

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee (Informal)** held as a **Virtual Meeting** using **Zoom meeting software** on **Tuesday 5 April 2022**.

(10.30 am - 12.05 pm)

**Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable  
Karl Gill  
Brian Hamilton  
Andy Kendall

Robin Pailthorpe  
Oliver Patrick  
Martin Wale



**Also Present:**

Dave Bulmer

Tony Lock

**Officers**

Marie Collins  
Sharon Jones  
John Hammond  
Kirsty Larkins  
Jill Byron

Stephanie Gold  
Michelle Mainwaring

Customer Connect Team Manager  
Customer Focussed Team Manager  
Lead Specialist (Built Environment)  
Director (Service Delivery)  
Monitoring Officer  
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)  
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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### 133. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 March 2022 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Louise Clarke, Charlie Hull and Sue Osborne. Councillor Martin Wale was present as substitute for Sue Osborne.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no members of the public present to ask questions.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

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### **138. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)**

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

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### **139. Customer Connect - Verbal Update (Agenda Item 7)**

Scrutiny committee received a verbal update and presentation from the Customer Connect Team Manager regarding recent successes and challenges faced by the Customer Connect Team. Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and comment regarding these successes and challenges, and the following items were discussed.

- One member commented that these are some very complex issues, adding that he felt it is concerning that members cannot reach SSDC on 01935 462462. He also said that system crashes are a real concern. The member then asked what has been the biggest issue for the team? i.e. software, high call volumes, covid-19?
- One member asked if SSDC could use a call back system, rather than leave people waiting on the phones.
- One member commented that there will always be people who are not wanting to go online.
- One member suggested this perfect storm of issues started in transformation, he added that he felt we have had these problems for a long time.
- One member asked what the extra funding (recently awarded by full council) was for, was it for staffing?
- One member commented that staff may be in stress due to dealing with complex cases and stressed residents.
- One member asked for the members' phone number.
- One member asked about the phone lines, and if the work cascades back into the business at busy times.
- One member suggested that it is an issue that the SWP waste services system is not linked with SSDC systems.
- One member thanked officers for coming and helping members understand what the team are going through, and generally all Scrutiny committee members agreed.
- One member commented that the members' portal is not fit for purpose.
- One member asked if SSDC are we aligning the Connect teams' working model with other authorities? Have we looked at other unitary authorities to see what works/does not work?
- One member sought reassurance that SSDC will be able to recruit into all of the vacancies in the team.
- One member commented on the use of the word 'resistance' and suggested the public are not 'resisting' using the website, he felt it's just more difficult for some people.
- One member asked about the correct process for reporting so that things do not get lost?
- One member asked if the members phone line could be extended to parish clerks?

The Chairman thanked the Customer Connect Team Manager for attending with a very informative, honest, and positive update. In conclusion the Customer Connect Team manager informed members that they are welcome to contact her directly with any further enquiries regarding the Customer Connect Team.

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**140. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 3 March 2022 (Agenda Item 8)**

There were no verbal updates on reports considered by the District Executive on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022.

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**141. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7 April 2022 (Agenda Item 9)**

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except those marked by an asterisk:

**Planning Re-imagined - Changes to the Scheme of Delegation to increase the efficiency of the Planning Service (Agenda item 6)**

- One member asked for clarification that these changes refer to ‘major major’ applications. Does this mean that all ‘major major’ applications will almost always go to regulation and ‘cut out’ the area committees from the process?
- The chairman of Scrutiny remarked that the planning reimagined work has been a good example of cross party working.

**Planning - Planning Application Validation Requirements; Revised Validation Checklist (Agenda item 7)**

- A member asked if the ‘display of notice’ is being displayed on site again now.
- One member questioned if removing neighbour consultation would result in neighbours feeling ‘let down’ about not being consulted in the early validation stages.

**Planning - Discretionary fees for Pre-application advice and associated services (Agenda item 8)**

- One member asked if listed buildings currently have a fee charged? What impact will this proposed fee have on heritage projects across the district?
- One member asked if the specialist listed building officer will be charged out.
- One member noted that community and affordable developments are exempt, and asked what about applications which are partial affordable/community schemes?
- One member commented that the fee increases are quite large. Have we benchmarked against neighbouring authorities?
- One member asked for clarification on the phrase ‘permitted development is not dealt with by non-binding advice’.
- A member asked for a definition of ‘PPA fee negotiable’.
- A member asked when the new fees will be in place? Will they be backdated to April ‘22?

**Annual review of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) (Pages 122 - 154) 10. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 9)**

- One member commented that they were delighted to see that we rarely use the RIPA acts.

**District Executive forward plan (Agenda item 10)**

- No comments
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**142. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 10)**

The Chairman informed members that they were still waiting for the S19 flood investigation report to come forward and therefore any further investigation on flooding issues in South Somerset is on hold. The Director for Service Delivery advised that she would keep in touch with the Specialist Scrutiny and Member Development on this.

The Specialist Scrutiny and Member development informed members that there may be some more work for Scrutiny on fees and charges, but she will contact those members when she knows more about this.

A member commented on some conversations that had taken place at the most recent audit committee regarding problems with an external audit. He suggested that the Audit Committee had not been informed of these issues in a timely manner, he felt that the audit committee was flawed, and that scrutiny should look into this issue. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that an additional report on these issues is going to the next meeting of the audit committee. The Monitoring Officer reminded members that the roles of the Scrutiny and Audit committees are complimentary, although they are very different. She also added that both committees could receive some training on their respective roles in the early summer.

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**143. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 11)**

There were no discussions under matters of interest.

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**144. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)**

There were no discussions under Scrutiny Work Programme.

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**145. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 13)**

Members noted that the date of the next meeting would be Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022. *(delayed by one week due to parish/town and county elections on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022)*

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Chairman