

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Tuesday 29 November 2022.**

(10.30 am - 11.45 am)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Sue Osborne
Ray Buckler	Robin Pailthorpe
Brian Hamilton	Oliver Patrick
Andy Kendall (from 10.45am)	Lucy Trimnell (to 11.00am)



Officers

Nicola Hix	Director (Strategy, Support & Environmental Services)
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
James Griffin	Regeneration and Capital Accountant – via Zoom
Martin Hone	Senior Project Accountant – via Zoom
Jo Boucher	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services) – via Zoom

64. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

One member referred to the Millers Garage Call-In item that had been discussed at the previous meeting, and noted that at that meeting another member had suggested that District Executive receive the same presentation that had been made by a planning agent to the Scrutiny Committee during the Public Question Time item, however this appeared to be omitted from the minutes. She commented it would be helpful to know the reasons why the presentation had not been made to District Executive.

The Chairman noted he would enquire why the presentation had not been made to the District Executive.

Members were content that the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to an additional sentence being added to minute 57 to reflect the suggestion made by a member of Scrutiny Committee that District Executive also received the presentation made by the planning agent.

65. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barbara Appleby, Tim Kerley and Paul Maxwell. It was also noted that Councillor Lucy Trimnell would be leaving the meeting early.

66. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

68. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

A member of the public addressed members regarding the Millers Garage item which had been discussed at the previous meeting, and he read out a statement he had prepared, Some of his points included:

- A member of Scrutiny had suggested that District Executive receive the same presentation from Boon Brown regarding the proposal for development on land adjacent to the site. However the Scrutiny minutes did not reflect this and were therefore not a correct record of the meeting.
- District Executive did not receive the Boon Brown presentation but had an officer report which avoided mention of any proposed development on the adjacent field.
- He felt from the outside it looked like that council would never build the car park but would use the site to unlock the adjacent field for development.
- As the Millers Garage site had been purchased with public money for the purpose of providing the town with a car park and the potential for loss of open space, he felt the people of Crewkerne deserved an investigation into why the car park had failed to be provided after eight years, and why part of the Conservation Area had been left as a derelict site for same length of time.

The Chairman explained that the debate on Millers Garage could not be re-opened by Scrutiny Committee. He thanked the member of the public for his comments and asked if he would kindly leave a copy of his statement at the end of the meeting. The Chairman noted he would ensure the comments were passed up to the appropriate people at District Executive so that they had a copy of the exact wording as read out to members.

During a very brief discussion a member expressed his concern and frustration with the situation. In response, the Chairman commented he did not have the answers but he would raise the matter, and the concerns of Scrutiny Committee, at District Executive on Thursday.

69. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

70. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 6 October and 3 November 2022 (Agenda Item 7)

There were no verbal updates on reports considered by District Executive at the October and November meetings.

71. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 December 2022 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda the District Executive for 1 December 2022 and raised comments and questions as detailed below. Responses to many questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers – except those marked by an asterisk.

Corporate Performance Report 2022-23: 2nd Quarter (Item 6)

- This report seems to be in a different format to the previous report, and seems to provide an overview. Different formats of reports for corporate performance makes it less than easy to compare reports like for like.
- Is this going to be the format for performance reports going forwards into the unitary authority?
- *Page 13, ENv10 – re checking health of trees and using tablets – is this a good use of officer time? Is there a trail which shows every tree in SSDC care across the district? Who is going to undertake this work? What will happen to this work as we go into the new authority? Some members queried if this was a new KPI as they didn't recall it from previous reports?
- *Page 14, PL1 – PL4, members noted the poor performance. Some members were particularly concerned about the performance of PL2 and PL3 (affordable housing) as they didn't believe affordable housing was impacted as much by the phosphates situation.
- A member commented he could see no performance data relating to the Lufton site
- *Page 8, para 16 (Places where we live) – there is reference to the impact of phosphates and the prospect of determining a significant number of applications in the second half of 2023 – we have yet to discover what the planning arrangements will be in the new authority. Will the three rural affordable housing schemes referred to be delivered by March 2023 is the year a typo?
- *Page 13, Env7 - whilst acknowledging this was a specific query – a member noted that an EV charging point had been installed in Ilminster for a while but had yet to be commissioned – was a date known when the point would be active?
- Members were pleased to recognise the positives in this quarter including improvement in the speed of dealing with Council Tax Support, planning enforcement, and average call waiting times.
- Page 18 - The Octagon – not sure what value engineering works is – does it come at additional cost to the project?
- The Octagon – what are the chances of the project staying within the £29million budget? A member sought clarity on the decision making process going forwards during transition to unitary. Will County also have to consider and agree?
- *Page 19 – LGR 11 – it was noted that 92 days is a long time for someone to wait to find out if they are going to get some support. Could members have more monitoring / monthly data / reporting as it would be useful to provide reassurance for members that the issue is being addressed and that measures being put in place are effective. How frequent is the data monitoring? Members formally requested a specific response to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on this specific KPI.

