

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Tuesday 2 August 2022.**

(10.30 am - 12.33 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Barbara Appleby	Paul Maxwell
Robin Bastable	Sue Osborne
Ray Buckler	Robin Pailthorpe
Karl Gill	Oliver Patrick
Brian Hamilton	



Also Present:

Jason Baker	(On-line via Zoom)
Sarah Dyke	(On-line via Zoom)
Andy Kendall	(On-line via Zoom)
Tim Kerley	(On-line via Zoom)

Officers

Jane Portman	Chief Executive
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Jan Gamon	Director (Place, Recovery, Arts & Entertainment)
Peter Paddon	Acting Director (Place and Recovery)
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Robert Orrett	Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager (On-line)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Jo Boucher	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

26. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 July 2022 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

27. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mike Lewis.

28. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Paul Maxwell declared a personal interest for item 8 on the District Executive Agenda - Millers Garage Car Park Project, as he is also a member of Crewkerne Town Council which had been consulted on elements of the project in the past and may be likely to again in the future.

29. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

No issues were raised from previous meetings.

31. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Barbara Appleby as a new member on the Scrutiny Committee.

32. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 7 July 2022 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman noted there had been an item on last month's District Executive agenda regarding the Wincanton Regeneration Budget Change of Scope. The item had been 'called-in' and was identified on the current Scrutiny agenda at item 13. The call-in would be discussed later in the meeting, but he shared with members that he understood the ward members were now comfortable with the processes put in place regarding the Wincanton Regeneration Scheme.

33. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 4 August 2022 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 4 August 2022 and raised comments and questions as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers - except any marked by an asterisk.

Natural Environment Presentation (Agenda item 6)

- *Green Flag award - What support might be given to other town and parishes who are doing equally good work? i.e. High Ham millennium wood.

Yeovil Crematorium Project - Request for Additional Funding from the Corporate Capital Contingency Budget (Agenda item 7)

- Why are contingencies not built into each of these budgets, as opposed to requesting draw down from a central contingency fund.
- What is the balance of the capital contingency fund? And how much is left after these requests?
(The above questions apply to agenda items 7, 8, 9 and 10 - Requests for funding from the capital contingency budget 22/23)

- Page 7 item 10 – 2019 costings - Do we expect costs from 2019 to have increased significantly now?
- How confident do we (SSDC) feel that the funding would now be sufficient to see the project through to the end.
- Replacement of the second cremator - Is this cremator now active and is the crematorium operating at full capacity? What money has been saved on not replacing the base of this cremator, and can this saving be used for the refurbishment of the chapel?
- Clarification on the total amount being requested. Is it 165k from the SSDC contingency budget, and then a further 20k being requested from Yeovil Without Parish Council? Are the Parish Council on board with this.
- Page 8 Para 13 – Clarity on why the project is no longer carrying a contingency from the original crematorium budget.
- The impact of local government reorganisation on legacy projects like these. Are they future proofed and will these financial decisions be honoured in the handover to Somerset Council?
- What happened as a result of the changes to the service contracts at the crematorium? Have these service contracts been factored into this request for funding of the crematorium.
- If the work will take 22 months to complete, is there a risk that after vesting day the contractors will need more cash from the new Somerset authority to finish the work.
- What are the risks if this work is not carried out at all?
- The Chairman concluded that this is a very complex project over a long time. Not easy to manage and hopefully lessons are being learned.

Millers Garage Car Park Project, East Street, Crewkerne - Request for Additional Funding from the Corporate Capital Contingency Budget (Agenda item 8)

- Many concerns from Crewkerne residents about any potential links with planning application for housing development on or close to the site? Is this proposal to build the car park as a stand-alone project, and not intended for use as an access route for future housing.
- When they we expect this project to be completed?
- Do we have any concerns regarding land contamination, given that this site is a former garage?
- Why have expected costs gone up by nearly 100%, from £210k to £413k?
- Is this carpark subject to a live planning application, and if so, will this lapse if the work is not started soon?
- Page 12 Para 10 refers to 'officers unable to provide a high level of reliability'. One member suggested that this doesn't sound very reassuring.
- Is the project going to be good value for money? The previous report (that was withdrawn from DX agenda in June) suggested a more value for money approach i.e. a potential land swap. Why has this approach been left out of this report?

Yeovil Key Sites Change of Scope Request (Agenda item 9)

- *Benefit cost ratio (BCR) – What is this now, and will it pose a problem for these projects if the BCR is less than 2?
- Cattle Market site - If the site had a £35m funding gap, why was it included in the original future high street fund bid?

- One member asked about the possibility of Scrutiny doing a deep dive review of Yeovil Key Sites projects in confidential session, whilst also acknowledging that bidding for future high street funding is a very competitive process.
- Para 17 – What would happen if this money had to be returned? Is there an earmarked reserve to cover us in case this money must be returned?
- One member commented that SSDC used to be a very ambitious authority, but these are clearly very different times. Regarding a deep dive report into Yeovil Key sites, he asked for it to include any history and context to help members understand how some of those ambitions are now out of reach.

