

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee (Informal)** held by video conference using Zoom meeting software **on Tuesday 29 June 2021.**

(10.30 am - 12.50 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Sue Osborne
Karl Gill	Robin Pailthorpe
Brian Hamilton	Oliver Patrick
Charlie Hull	Crispin Raikes
Mike Lewis	Jeny Snell (to 11.50am)
Paul Maxwell	Martin Wale



Also Present:

Jason Baker	Peter Gubbins
John Clark	Tony Lock
Sarah Dyke	

Officers

Cath Temple	Specialist (Performance)
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
Joe Walsh	Specialist (Economic Development)
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Karen Watling	Interim Section 151 Officer
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)

24. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 1)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Linda Vijeh - Councillor Martin Wale was in attendance as substitute.

25. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

26. Public question time (Agenda Item 3)

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

27. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 4)

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

28. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman noted that the trial of circulating the responses from District Executive members and officers to comments raised at Scrutiny Committee appeared to be being quite well received, and the trial would continue.

29. SSDC Key Performance Indicators Review - Verbal Update (Agenda Item 6)

The Performance Specialist provided members with a brief verbal update regarding the review of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and referred to the draft list of KPIs which had been circulated to members for information. She highlighted the new KPIs and explained that some other indicators remained the same but the targets had changed.

The Council Tax and Benefits indicators would remain the same and the indicators for planning (development management) were still with senior officers to finalise the measures and targets. It was noted that measures and figures for waste and recycling were only available for the whole county and not broken down by district due to collection routes. The Performance Specialist asked if members felt the county-wide data was still relevant and useful for the district?

During discussion members raised several queries and suggestions, some of which included (responses from the Performance Specialist and Director (Service Delivery) are shown in italics). :

- PCS14 - Appeals Lost - understand if more than 10% of appeals are lost then will come under the scrutiny from central government - so shouldn't the target be less than 10%?
(planning indicators are being reviewed by senior officers - it was taking some time as want to ensure it's accurate)
- Indicators for waste should still be measured and reported, and available for districts to scrutinise even if data is at a county-wide level. Data is still useful in order to see trends and issues or concerns can be raised with Somerset Waste Partnership or via the Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel.
- One member wanted to stress the importance of measure for planning in performance reviews.
(planning indicators are being reviewed by senior officers - it was taking some time as want to ensure it's accurate)
- Regarding waste - feel it would be useful to know what's going in and out of Dimmer as the contract is changing. There is a need to monitor the amount of vehicle movements.
(will raise the issue with the Somerset Waste Partnership regarding figures)
- EN 1 - Land management (environment indicator) - how would this be recorded and down to what level? Will it include species monitoring, nature conservation management, flora and fauna? And at site level such as Ham Hill or Chard Reservoir?
(The environment team are working on this and these new KPI reports will show that level of detail moving forward.)

- How do we record information about Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and our response rates?
(FOIs and complaints will be an area that's looked at separately from KPIs as it's an important area and needs to be transparent. Acknowledge it's an area that needs to be improved.)
- E4 digital connections - the measure state 'various', which is a catch all. What specific measures will be included in this?
The measures are Gigabit vouchers facilitated per premise, broadband connections facilitated per premise and additional mobile coverage facilitated per premise. This KPI is still under review.)
- EN5 - Waste to landfill - understand that a lot of waste is now going into the 'Energy from Waste' incinerator at Avonmouth. Is this data online now? What % of waste from South Somerset goes to this incinerator?
(The Performance Specialist will check the latest position on this.)

At the end of discussion the Chairman thanked officers for their updates, and the Performance Specialist acknowledged the comments made and would feedback the suggestions to the relevant officers.

30. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 3 June 2021 (Agenda Item 7)

There were no updates on reports considered by District Executive members at the June meeting. The Chairman referred members back to his comment made under Chairman Announcements (item 5) regarding responses circulated to members.

31. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 July 2021 (Agenda Item 8)

Prior to considering the District Executive agenda, the Chairman referred to storm flooding that had occurred in the Chard area the previous evening. He thanked all staff who had helped with the response or were offering support and advice to the community, and he asked the Director (Service Delivery) to convey thanks on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee.

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 1 July 2021 (Informal Consultative Meeting) and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee (Informal Meeting) by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except those marked by an asterisk:

Planning Reimagined Update (Agenda item 5)

- A member suggested it would be useful to have some local and national context to help better understand how SSSC are doing compared to other authorities.
- Some members expressed concern about ward member involvement and ensuring that ward members are 'kept in the loop' especially regarding applications going forward to Regulation Committee.
- Members also expressed concerns regarding timeframes and processes for notifying parish / town councils and receiving their comments.

- Some members noted the report referenced a technical lead position in the team as well as a Lead Specialist. Members sought clarification whether an appointment had been made to the technical lead role, and also if the position was an additional role at additional cost?
- One member asked about the use of the phrase “bolstering the team”, what does this mean exactly?
- Several members expressed concern about enforcement which was often a controversial subject at parish meetings.
- The report refers to a training video – would this be for members or parishes?
- A member suggested that more briefings for members on technical elements would be useful, including how people can report enforcement issues.
- A members asked if a breakdown was known regarding how many enforcement queries were submitted through the website, member portal, post or by phone? *The Director for Service Delivery informed Scrutiny members that she would share this enforcement data with them.**
- Some members queried if the planning re-imagined workshops would be reconvening in the near future?

Review of Priority Project 1 of the Council’s Annual Action Plan 2021-2022 (Agenda item 6)

- A member noted the report referred to ‘subject to funding’ (pages 18 and 19) and asked for clarity about the purpose, amount and sources of such funding.
- Members asked if we were still engaging with education providers to assist with our economy and recovery?
- *Page 19, Q3 – a member sought clarity about how much progress had been made with the health and well-being framework – what and when etc.
- Page 18 – outcomes – refers to digital infrastructure – a member commented that some more detail or information would be useful.
- Regarding the imminent decision due regarding the future of local government in Somerset – and the possible associated statutory instruments likely to be in place – how would all this work / projects be achieved? One member suggested this was a very ambitious priority project.
- Regarding the work detailed under Q1 on page 18 – a member asked how many of the elements were carried over into Q2 or were still ongoing?

2020/21 Revenue Outturn Report Period Ending 31 March 2021 (Agenda item 7)

- Page 24 – Commercial Investments – it refers to a property re-gear. Members asked what re-gear meant and also sought reassurance that it was just for the one property in our portfolio?
- Table 1 – page 23 – members noted there is a large variation on spend associated with the Chief Executive (Directorate) – members queried where the budget had gone as it had effectively doubled, and noted a breakdown would have been useful. *Members noted a response would be circulated via email by the Lead Specialist (Finance) to Scrutiny Members.**

2020/21 Capital Outturn Report Period Ending 31 March 2021 (Agenda item 8)

- Para 16 on page 49 – a member sought clarity on the meaning of the paragraph, and remarked that the wording did not seem entirely professional.

- Para 20 on page 50 – members asked if there was any update regarding the Arlingclose review of external borrowing options? Members asked if when the outcome was known if it would be something that could be circulated to Scrutiny members for information?
- Members noted that some additional training regarding capital and interest payments would be useful.
- A member asked why the council was barred from utilising Public Works Loan Boards for low interest borrowing, was this because the council makes large property investments?

Financing the Yeovil Refresh (Agenda item 9) *(Scrutiny did not go into confidential session)*

- Members noted that there had been various regeneration projects over the years and queried if the Yeovil refresh was cross-referencing with the older visions and schemes?
- Some members expressed concern regarding the amount of funding and the possible pay off time of 50 years with associated borrowing costs.
- A member sought clarification about aspects of funding for the Yeovil Refresh including whether there would be developer contributions / obligations, the amount of high street funding and the amount of potential funding from the business rates pooling.
- A member asked what would happen if the funding detailed in the report recommendation was not agreed? How much of a scale-back would have to be made? How many businesses might cease to come to Yeovil?

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 10)

- The chairman suggested it would be useful to compare and align the Scrutiny Work Programme with the District Executive Forward Plan where appropriate. Is there anything on the District Executive Forward Plan that Scrutiny could pick up for a debate on their own agenda?
- Members asked when the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding and allocation report would be coming to Council, as it is very overdue.
- Members asked about the status of the current Local Plan review, and when an update would be coming to committee?
- Regarding the A358 Taunton to Southfields duelling, what role did SSDC have in supporting the parishes affected?

32. 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:

SSDC Environment Strategy - meetings are ongoing and gathering data. Confirmation was awaited regarding changing the remaining contract with our existing energy supplier as there was a financial implication.

Productivity Analysis - no update.

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

The Chairman reminded members that meetings would continue to be held virtually until at least the end of July. Depending on coronavirus restrictions, the August meetings may be in person.

A representative on the Somerset Waste Board Joint Scrutiny Panel noted that at a recent meeting the driver shortage had been discussed, and the impact it was having on waste collections.

Regarding the Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel, a meeting was due to be held on 2 July.

In response to a query raised, a member on the Appointments Committee advised they were due to meet on 5 July to interview shortlisted candidates for the CEO role.

34. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

During a brief discussion about the Work Programme, the Chairman noted the following:

- Member briefings regarding Broadband had been arranged for 13th and 14th July depending on Area.
- Rural Transport - he would follow up on a particular enquiry.
- Local Plan Update - a report or update is due to be made to the next Scrutiny meeting.

A member asked about an update regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) - they also noted that they thought each authority had to keep list of each receipt and queried if we had such a list, if it was published and when was it reviewed? In response the Lead Specialist (Economy) advised that there was likely to be a workshop for Scrutiny members in August or September. He noted there was a need to agree the CIL governance structure in order to spend any receipts.

Members were content to note the Work Programme.

35. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 3 August 2021 - with meeting arrangements to be confirmed nearer the time depending on coronavirus restrictions.

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Chairman