

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee (Informal)** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Tuesday 8 February 2022.**

(10.30 am - 12.05 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable
Karl Gill
Brian Hamilton
Andy Kendall

Mike Lewis
Paul Maxwell
Sue Osborne



Also Present:

Jason Baker
John Clark
Val Keitch

Tony Lock
Peter Seib

Officers

Anna Matthews
Karen Watling
Cath Temple
Paul Matravers
Anthony Morris
Jill Byron
Angela Cox
Michelle Mainwaring
Becky Sanders

Chard High Street HAZ Project Manager
Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Specialist (Performance)
Lead Specialist (Finance)
Specialist (Finance)
Monitoring Officer
Specialist (Democratic Services)
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

102. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 January 2022 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

103. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlie Hull, Robin Pailthorpe and Oliver Patrick.

104. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

105. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

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

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

107. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman noted that Councillor Crispin Raikes was no longer a member on the Scrutiny Committee, and he wished to convey his thanks to Cllr Raikes for his support and contribution as former Vice-Chairman and previous Chairman.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Andy Kendall as a new member on Scrutiny Committee.

108. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 6 January 2022 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman noted that unfortunately the routine document detailing responses to the District Executive reports had been delayed due to staff absence. The document would be circulated as soon as possible.

109. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 10 February 2022 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 10 February 2022 (Informal Consultative Meeting) and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to many questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee (Informal Meeting) by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except those marked by an asterisk:

Somerset Waste Partnership Annual Report and Business Plan Update (Agenda item 6)

- *Para 18 on page 9 – refers to an increase in cost of £505,219 but it doesn't explain what the costs are for. Some members sought clarity about if the additional costs would be charged for in the current financial year
- *Page 9 – members noted that paragraphs 23 and 24 are duplicates and queried if a para for Legal Implications was missing? (*this has been corrected since Scrutiny Committee*).
- *Point 7.2 on page 23 – a member expressed some concern regarding the chatbot facility as their experiences elsewhere had been poor
- *A member raised concern regarding waste collection for residential units situated above commercial premises. Often bags / boxes would be placed on a pavement together and it must be difficult for collectors to differentiate between commercial and domestic waste. At times this has led to waste not being collected (rejected)

and left to mount up until the following collection. In some circumstances the mounting rubbish can block pavements making it difficult for pedestrians to pass. What can be done to ensure the waste is collected and not left?

- *Point 9.3 on page 26 – a member referred to the potential takeover of SUEZ and asked if elected members would continue to have a direct contact where there have been missed collections?
- *Page 27, point 3 under financial risks – a member asked if we knew what the implications will be for SWP yet, as the report mentions ‘likely to have major operational and financial implications’?.
- Members welcomed the regular communications from SWP, which are very helpful.

Adoption of Future Chard Strategy (Agenda item 7)

- Para 15 – A member expressed their surprise at the number of people who had attended, they had hoped for more.
- A member asked if the strategy had been done earlier or first if it might have helped in attracting more grant funding for the Chard regeneration projects?
- Members queried the next 12 months and if there were enough staff resources to deliver and support the strategy?
- The situation with the contractor Midas – was this likely to impact on any Chard Regeneration projects?
- A member noted that as we are in a transition phase to a new authority, was the document lining up as something the new authority could take forward? Is the whole report at risk if the new authority does not take this up?

Council Tax Policies (Agenda item 8)

- *Para 11 - a member asked what happens if a landlord has a property where a tenant has left and so the property is empty, and it remains empty for a number of months despite active marketing – are there exceptions or would they be eligible for any discount?
- *Another member queried if there was any appeals process?

Business Rate Reliefs (Agenda item 9)

- *Members asked how the reliefs would be publicised and whether there was an appeals process? Members sought reassurance that efforts would be made to ensure that those who might be eligible were made aware of the reliefs available.
- *Para 49 – a member sought reassurance that charitable organisations would not be affected by the change?
- *A member referred to the rural settlement threshold (3000 properties) and asked if the threshold was likely to be reviewed in the future (due to housebuilding)?

