

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held by video-conference using Zoom meeting software **on Tuesday 5 October 2021.**

(10.30 am - 12.17 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Sue Osborne
Karl Gill	Oliver Patrick
Brian Hamilton	Crispin Raikes
Charlie Hull	Linda Vijeh
Mike Lewis	



Also Present:

Jason Baker	Tony Lock
Sarah Dyke	Peter Seib

Officers

Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Karen Watling	Interim Section 151 Officer
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Leigh Rampton	Lead Specialist (Communities)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

66. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 31 August 2021 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

67. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Robin Pailthorpe.

68. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

69. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

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

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

71. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

72. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 2 September 2021 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman noted that unfortunately the routine document detailing responses, which had been circulated for the previous few months, had been delayed for the September meeting, but it would be sent to members shortly. He noted the monthly document was being well received by members.

73. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7 October 2021 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 7 October 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:

South Somerset Families Project - Budget Approval (Agenda item 6)

- A member noted it would be useful to see a breakdown by ward of the number of families who are receiving support from the project, and also what members could do to help officers regarding any referrals. To what extent is this a part of the role of a district councillor?
- A member asked for a definition of social mobility and queried whether the term was still fit for purpose?
- A member sought reassurance that families from rural areas would also qualify for assistance under this programme
- Clarification was sought regarding the £303k and whether it was an additional figure on top of the approved budget?
- Para 14 - members sought clarification that the £50k payment made in advance was from the £303k rather than in addition to the £303k.
- Page 14. Second bullet point - the sentence is incomplete.
- Page 12. Last bullet point in the first section – the sentence is incomplete.
- *Page 9 Summary of needs table: A member asked for more definition on the terms used within the list of identified needs.
- A member asked if this project is aligned with other councils in Somerset, and how it links with Social Services.
- Page 15. Summary table: Regarding school attendance. A member asked for clarification on these statistics, as these percentages seem to be unacceptably low.

- A member questioned the continuity of this project as we move into the unitary authority following LGR. In addition to this, a member asked if SSDC was ahead of the other Somerset Councils on this project?
- A member asked if this project has evolved from the 'Troubled Families' programme.
- Regarding the duration of the programme - A member asked if the families that join the programme later in the third year will still receive the full support needed.

Future Chard Strategy (Agenda item 7)

- Page 18, Para 15 - Financial Implications - a member noted the paragraph referred to no direct financial implications, but the recommendation was to conduct a consultation. How much would the consultation cost as there will be costs for staff time and resources? What form will the consultation take?
- Within the strategy document there are references to active travel. A member asked what the current position was regarding active travel in Chard?
- A member noted it would be interesting to know what the costs of the whole exercise will be, and what the costs for the consultants are? Where is the funding going to come from to deliver the strategy?
- A member sought more detail about the consultation such as how, when and where as the consultation period was due to commence in the next few days.
- Within the strategy document there are multiple references to Chard Connect - a members sought clarity about where this would sit, what will its Terms of Reference be, and who will be on it? How would Chard Connect fit with the new authority in the future?
- A member sought reassurance that all eligible CIL funding would be claimed.
- A member asked if this strategy would impact on any future neighbourhood plan proposals.
- Members acknowledged and were appreciative of the comprehensive report, but suggested a summary version might be useful for the public.
- A member asked how this strategy is going to fit in with the new authority.
- A number of members expressed their interests in the Future Chard ambition, and offered to assist officers with consultation, as a 'critical friend' or to support in any way.
- Regarding the use of this 'place based' strategy, one member sought reassurance that more rural communities across the district are not forgotten.

Procurement Strategic Framework and Revised Standing Orders (Agenda item 8)

- *It was noted that Scrutiny had recently undertaken a Task and Finish review regarding the energy contract, however due to the changes with local government in Somerset and timeframes of the energy contract, the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group were unable to be taken forward. It was asked if there were any other contracts that could fall through a similar gap?

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) refresh 2021/22 - 2023/24 (Agenda item 9)

- Para 45 - a member asked what Section 31 grants are, and what could they be used for?
- Members noted the situation regarding inflationary pressures and specifically escalating energy costs, and it was asked if the impact upon our budgets was known?

- Regarding Covid-19 grants, a member sought clarification if there was any funding due to be returned.
- *Para 25, point K, a member referred to the increasing National Insurance contributions and the year referenced being 2023/24 - it was thought payments were due before then. An explanation / more information was requested.