Yeovil Refresh Wyndham Street Public Realm Funding (Agenda item 10)

- Are we (SSDC) confident that we've got the ability to see this through by vesting day '23? Are there any likely constraints that may arise?
- One member questioned whether this public realm project is value for money when he felt that footfall in the area was not significant enough to justify the spend. In response, the ward member told members that this area was in fact a very busy part of town and serves many people with access into the town centre.
- Some members felt that this project was a positive move for the area, agreeing that it would be better to do this work now, rather than leave the area in a run-down state.
- Does the scheme include tidying-up of the shop fronts, like the Chard Shop Front Design Guide?
- The Chairman asked the Regeneration Service Manager for a detailed breakdown of the 891k spend for the District Executive meeting on Thursday 4th August.

Placeholder Report - Potential request from Scrutiny Committee for re-consideration of an Executive Decision as a result of the Scrutiny Call-in procedure (Agenda item 11)

- This was considered as a separate item on the Scrutiny agenda.
- The 'call-in' request was withdrawn.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 12)

- One member felt that October looks light but acknowledged that as time goes on there will likely be more decisions taken under the Local Government Reorganisation governance workstreams.

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

The Chairman provided a brief verbal update on progress of Task and Finish Groups, including

- Flooding in South Somerset - the Section 19 report regarding the Chard Flooding had been considered. The report for Ilminster was still awaited, and once received, the two reports would be correlated to identify if there is anything that could be recommended by Scrutiny to try and improve matters.
- Productivity Analysis - on hold

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

The Chairman noted that at the District Executive meeting in July he had raised about the upcoming reports on Section 106 and CIL. He acknowledged that members were aware that a report was due to each Area Committee, but he had also raised an observation that there was perhaps a need for a strategic discussion beyond the locality element, about how these funding programmes would carry over into the new authority and what our recommendations might be. The suggestion was acknowledged by the Executive and not immediately rejected.

One of the Vice-Chairs noted that members of Area West Committee had been asking for an update report on historic buildings for a considerable length of time, as it was an important report providing updates on progress of building at risk. She asked if it wasn't possible to take a report to each Area Committee could a district wide report be made to Scrutiny Committee? A brief discussion followed during which other members supported the need for an update report on historic buildings. In response the Chief Executive noted she would discuss the matter with Directors to see if a report could be provided.

36. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman reminded members that as had been discussed during consideration of the Yeovil Key Sites Change of Scope report on the District Executive agenda, a 'deep dive' report would come back to Scrutiny Committee in October for consideration.

Members were content to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

37. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 30 August at 10.30am, in the Council Chamber, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

38. Scrutiny Call-in procedure - Wincanton Regeneration budget- Change of Scope (Agenda Item 13)

The Chairman informed members that he had been made aware of a telephone call from one of the Wincanton ward members prior to the meeting, and that both Wincanton ward members had asked for the call-in to be withdrawn from the Scrutiny agenda.

The Chairman advised members that Councillor Bastable and Councillor Osborne would need to give their permission for the call-in to be withdrawn, to which they both agreed. However, both Councillors had some queries and concerns regarding processes relating to the Regeneration Board. During discussion some of the comments raised by members included:

- Would be interested to know what was discussed at the Board and what has changed for this call-in to have been withdrawn.
- The situation shows weaknesses in the relationships between Regeneration Boards, ward members, Area Committees and the public.

- Concerned that presently the people of Wincanton do not know what is happening with Wincanton Regeneration? Suggestion that this shows the lack of consultation by Wincanton Regeneration Board.
- buying habits in retail have changed considerably in recent years, with online shopping, home delivery etc... meaning that town centre footfall must be very different now. What recent studies are being done regarding footfall in these areas? Have town centre regeneration needs changed?
- In the interests of transparency, there should be more reporting from regeneration boards to prevent ward members feeling like they have not been consulted sufficiently.
- It is important that public speakers representing a specific 'place' make it very clear who they are representing. i.e. town or parish council or themselves.

The Director for Place and Recovery and the Regeneration Programme Manager responded to points of detail raised during discussion, and some of their comments included:

- The Town Council has always been represented on the Regeneration Board, however following the local elections there had been a major change of councillors.
- Some elements of the public realm scheme are more supported by some stakeholders, than other parts.
- From discussions relating to the ward member concerns and a recent Board meeting, all parties now aligned behind a renewed vision for Wincanton that the Board feels able to support.
- Will take back to the team about improving communication.
- Assurances that lessons would be learned.

The Chairman was pleased that the call-in process had been handled diligently, and that discussions had taken place to address the concerns of the ward members concerned. He concluded that lessons would be learned for the future of Wincanton Regeneration and all regeneration projects.

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Chairman