

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held by video-conference using Zoom meeting software on **Tuesday 30 March 2021**.

(10.30 - 11.25 am)

**Present:**

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

Robin Bastable  
Nicola Clark  
Brian Hamilton  
Charlie Hull  
Mike Lewis

Sue Osborne  
Robin Pailthorpe  
Oliver Patrick  
Gerard Tucker  
Linda Vijeh



**Also Present:**

John Clark  
Val Keitch

Peter Seib

**Officers**

Clare Pestell  
James Divall  
Tessa Saunders  
Stephanie Gold  
Becky Sanders

Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)  
Income Opportunity Development Manager  
Specialist, Strategic Planning  
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)  
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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### 247. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

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

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Maxwell and Jeny Snell.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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### 250. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

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

No issues were raised from previous meetings.

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

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

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

There were no updates regarding reports considered by District Executive on 4 March.

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**254. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 April 2021 (Agenda Item 8)**

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 1 April 2021 and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holders.

**South Somerset District Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy (Agenda item 6)**

- All members commended the income and opportunities manager and the team for an excellent, very comprehensive report.
- Page 33 Infographic page – some members felt this page, although very detailed, may not be easy for all readers to understand. For example, the use of acronyms and ‘management speak’ that some readers may not be familiar with.
- A member asked about the need for highly skilled employees and asked how this strategy would work with the businesses and residents across the district to access more employment opportunities in the future.
- A member questioned the duration of the strategy and how it aligns with other SSDC and Somerset wide strategies.
- Members asked for the definition of DE adults.
- Members sought clarity on if and how this strategy would adapt and evolve with the potential for the district council to be replaced by a unitary authority in the near future.

**Annual review of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) (Agenda item 7)**

- A member questioned that if these powers were used, at what point would members be notified?

**Rural Designation of Areas in South Somerset (Agenda item 8)**

- A member had sent some questions to the planning policy specialist prior to the meeting, and during the meeting referenced a question around fears that the council could impose affordable housing in small rural areas where it may not be sustainable. i.e. no local services or facilities, no access to public transport. In addition to this, how does this align with our environmental agenda.

- A member asked to what extent we are engaging with communities to gather evidence on planning policy.
- A member asked about an aspect not covered in the report. He asked the Specialist about the sale of social housing and if this policy could also ensure HA's are replacing housing stock that is sold to ensure the availability of social housing in rural areas across the district.
- A member informed the committee that the government definition of affordable housing is 'housing that costs less than 30% of gross household income' and questioned how this term would be interpreted in this policy.
- Some members asked why this policy was being implemented now, given that the legislation has been around for some time, and asked if the Specialist could give any examples from other councils where this designation had been successful.
- Similarly, a member asked the Specialist for examples from other authorities, particularly neighbouring, where this policy has improved the supply of affordable housing\*
- A member questioned why there was no reference to the current phosphates issue in this policy.

#### **District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 9)**

- There were no questions or comments.

#### **255. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 9)**

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

Productivity Analysis – no update since the previous meeting, It was hoped the group would fully re-convene in May.

SSDC Environment Strategy – the group would shortly be involved in an early engagement session with potential energy providers for the authority.

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

The Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) reminded members that at a previous meeting some comments had been raised about staff well-being and absence statistics. She noted that the Audit Committee had requested similar information and that a report would be taken to the May meeting of Audit Committee.

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

The Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) provided a brief verbal update about some items detailed in the Work Programme including:

- There were no updates at the moment regarding Corporate Performance as much was being linked into the Recovery Strategy.
- Step-back review of Covid 19 response and recovery – work on the review would commence shortly with the Income & Opportunities Development Manager.

- Planning Service (Planning Re-Imagined) – a report is due to District Executive in June about Planning re-Imagined – it was suggested that Scrutiny Committee consider the report before prior to requesting any further information.

In response to a question raised during a brief discussion, the Chairman confirmed that he and the Vice-Chairmen were providing a presentation on the role of Scrutiny Committee to Area Committees in April and May.

Members were content to note the Work Programme.

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**258. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)**

Members noted that the next routine meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 10.30am on Tuesday 11 May. It was also noted an additional Special Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 13 April at 10.30am, which would be held virtually using Zoom.

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Chairman