Establishment of a Joint Committee in Somerset for the Implementation of Local Government Reorganisation (Agenda item 10)

- Para 8 - a members asked if the Scrutiny Committee would be consulted about how the proposed LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee would be set up?
- *Page 238 - Membership and Meetings - member asked if the meeting of the Advisory Board planned for the 30 September happened? If it did, was it publicised and could members have some feedback from the meeting? Some members expressed concern that this meeting had not been done publicly and suggested that this Advisory Board is not transparent.
- *Page 234 - membership of the Joint Committee - a member noted the make-up of the committee with 5 members from SCC and 4 from the districts didn't seem very democratic.
- Members asked if they could have a list of names of those on the Joint Committee, when available?
- *A member asked about the other existing Joint Scrutiny Panels - for Waste and the Rivers Authority - and queried if they would continue or possibly be amalgamated?

Public Space Protection Orders: Yeovil (Agenda item 11)

- *Pages 240-241 - both maps - a member queried the black line as the line on page 240 didn't include the Yeo Leisure Park but on page 241 it did. Hence members queried if the red line was correct for the proposed extension to the restricted area?
(NOTE - The map on page 240 has since been corrected and the agenda re-published with the correct map)
- *A member asked what the future of PSPOs would be within the new authority and whether there would be a levelling up across the county?
- *A member queried if it was known how the Police see the effectiveness of such orders?

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 12)

- No comments.

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

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

SSDC Environment Strategy - Energy Supplier - a lot of work had been undertaken and thanks was conveyed to the members and officers involved. However due to the timing of transition to a new authority and the timing of contracts, unfortunately it was not possible for the recommendations of the Task and Finish group to be implemented. It was noted the work undertaken had been a good opportunity for research.

The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) noted that it was quiet regarding the other Task and Finish groups, which provided some space as the authority progressed through the Local Government Reorganisation. She advised that an initial meeting regarding the Council Tax Support work was arranged for in a few weeks time.

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

There was no discussion and members noted the following brief updates provided by the Chairman:

- With reference to the recent meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Waste Panel, he had received an excellent and comprehensive response to his questions from the Managing Director of Somerset Waste Partnership.
 - Regarding the query raised at previous meetings regarding a breakdown of costs in the CEO programme expenditure programme - a response had now been received.
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76. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman and Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) suggested reviewing some of the items on the Scrutiny Work Programme, as some items may be less relevant now with the Local Government Reorganisation. During discussion the following was agreed and noted:

- Local Plan update - members acknowledged the comments of the Director (Place & Recovery) that it was unlikely a full Local Plan review could be delivered by 2023, The item to be deleted from the work programme, but for members to still receive an update when appropriate if evidence gathering.
- Remote working, meeting technology and IT support (members) - a member liaison group had now been established by the Digital Services team which would look at issues, technology and remote working. The item to be deleted from the work programme. Suggestion though that the member portal is reviewed including statistics regarding use.
- Somerset Waste Partnership - item to be deleted from the work programme as matters have been raised, explained and improvements are being made.
- Somerset Rivers Authority - leave on work programme. Request for officers to find out when the statutory report is due regarding the Chard flooding incident.
- S106 SWAP audit findings - leave on the work programme.
- CIL update - some questions outstanding from the member workshop held in August. Leave on the work programme with a due date of January. The Director (Place & Recovery) advised that a draft report was available and members requested that the report be considered at the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee.
- Overview of voluntary sector support and draft commissioning model - the stance of this had changed due to the transition to a unitary authority, and it is unclear if the new authority will honour the commissioning model. Delete from work programme.
- Resident survey - delete from work programme.
- Council Tax Support Scheme Task & Finish - leave on work programme.

- Productivity analysis Task & Finish - paused. Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) to liaise with the Income & Opportunities Manager to discuss status of the review and if continuing.
- SSDC Environment Strategy Task & Finish - energy contract - delete from work programme as completed.
- SSDC Environment Strategy refresh Task & Finish- leave on work programme but request for Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) to follow up if work still required as there has previously been discussion about the communications element.
- Step-back review of Covid-19 response Task and Finish - delete from work programme as much information now included within the recovery strategy.
- Effect of short-term lettings Task & Finish - delete from work programme as due to timescales feel unable to do with the Local Government Reorganisation. Suggestion that a recommendation put forward that the new unitary authority should consider the issue.

Scrutiny working groups, workshops etc:

- Somerset Bus Services Improvement Plan - delete from work programme. Members had previously suggested some improved communications about the consultation which had happened.
- CIL update/S106 - delete from workshop section of the work programme as it's a duplication.
- Members portal improvement working group - delete from work programme as now incorporated into the member liaison group co-ordinated by the Digital Services team.
- Role of Scrutiny & Audit - leave on the work programme and to include an update to refer to the Local Government Reorganisation.

77. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 2 November 2021 at 10.30am - as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman