

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Tuesday 30 August 2022.**

(10.30 am - 12.10 pm)

**Present:**

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

Robin Bastable	Tim Kerley
Ray Buckler	Mike Lewis
Karl Gill	Sue Osborne
Andy Kendall	



**Also Present on-line:**

John Clark	Sarah Dyke
Peter Seib	

**Officers:**

Jan Gamon	Director (Place, Recovery, Arts & Entertainment) (on-line)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer) (on-line)
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
James Griffin	Regeneration and Capital Accountant (on-line)
Kate Arscott	Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Joe Walsh	Specialist (Economic Development) (on-line)
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Jo Boucher	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)

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### 39. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 02 August 2022 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barbara Appleby, Louise Clarke, Brian Hamilton, Paul Maxwell, Robin Pailthorpe, Oliver Patrick, and Stephanie Gold, Scrutiny Specialist.

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

There were no declaration of interest.

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**42. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)**

There were no questions from members of the public present.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

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**44. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)**

The Chairman advised that following the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 04 August, he had received a number of emails and phone calls regarding the Millers Garage car park proposal and the projects value for money. He said that the questions on value for money had remained unanswered and that possibly, there was a more effective way of delivering the scheme which would be of greater assistance to Crewkerne. He had asked for the suspension of the commencement of the car park project until the Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to discuss the project in more detail, including the neighbouring landowner and his agent. That meeting would now take place at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on the 04 October 2022.

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**45. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 4 August 2022 (Agenda Item 7)**

The Chairman had no further updates on the reports considered by District Executive on 04 August 2022.

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**46. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 September 2022 (Agenda Item 8)**

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 01 September 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.

**Economic Development Celebratory Report (Agenda item 6)**

- Had SSDC returned any of the unspent grant funding to the Government and if so, how much?
- Had SSDC funding contributed to any of the achievements listed in the report?
- How much did the Transformation programme and agile working help officers to adapt to administer the business grants?
- How successful had the Employment Hub open days been?

**2022/23 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the period ending 30 June 2022 (Agenda item 7)**

- Page 29, Table 1 - Investment income is £1.9m in deficit?
- Page 30, Table 2 – the variances in the figures are difficult to understand

- The tables in the report could be laid out better as the lines are close together and can be mis-read.
- What are the greatest risks to the authority at the current time?
- Para 13 – what is the risk in not being able to recruit sufficient staff? How is mutual aid working between the authorities?\*
- Para 48 – are the Council's reserves sufficient to cover any loss of business rate income because of failing businesses and any drop in Council income generally?

### **2022/23 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the period ending 30 June 2022 (Agenda item 8)**

- The budget for the refurbishment of Yeovil Crematorium goes into 2023/24 and would this create any issues to complete the refurbishment work?
- Recommendation G – what was the process behind this correction?
- Para 22 – the date for the completion of the decarbonisation works had slipped back and was there any risk that the PSDS grant would be less than expected and was there any risk that additional funding would be requested? \*
- Para 12 – had the capital projects listed in table 3 been agreed to be taken forward by the new Somerset Council?
- Para 34 – was there a risk that the Octagon Theatre redevelopment may not be taken forward by the new Somerset Council?

### **Corporate Performance Report 2022-23: 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter (Agenda item 9)**

- Is the new performance monitoring format captured and presented in the same way across all 5 Somerset Councils now? And are the performance indicators the same across the 5 Councils?
- Is the new reporting format a good use of officer time if it is not going to be adopted by the new Somerset Council?
- Dispute the improvement in planning control (LGR18) – personal experience is no better than a year ago. Officers should respond to Members requests for information or updates on enforcement cases.
- With regard to Freedom Leisure and the lack of data, was this because the contract was signed late?
- Page 66 – a number of the performance indicators mentioned recruitment as an issue. Did SSDC have an issue in attracting staff to vacancies? \*
- When would the various council teams join together and work together to resolve issues in the new Somerset Council?
- LGR 11 – Council Tax support – new claims: concern that it is taking 68 days to process claims when the cost of living crisis could increase the number of claims in the future. Are we recruiting to reduce the waiting time? \*
- LGR 9 – Housing Benefit – new claims: concern that the processing time has increased from 21 to 59 days. Are new residents expected to find 2 months rent before the Council is able to help them? How long does it take for the payment to reach them? \*

### **Wincanton Regeneration Scope Change (Agenda item 10)**

- Concern expressed that the proposal was still work in progress and relied upon certain buildings to be available.
- All views on the regeneration project were robustly discussed by the Wincanton Regeneration Board and Wincanton Town Council had been part of the meeting.

There were a number of uncertainties and progress would be reported in due course.

**Sale of commercial development land at Lufton, Yeovil (Lufton 2000 Joint Venture) (Agenda item 11)**

The Committee discussed this item in a confidential session. The press and public were excluded from the room and the debate.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development read out a briefing from the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager and he and the Monitoring Officer answered questions from Members of the Scrutiny Committee.

**District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 12)**

No comments from Scrutiny Committee.

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

The Chairman advised that there was a Scrutiny Task and Finish meeting on Tuesday 06 September at 1.00pm via Teams to discuss the SCC's Section 19 flood investigation report on the Ilminster flooding event.

Following a brief discussion it was requested that the invite to join the Task and Finish meeting be circulated to all Members.

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**48. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 10)**

The Chairman noted that the Scrutiny Specialist would arrange a discussion on Section 106 and CIL funding during either September or October 2022.

The Chairman reported that following their request the previous month to the District Executive for a 'deep dive' into the Yeovil Key Sites lessons learned, the Executive had not felt this would be a good use of officer time.

During discussion it was noted that both the Director and officers had confirmed their willingness to undertake the 'deep dive' investigation into the Yeovil Key Sites lessons learned and it was agreed by 6 votes in favour to one against, to again make a formal request to District Executive to undertake this work. Members felt it was important to understand how the decisions had been taken on the scheme and how they had impacted the outcomes as a learning exercise for the new Unitary Authority.

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**49. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)**

The Chairman advised that a joint workshop would be held during September for all Scrutiny and Audit Committee Members. This would be an on-line workshop and the date would be advised very shortly.

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**50. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)**

Members noted that the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 04 October at 10.30am, in the Council Chamber, SSDC Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

The Chairman requested that due to external public attendance, the Millers Garage car park call-in be the first item to be discussed at their next meeting.

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Chairman