that Council agreed to establish to take this forward, i.e. membership of the group, terms of reference, reporting mechanisms, timescales, budgets to consultants etc?
- Are there any 'deal breakers'?
- What will the successful implementation of this project look and feel like for SSDC members, staff and residents?
- What is the decision making process from this point on? Scrutiny members strongly feel that there should be an opportunity for members to consider the report prior to being asked to take any final decisions at Council to allow for a more collaborative process.

**Action:** That the Leader be asked to address the points raised by Scrutiny.

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### 37. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

Councillor Lock proposed an item for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme looking at the process followed when considering awards for Area grants. He asked that the Assistant Director – Communities be asked to come to a future Scrutiny Committee meeting and outline for members the processes followed across the four Areas in preparing grant requests for consideration by Area Committees.

**Action:** That the Assistant Director (Communities) be asked to attend a future meeting to outline the grant application process across the Area Committees.

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**38. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 13)**

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 1 September 2015 in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman