

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 4 October 2016.**

(10.00 am - 1.05 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Neil Bloomfield	John Clark
Amanda Broom	Rob Stickland
Dave Bulmer	Martin Wales

Also Present:

Clare Aparicio Paul	Angie Singleton
Ric Pallister	

Officers

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Rina Singh	Interim Chief Executive
Donna Parham	Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services)
Martin Woods	Assistant Director (Economy)
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager

53. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Jason Baker, Mike Beech, Val Keitch, Tony Lock, Sue Osborne, Tiffany Osborne, and Garry Shortland.

55. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

56. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions raised by members of public at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

58. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman explained the Transformation Board meeting on 6th September was cancelled with only 24 hours' notice. She informed the committee that she wrote to the Leader of the Council to raise concerns regarding the decision making process , given that no board meeting had taken place since 6th July 2016, and that the Leader responded providing reassurance with regard to the process and had stated that no further developments had arisen since the last meeting of the Transformation Board that required a decision to be taken.

The Chairman welcomed and introduced the new Chief Executive Officer – Alex Parmley to Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that there was a session for all members the following morning where the new CEO- Alex Parmley would be providing an update with regards to Transformation including his proposal for the new management team. The Portfolio Holder for Transformation stated the Leader would be leading the briefing.

Vice Chairman - Cllr Dave Bulmer explained that the Strategic Alliance had met and that the message from the meeting was that the authorities are pursuing collaborative working. The minutes from the meeting had been circulated to all members for information.

59. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 1 September 2016 (Agenda Item 7)

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

60. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6 October 2016 (Agenda Item 8)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the reports contained in the District Executive Agenda for the 4 October 2016 and made the following comments:

Report from Musgrove Park Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (Agenda item 6)

The Chairman introduced the report and requested members provide feedback on the style and content of the briefing note.

Community Right to Bid Quarterly Update Report July to September 2016 (Agenda item7)

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning provided highlights of the report and proposed that updates are decreased to six monthly. Scrutiny Committee agreed six monthly updates would be appropriate going forward.

Somerset Armed Forces Covenant – Overview of Progress 2016 (Agenda item 8)

Members sought clarification on paragraph 16 of the report where it states that with the exception of three service areas, SSDC knows very little about the Armed Services community within the district. Members asked what specific actions are being taken to address this and how they could contribute suggestions or questions?

Members also queried where responsibility now lies for maintaining Commonwealth War Graves in the district?

Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan – Flexible Use of Capital Receipts (Agenda item 9)

Members supported the recommendations in the report.

Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan – Four Year Settlement (Agenda item 10)

Members considered the report and an additional paper supplied by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services. Scrutiny members acknowledged the differing points of view expressed by the s151 Officer and the Portfolio Holder, noting that the authority is in a very difficult position, with neither option being particularly favourable. The Committee discussed the potential impact of accepting the 4 year settlement and not accepting it and noted the s151's confirmation that DCLG had reiterated that no authority would be better off if they did not accept the deal. Consideration was also given to the reputational risks of informing the public that the council had willingly accepting a negative RSG position versus informing them we had not accepted three years of certainty in defence of a principle.

Further discussion was about whether it would be possible to follow the example of Wokingham (and example provided by the Portfolio Holder) whereby the period of certainty offered within the deal is accepted but the negative RSG is not. Members concluded that this 'cherry picking' approach would not be appropriate and instead noted that in making our application to DCLG, SSDC should strongly reiterate our opposition to the principle of negative RSG.

Members did not indicate a preferred option at this stage, but did feel that members had sufficient information upon which to base a decision at Council on 13th October.

Infrastructure Projects and Funding for Feasibility Studies (Agenda item 11)

The Assistant Director (Economy) introduced and talked the committee members through the report, and in response to members' questions confirmed:

- This will enable Area Committees to explore particular opportunities to develop infrastructure.
- Spending of capital will still go through the usual process – Capital Bid, Scrutiny and District Executive.
- Area Committees will be making bids for the remaining Infrastructure Reserve this supports/encourages wider member engagement.

Members accepted the need to ensure that internal decision making processes effectively balance timeliness and the principles of transparent and accountable decision making. They sought clarification that any Executive Decisions were being delegated to the Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Strategic Regeneration Board (rather than to

the Regeneration Board itself) and that any decisions would be published and subject to Scrutiny in line with existing procedures.

Monthly News Snapshot

Scrutiny Committee made no comments.

District Executive Forward Plan

Scrutiny Committee made no comments.

61. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 9)

The following Task and Finish Groups are currently in progress:

- **Consent for Disposal of properties** – This group is now re-focusing on the impact of the disposal of properties by Housing Providers on SSDC's Rural Letting's Policy. Following evidence gathered by the Task and Finish Group it is clear that Yarlington Homes in particular are committed to continue to dispose of rural properties and that SSDC must now seek to mitigate the impact of this as far as it possible.
- **Discretionary Housing Payments** – This group has collected a significant amount of evidence from key agencies and will be meeting on 4th November to review the data and comment on a draft policy.
- **Rural Services Network – Rural access to health project** – The Somerset CCG have provided a written response to the questions set which will be incorporated into a report for submission to the RSN national project.
- **Street Trading** - This group have now had their first meeting and have agreed the review Terms of Reference. Further meetings are scheduled for 4th and 29th November with the aim on producing a draft policy that will be sent to all interested parties for a 12 week consultation period at the end of November.
- **Devolution** – As referenced above, this review is held in abatement pending any announcements made in the Autumn Statement.
- **Council Tax Support** – This group has meant on several occasions reviewing extensive evidence. At the last meeting members took the decision to extend the consultation period regarding the options to amend the scheme going forward to try to encourage a better response and in particular for representatives of vulnerable and minority groups to participate.
- **National Non Domestic Rates Discretionary Relief** – the group last met on the 12th of September with Revenue Officers to discuss the effectiveness of the current scheme. and considered if and how the scheme may need to be amended for the forthcoming year, the changes around Small Business Rate relief are key and the impact of this will be discussed at the next meeting on 31st October.
- **Right to Buy Clawback** - Following on from Garry Orr the CEO of Yarlington Homes requesting members reconsider the approach taken with the monies

obtained through the Right to Buy Clawback Agreement, an invitation has been sent to all members to participate in a Task and finish group to consider:

- The impact on the Capital Programme in terms of the other significant projects that this Council wants or needs to deliver on behalf of the community.
- How best to allocate the clawback monies to best meet those in housing need on the Housing Register.
- Other housing priorities and areas of spending such as Disabled Facility Grants and grants to Houses of Multiple Occupation.

62. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 10)

Devolution presentation - Scrutiny Committee Vice Chair – Cllr John Clark gave a presentation on the subject of Devolution. He informed members that at the invitation of the Leader he had attended a Leaders and CEO’s meeting about Devolution and subsequently felt that a presentation to Scrutiny would aid the work of the Task and Finish Group established to look at this subject.

Members thanked Cllr Clark for his very detailed presentation which outlined the context of Devolution and the potential risks and benefits to South Somerset. Members noted that Devolution is currently paused awaiting any announcements in the Autumn statement and that the issue would be revisited by the Task and Finish Group following the statement.

63. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted the Scrutiny Work Programme.

64. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on 1 November 2016, in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way.

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Chairman