Corporate Performance Report 2021-22: 3rd Quarter (Agenda item 10)

- PCS3 - Members noted there were many concerns about phone calls and the wait times experienced by customers.
- *PCS 6 and PCS 7 - Some members queried if there was a progress report regarding benefits?
- *A member referred to the Civica system and queried since it had been implemented how much had been spent on fixes and patches to the system, as it

didn't seem to be delivering what was hoped. Was it leaving us at reputational risk?

- *PCS12 and PCS14 on page 242 – a member noted that the supporting comments referred to a lack of conservation resource. It was asked if there were intentions to remedy this and provide any improvements?
- Members noted the disturbing amount of 'reds' showing in the performance against target and direction of travel for planning, benefits and customer calls.
- *PCS18 – sickness – members noted the rate of absence had increased – was this due to Covid related illness or other reasons? Concerns were raised if the increase was relating to mental health.
- *A member asked how many officers or how much officer time was being diverted to work regarding the transition to unitary? Is the resource factored into the allocated expense for transition or is it additional?

2021/22 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the period Ending 30 December 2021 (Agenda item 11)

- No comments.

2021/22 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the period Ending 30 December 2021 (Agenda item 12)

- *Page 274, table 3 – regarding the loans to Opium and SWP – members queried what percentage was for each project. Was the loan to SWP for the vehicles?
- Page 280 – Wincanton Regeneration – referring to the commentary, a member noted December 2022 was not far away, and they felt little seemed to have happened regarding Wincanton Regeneration.
- *Page 275, CIL – A member queried what is likely to happen to CIL funds after April 2023, and how could other places / projects put in a bid for funding? It was also asked how allocations are decided and if the criteria is publicised?
- Page 285, Appx C:
 - Noting the number of deferrals to the new authority, a member asked if in future it would be possible to collate the deferred schemes into a separate group or table for ease of reading?
 - *A member asked if the risks or likelihood were known about whether the deferred projects were likely to be dropped or continued by the new authority?
 - *A member queried why certain schemes had been deferred as there was no explanation provided? Was it for financial or other reasons?
 - *Gypsy & Traveller Acquisition Fund – a member queried what the budget had originally been for and why was it being removed?
- Page 286, Investment in Commercial Property – Trelleborg, Bridgwater – members sought clarity about what it was that we would be pulling away from as it was understood we had already purchased the site, or part of.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 13)

- No comments.
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110. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman provided brief verbal updates on the progress of Task and Finish groups including:

- SSDC Environment Strategy Refresh - no update.
 - Council Plan Annual Review - a document had been recently circulated to Scrutiny members following a Scrutiny workshop held on 18 January. The document provided responses from the Senior Leadership Team following comments raised at the workshop.
 - Flooding in South Somerset - there is a much awaited report from Somerset County Council (SCC) due around April. In consultation with officers and due to the imminent report, Scrutiny has been asked to put this Task and Finish group on hold until members have had sight of the SCC report. It was hoped to still pick up on this work but at a later date.
 - Productivity Analysis - on hold.
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111. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 10)

The Chairman reminded members a Town and Parish Conference relating to Local Government Reorganisation was scheduled for mid February. He also noted that the first meeting of the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee had taken place on 31 January, and invited the appointed representatives on the Joint Committee, Councillors Brian Hamilton and Paul Maxwell) to provide some feedback.

Councillor Hamilton advised he had recently circulated a short report via email to Scrutiny members to provide a briefing on what had been discussed at the meeting.. In response to some questions raised during a brief discussion, he noted that:

- How the committee structure will look like in the future was unclear at the current time.
- The LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee is likely to be in place until vesting day.
- There were aspirations from members for planning to be determined at a local level, but it was acknowledged this could be looked at in different ways.
- He had a fear that more decisions in general may be officer delegated, but especially planning.

A member asked if the Scrutiny representatives could push the importance of member engagement in the planning process. Also that there are still major issues regarding phosphates and the situation is getting desperate.

At the end of discussion, Councillor Hamilton encouraged members to attend the meetings as any member was welcome to ask questions.

112. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman advised that a request had been received from a non-Scrutiny member for the Committee to review call handling and customer access as there were a number of concerns. The Chairman noted he would take the matter forward.

During a brief discussion, some members also noted that some customers were finding it difficult to make comments about planning applications.

Members were content to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

113. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 10.30am - as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman