

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held by video conference using Zoom meeting software on **Tuesday 3 November 2020**.

(10.30 am - 11.35 am)

Present:

Members: Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Robin Pailthorpe
Brian Hamilton	Oliver Patrick
Charlie Hull	Gerard Tucker
Mike Lewis	Linda Vijeh
Paul Maxwell	



Also Present: Sarah Dyke

Officers

Kirsty Larkins	Director (Strategy and Commissioning)
David Crisfield	Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Katy Menday	Leisure & Recreation Manager
Cara Naden	Environment Case Officer
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)

185. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

186. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicola Clark, Louise Clarke, Sue Osborne and Jeny Snell.

187. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

188. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

190. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman welcomed Councillors Oliver Patrick and Linda Vjeh as new members on the Scrutiny Committee. He noted Councillor Louise Clarke was also a new member to the Committee but was unable to attend this meeting.

191. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 1 October 2020 (Agenda Item 7)

There were no verbal updates on reports considered by District Executive at the October meeting.

192. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5 November 2020 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 5 November 2020 and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except those marked by an asterisk.

“Towards a Climate Resilient Somerset” – Somerset’s Climate Emergency Strategy (Agenda Item 6)

- Members wished to thank all officers and councillors, both at South Somerset and the other Somerset authorities, for all their work in creating the comprehensive report and strategy, especially given the current circumstances.
- Members acknowledged this would be a constantly evolving and working document and also noted it was an example of how all the Somerset local authorities had worked to together regarding a single issue.
- Referring to behaviour change – a member asked how we would work with families and schools about changing travel habits for example – had any progress been made to date?
- A member asked if further detail could be provided about the electric car charging points including the type (e.g. rapid) and the likely costs to be charged to customers for using the chargers.
- *A member asked if the responsibilities for public footpaths (Public Rights of Way) had been looked at as part of the strategy? He noted that if encouraging increased use of footpaths that more maintenance may be required.
- Members were content that the recommendations go forward.

Corporate Performance Report 2020-21 – 2nd Quarter (Agenda Item 7)

- Some members queried the statistics for planning (PCS 7-16) as it was felt some data was open to interpretation.
- *PCS11 – it was felt the figures were misleading as the figure included applications with extensions of time and so was not a reflection of those applications actually determined within the 13 week timescale.
- *PCS15 – members noted there was no detail to indicate how long extensions of time were for and the information would be of interest. They also noted that a breakdown of information to show differentiation of who had agreed / requested the extensions of time (eg, applicant or SSDC) would be useful.

- Some members felt there needed to more recognition of there being some issues with the planning service.
- *PCS14 – members noted the appeals lost figure was rising. A member queried if officers and the Portfolio Holder were comfortable that the matter could be addressed to a more acceptable level?
- A member asked if it was possible for figures to be circulated to members regarding the number of major planning applications which had been approved but not yet come to fruition – especially any permissions which were now beyond the three-year time limit and hence expired?

2020/21 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th September 2020 (Agenda Item 8)

- Members asked some points of detail regarding elements of the report:
 - Table 1, page 39 – Figure of 1,535 (£'000) is shown for Investment in Land, Property and Renewables – could a brief breakdown be provided?
 - *Appx A, page 46 - Figure of 9,900 (£'000) is shown for Investment in Land, Property and Renewables – could a brief breakdown or reminder be provided as the comment refers to property renovations complete?
 - *Appx A, page 46 – Figure of 800 (£'000) is shown for Westlands Building Improvement Works - could a reminder be put in the narrative or comment of what the project / funding is for? Some members expressed concerns about the amount of capital being spent on the facility considering it's leased.
 - *Appx A, page 47 – Affordable Housing (Chard Working Mens Club) – Some members queried how the situation had occurred.
 - Appx A, page 48 – Wincanton Community Sports Centre – some members asked what the situation was if basic maintenance was not undertaken at the facility?

2020/21 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th September 2020 (Agenda Item 9)

- Page 67, Careline – whilst not specifically related to the report, a member queried the comfort call service provided by Careline and acknowledged it was a service much valued by customers especially at the current time – however he believed that the comfort call service may have changed slightly which was possibly causing anxiety and concern for some customers. He asked if the matter could be looked into further as he felt that engagement with some Careline customers may need to be reviewed especially during the current pandemic.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 10)

- Regarding the Investment Assets report due in December, a member requested if the report could include detail of the returns (return on investment) for the Opium Battery Storage Project near Taunton.

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

The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) provided a brief verbal update on the progress of work of Task and Finish groups, including:

- Council Tax Support – public consultation was due to end in the next few days. A report on proposals for a banded scheme would be made to Full Council in December.
 - Productivity Analysis – the group had reconvened and started to look at productivity analysis and the development of a fees and charges policy.
 - Environment Strategy – an informal meeting was being arranged for the end of the month to discuss deliverables.
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194. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 10)

There were no updates on matters of interest from the Chairman or Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development).

During a brief discussion a member acknowledged that the majority of staff were currently working from home and expressed his concerns about staff welfare. He queried if a staff survey or similar had been undertaken.

In response, another member noted that staff well-being had also been discussed at Audit Committee, and Audit Committee members had been reassured that staff were being taken care of and able to access support where needed at any time. He asked that members were kept informed regarding staff welfare and the council's financial situation.

The Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development), confirmed that a staff survey had recently been completed and she would ask if a summary of the findings could be circulated to members for information.

195. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

The Director (Strategy & Commissioning) noted a short workshop had been held with Scrutiny members in order to make suggestions on content for the Transformation close down report due to Council in December. Officers would be running more of these informal briefing/workshop type meetings, and she asked members to try and attend where possible. She acknowledged that Scrutiny Committee needed to be more involved in policy development from an earlier stage.

Members were content to note the work programme.

196. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 10.30am on Tuesday 1 December 2020, and would be held as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman

