

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held as a **Virtual Meeting** using **Zoom meeting software** on **Tuesday 2 March 2021**.

(10.30 am - 12.20 pm)

**Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable  
Brian Hamilton  
Charlie Hull  
Mike Lewis  
Paul Maxwell

Sue Osborne  
Oliver Patrick  
Jeny Snell  
Linda Vijeh



**Also Present:**

Mike Best  
John Clark  
Sarah Dyke

Val Keitch  
Tony Lock

**Officers**

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Nicola Hix      | Director (Strategy and Support Services)           |
| Clare Pestell   | Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation) |
| Jo Nacey        | Section 151 Officer                                |
| David Crisfield | Specialist (Strategic Planning)                    |
| Peter Paddon    | Lead Specialist (Economy)                          |
| Robert Orrett   | Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager    |
| Adam Burgan     | Arts & Entertainment Manager                       |
| Stephanie Gold  | Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)         |
| Becky Sanders   | Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)         |

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### 235. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 February 2021 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

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### 236. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicola Clark, Robin Pailthorpe and Gerard Tucker.

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### 237. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

At the time the item was discussed, Councillor Jeny Snell declared a personal interest for item 10 on the District Executive agenda – Octagon Theatre Development – as she was a customer and her daughter also performed there.

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

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

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

The Chairman advised members that due to the Elections in May, both the Scrutiny Committee and the District Executive meetings would be held one week later than usual.

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**241. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 4 February 2021 (Agenda Item 7)**

The Chairman reminded members that at the last meeting a question had been raised about whether there would be any impact on Portfolio Holder roles as a result of the proposed changes to the senior management structure. We were informed at District Executive there wouldn't be any, but had since been advised by the Leader of Council there were likely be a few minor changes just to make things easier for all, but they would not be significant changes.

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**242. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 4 March 2021 (Agenda Item 8)**

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 4 March 2021 and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holders.

**District-wide Strategic Grants - funding arrangements with CASS and SPARK 2021/2022 (Agenda item 6)**

- A member questioned how this report links up with the agreed review of the Voluntary sector commissioning model as agreed at scrutiny committee Jan 2020. How can Scrutiny assist with the development of the core commissioning model going forward?
- Members commended the work of CASS and SPARK and noted the increased demand for these organisations due to Covid-19 pandemic.
- A member asked if there were any contingency plans in place, should CASS and or SPARK needed further funding as a result of the increase in complexity of cases due to Covid-19.
- Page 19 Infographic page – 77% image section has a minor typo
- Page 19 Infographic age - A member questioned the percentage figures for feelings of Confidence/Optimism from the voluntary sector. 42% confident for the future, 48% feeling about the same - what about the other 10%? Are these charities feeling less confident/optimistic about the future? Is there a risk these charities will be lost?

- Members endorsed the recommendations.

### **The Martock Parish Neighbourhood Plan Referendum (Agenda item 7)**

- Members asked for indication of the date for the planned Neighbourhood Plan referendum. It was confirmed that this will be held on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- Members questioned to what extent the unitary/re-organisation plans would impact the neighbourhood plan. Will the plan be automatically adopted by the shadow authority and new authority?
- Similarly, to what extent will the proposed central government regulatory changes to the planning policy framework impact the neighbourhood plan?

### **Private Sector Housing Grant Policy (Agenda item 8)**

- A member expressed concern around the recommendations for discretionary decision making by officers. What protocols and safeguarding procedures are in place to protect officers when decisions are faced with criticisms in the event of refusals?

### **Investment Assets Quarterly Update Report (Agenda item 9)**

- Members commended officers for the good progress of the Investment Strategy to date, and the 95% rental collection rate for the portfolio during the Covid-19 pandemic which is very impressive.
- One member expressed their disappointed at the Marlborough housing development project. Why did we agree to undertake a project with a projected profit margin of only 10%. This is very low for a development of this type. Have we considered marketing properties at a later date when property market could return to pre-pandemic levels to enable us to claw back some of the profit lost? Another member asked what valuable lessons we had learned from this and how will we rectify this going forward? Members agreed they would like to see more detail around this and asked for a briefing note.
- One member asked how the issue of permitted development rights fitted into this strategy?
- Members questioned why there was no mention of maintenance costs for the properties in the investment report?
- A member questioned why there was no mention of depreciation of the value of the properties in the report?
- A member asked if the property portfolio is included in our annual audit of fixed assets. How often do we undertake a property valuation for the entire portfolio?
- A member asked whether the 95% rate for rent collections included any concessionary rent payments for tenants that may have been struggling to pay their rents. Can we predict when rental cash flow will be back to pre-pandemic levels?
- Para 33 A member asked for clarity on the meaning of New Dynamic containment market, and how much we expect to see that generating over and above conventional markets?

### **Octagon Theatre Development (Agenda item 10)**

- Members were generally supportive of the recommendations and agreed this would be a great improvement to the Octagon, and the wider economy for South Somerset and the surrounding areas.

- A member questioned the plans for parking at the Octagon. These proposals suggest a max footfall of circa 1000 people during busy periods, however the 357 parking spaces in Petters Way and Goldenstones are not going to meet this demand.
- A member expressed their strong support of the proposals in regards to the plans for disability access.
- A member asked to what extent the unitary/re-organisation plans will impact the completion of the project.
- A number of members expressed some concerns around the ripple effect of this project on smaller venues in South Somerset. In particular, will the proposed Arts Council funding allocation result in fewer funding opportunities for other smaller venues in the area?
- How can SSDC support smaller venues in South Somerset?
- A member asked how the project board will be communicating progress back to members.
- A member, although supportive of the project, questioned whether this was the right time to be undertaking such a significant project?

#### **District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 11)**

- There were no comments or questions on the District Executive forward plan.

*(Note – Scrutiny Committee did not go into confidential session)*

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#### **243. 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:

Productivity Analysis – work was ongoing and the group has reviewed fees and charges for pest control, and a similar process would start shortly regarding licensing fees.

SSDC Environment Strategy - the group were starting to look at and review energy supplier contracts across our properties. This would be a large piece of work as there were multiple suppliers and contracts for the properties across the Council's portfolio.

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#### **244. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 10)**

There were no updates on matters of interest.

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#### **245. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)**

The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) reminded members that several items were still pending due to Covid restrictions. She advised that:

- A further update would be provided at the next meeting regarding work on the Member Portal.
- The Specialist (Performance) would be attending the next meeting to provide an update on performance reporting.

During discussion, members made some comments on items detailed in the work programme and also raised suggestions for future topics. Some of the points raised included:

- It was sometimes difficult for members to identify which officer was dealing with a particular issue and was there a way that members could be kept informed. In response the Director (Strategy & Commissioning) explained that there was a different staffing structure in place to that historically. The Locality team were a first point of contact for local queries and issues from members, however everyone was encouraged to log queries via the website so that they could view the progress being made with the query and by who.
- It was acknowledged that a Portfolio Holder briefing for members was due shortly regarding broadband – it will be interesting to see how the proposed Task and Finish group will dovetail in to any information from the briefing.
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – note that much development is taking place but have seen little CIL funding coming in, an update would be useful.
- A joint workshop on the role of Scrutiny and Audit was postponed due to Covid – feel the workshop could be arranged for a date soon.
- Listed buildings – feel members need comprehensive information and understanding of buildings which may be at risk in our district and any actions being taken. In response the Director (Strategy & Commissioning) noted she would forward the concern to the relevant Director).

The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) noted the comments made, and members noted the work programme.

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#### **246. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)**

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 10.30am on Tuesday 30 March 2021, and would be held as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman