

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held at the **Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil BA20 2HT on Tuesday 10 May 2016.**

(10.00 am - 12.30 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Jason Baker	Tony Lock
Mike Beech	Sue Osborne
Dave Bulmer	Tiffany Osborne
John Clark	David Recardo
Tim Inglefield	Garry Shortland
Val Keitch	Rob Stickland

Also Present:

Henry Hobhouse	Jo Roundell Greene
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Officers

Rina Singh	Interim Chief Executive
Martin Woods	Assistant Director (Economy)
David Julian	Economic Development Manager
Jo Morgan	Equalities Officer
Gary Russ	Procurement and Risk Manager
Paul Wheatley	Principal Spatial Planner
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager

145. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 April 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

146. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clare Aparicio Paul, Gye Dibben and Martin Wale. Councillor Mike Beech attended the meeting as substitute for Councillor Martin Wale and Councillor Tim Inglefield as substitute for Councillor Clare Aparicio Paul.

147. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillors Tony Lock, David Recardo and Rob Stickland each declared a personal interest for item 14 on the District Executive agenda – Provision and Maintenance of Bus Shelters, as they are also members of Yeovil Town Council.

148. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

149. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 5)

Councillor Sue Steele explained the Rural Broadband report that had been scheduled to go before District Executive later in the week was now going direct to Full Council. As this had been a matter that the committee were keen to monitor and be involved with she had requested the Assistant Director (Economy) and the lead officer for the report to attend this Scrutiny Committee meeting to provide an update and talk through the report under item 10 – Matters of Interest.

150. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

Councillor Sue Steele advised that she is part of the Transformation Board as an individual councillor not in her capacity as Scrutiny Chair and unless she has specifically consulted the Scrutiny Committee on an issue, all views expressed will be her own. It was agreed she will provide updates at each committee meeting regarding the work of the Transformation Board.

Councillor Dave Bulmer - Vice Chairman added that he is on the Income Generation Board and will also provide updates.

Councillor John Clark – Vice Chairman confirmed he is also on the Transformation Board.

151. Equality Objectives Report (Agenda Item 7)

The Assistant Director (Economy) provided a general overview of the Equalities Objectives Action Plan and highlighted the improvement in the decision making process with the introduction of the Equalities Impact Analysis (EQA).

The Equalities Officer gave examples where having conducted a full EQA has enabled SSDC to demonstrate the positive work it does to assess and evaluate impact for residents and therefore make good decisions on behalf of the South Somerset Community. She reminded members that as SSDC's decision making structures evolve with the inclusion of various Boards, some of which are decision making it is essential that they give 'due regard' to equality implications with all decisions.

In response to members' questions, the following information was provided;

- There should always be at least a paragraph in every decision making report with regard to equality and diversity implications otherwise a full EQA should be completed detailing the impact and where possible the mitigation that will be introduced.
- An update will be included in the Action Plan when it is considered by District Executive on the progress on Action 3.01 – We will work in partnership through attendance at the Independent Advisory Group, Strategic Partnership Against Hate Crime and Hate Crimes Conferences.

152. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 7 April 2016 (Agenda Item 8)

Members noted the update given by the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee.

153. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 12 May 2016 (Agenda Item 9)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the reports contained in the District Executive Agenda for the 12 May 2016 and made the following comments:

Report from Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (Agenda item 6)

- Members noted the report.

Intelligent Enforcement Proposal for Car Parks (Agenda item 7)

- Members requested that any potential SMS charges are made very clear in all communications – especially those relating to receiving confirmation text messages.

Community Infrastructure Levy – Draft Charging Schedule (Agenda item 8)

- Members noted the modifications to the scheme as noted in the report and that the viability of the proposed levy would be thoroughly assessed by the Independent Examiner.
- Members were pleased to note that the charging schedule will be reviewed in 2-3 years to take account of market changes.

Monthly News Snapshot (Agenda item 9)

- Members noted the report.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 10)

- Members noted that at the last Full Council meeting it was agreed that monthly updates would be submitted to District Executive outlining the progress in the Chief Executive Officer recruitment process – and questioned why this has not been factored into the Forward Plan and no update has been included in this agenda.
- Members noted that on occasion significant reports (such as the Superfast Broadband, Strategic Alliance, Management Arrangements) are going straight to Council and so are not included in the Forward Plan. Scrutiny Committee agreed to request that reports that are destined to go straight to Full Council are incorporated into the District Executive Forward Plan or that a Forward Plan for Council reports is created to enable Scrutiny committee to effectively plan their work programme and fulfil their function of holding the Executive to account

- Scrutiny Committee agreed to request that District Executive give some thought to how they will keep Scrutiny up-to-date and involved with work and decisions of the various themed boards. To enable effective Scrutiny, the committee request at least monthly updates.

CONFIDENTIAL – Exclusion of the Press and 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).

Restricted Covenant Removal – Dunster House, Castle Cary (Confidential) (Agenda item 13)

- No comments

The Provision and Maintenance of Bus Shelters in the Yeovil Area (Confidential) (Agenda item 14)

- Members supported the recommendations as the best solution at this current time.

154. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 10)

Members were updated as follows on the progress of the Task and Finish Groups currently underway:

Council Tax Reduction Review 2017

The first meeting of this Group has been held to agree the review parameters – it would be beneficial to increase the membership of this group to ensure a cross section of views and experiences are fed into the review. If any member wishes to join the group please contact either of the Scrutiny Managers.

Discretionary Housing Payments

This group was due have an initial meeting on 13th May where they planned to set the review Terms of Reference and scope.

Consent to Dispose of Housing Stock / Local Connections Allocation Policy

These two Task and Finish Groups have combined for the purpose of meeting with senior officers from South Somerset’s 5 key Housing Association Partners. This evidence gathering session was scheduled for 11th May and has been designed as an opportunity for members to meet directly with the Housing Providers and discuss the various issues associated with this topic.

NNDR

NNDR discretionary relief policy review – the changes from the revised policy have taken affect from 1st of April, this has resulted in some more feedback from ratepayers, the Task and Finish group will review this and changes in legislation regarding mandatory

relief to ensure the policy still achieves what it set out to do and that the impact of the changes to mandatory relief are taken into account.

Community Council for Somerset

The Scrutiny Manager explained that Members had previously agreed to establish a Task and Finish group to look at the roles and responsibilities of the Community Council for Somerset. The ambition was agreed to establish how best the two organisations can work together to achieve more for the SSDC Community and address any areas of potential duplication.

Members agreed with the current number of reviews this item of work could be started with an invitation to Community Council for Somerset attending Scrutiny Committee to provide an overview of the organisation.

155. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 11)

Scrutiny Comments on Superfast Broadband Extension Programme – Council 19th May 2016

The Assistant Director (Economy) gave an overview of the background and history to this report and explained that Cllr Ric Pallister felt it was appropriate that all members should be involved with this decision and that the report should go directly to Full Council.

Members raised the following questions, views and observations:

- Scrutiny members acknowledged that this a difficult decision – the provision of Superfast Broadband is an acknowledged priority of this Council and the only viable vehicle would appear to be through the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) Proposal.
- Members are concerned CDS are unable to provide a mechanism to enable members to track where the money has been spent/monitor the return on a significant investment of over £640k, this is a concern.
- Members noted that Devon County Council was contributing on behalf of the Devon District authorities – and therefore also underwriting the risk on their behalf.
- Members accepted that the officers had attempted to address the conditions identified by members when this £640k was agreed in principle, but had not been able to secure conclusive confirmation that business premises would be a priority or that SSDC funds would be spent within South Somerset.
- It is not ideal that prior to committing this funding , SSDC is unable to ascertain what the level of coverage will be in South Somerset at the conclusion of Phase 1 of the project, the target of which was to have 90% coverage across the country – The Superfast Extension Programme is to take the average from 90 to 95% coverage.
- Scrutiny Committee Members would like confirmation regarding the match funding, If we do not agree to contribute towards the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) Superfast (broadband) Extension Programme (SEP).

- It would seem that there is no viable 'Plan B' at this stage, if we looked to go it alone, we would be excluded from the CDS programme due to double funding and state aid rules.
 - Members accepted that there would be no more information forthcoming and that the information currently available would have to suffice as the basis on which to make a decision.
 - Scrutiny members discussed the risk of taking the decision and of not being able to clearly demonstrate what the investment had delivered versus the risk to South Somerset residents of not investing the money and therefore potentially threatening future broadband provision in 5% of the less commercially viable parts of the district.
 - Members noted that there are a number of issues where the Broadband provision has been made available to an area/the exchange box. Due to it being the individual's responsibility and therefore cost to have the fibre cables laid to their property or business premises the perception is the provision has not been made available, some costings are as high as £10,000 for the properties to be connected.
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156. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

Members agreed in place of a report coming forward in June regarding the role of the Scrutiny Manager, to have a brief training session with an external Scrutiny specialist, to be arranged in the next couple of months.

157. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on 31 May 2016, in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way.

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Chairman