2022/23 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th September 2022 and Revised Estimates for 2022/23 (Item 7)

- Page 25, table 3 – A member sought clarification what 'Place' included as it has an enormous budget.
- Page 29, para 37 – A member queried what building 11 is on the Boden Mill site – is it a small building?
- Page 29, para 40 – Disabled Facilities Grants – only appears to be about 33% spent – is this likely to be spent or allocated by year end?
- Page 31, table 9 (Financing the Capital Programme) – regarding the line for S106 contributions – a member queried where the contributions were coming from and why they are being put towards financing of the capital programme?
- *Page 33, Appx A – under Service Delivery – A member noted there was a line for Home Farm, Somerton – and queried what it was for? (Members acknowledged the Lead Specialist (Finance) would circulate a response to members).
- Page 33, Appx – under Area West – a member noted there was a line for North Perrott Cricket Club which had zero in each column and queried why the line was included in the table.
- Page 33, Appx A member asked if the projects could be in alphabetical order for ease of reading.
- Regarding decarbonisation of our buildings, phases 1 and 2 – a member recalled in a previous report about capital contingency there had been reference to awaiting a grant and completing a project within in a specific timeframe – is there an update on that – did we get the work completed in time to claim the grant funding? For any projects that are pushed forwards into subsequent years, when we will be in the new authority – what is the likelihood that the work is going to be done?
- *Members acknowledged there was a county-wide meeting taking place which was reviewing the capital programmes – how quickly will all members at district level be informed of the outcome of that meeting?

2022/23 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th September 2022 and Revised Estimates for 2022/23 (Item 8)

- Page 37, table 2 (proposed funding measures) – staff turnover savings assumption and savings in the employees budget – a member asked if the figures take into account any additional spend for agency staff?
- Page 40, table 5 (property services budget) – a members asked for an explanation of the terms re-gearing and grossing up as appeared to give a significant rise in income.
- Page 43, para 32 – a member noted the amount that could be paying in interest was staggering.
- Page 43. Para 34 – mentions proposed re-financing of the capital programme – when or where can members see the proposed re-financing? What are the plans, and will they need to be approved by Full Council and also County Council?
- Page 48, Appx A – Commercial Investments Risk Reserve – a member queried why SSDC would commit to further external borrowing when there was a risk reserve? Why take a loan if there is money in a budget?
- Regarding interest rate risk – did we allow for the level of interest rates that we are now face with when forming our financial assumptions?

District Executive Forward Plan (Item 10)

- Members noted the report due to the January meeting regarding The Octagon and permission to tender will be an important discussion and decision.
 - Members noted an update report on Section 106 funding is due at the December meeting of Full Council, however, Scrutiny members expressed frustration as it had been hoped the report would go via Scrutiny Committee first. Scrutiny members also noted that an update on CIL had been awaited for many months. As both S106 and CIL involved a lot of money and impacted on all wards, Scrutiny feel it is important that members receive an update to fully understand the allocation and distribution of funds.
 - A member noted that the presentation on Opium Power has slipped to January Full Council and sought assurance that in the event the January meeting is cancelled that the presentation will not be forgotten about as it is of interest to many members.
-

72. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 9)

There were no updates on matters of interest, as several matters had been raised during discussion of other items on the agenda.

73. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 10)

The Chairman acknowledged the frustrations of members raised earlier in the meeting regarding the Section 106 update report and reminded members he would raise the concerns of Scrutiny Committee at the District Executive meeting on 1 December.

The Chairman reminded members of the Task and Finish work undertaken regarding the Section 19 flooding reports for Chard and Ilminster and advised that the flooding reports were due to be considered by County Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Environment on 30 November. The work of the Task and Finish group had been acknowledged and appreciated by the County officers. Another member suggested that the Task and Finish group was kept on stand-by in case any further work was required following consideration of the reports at County.

It was also noted that earlier in the meeting during discussion of the Performance report on the District Executive agenda, members had requested a specific update regarding KPI LGR11 regarding the reported 92-day wait for processing new Council Tax Support claims.

The representative on the Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Waste Board and also the Local Government Reorganisation Joint Scrutiny Committee provided members with a brief verbal update, including:

- The former Chairman of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Waste Board had sadly passed away following a tragic accident.
- The Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Waste Board were due to meet shortly to consider a number of updates,
- The Local Government Reorganisation Joint Scrutiny Committee was also due to meet shortly and would take place in the Council Chamber at Brympton Way. Anyone was welcome to attend, and reports could be viewed on the Somerset County Council website.

There being no further discussion, members were content to note the work programme.

74. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted that the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 3 January 2023 at 10.30am, in the Council Chamber, SSDC Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

.....

Chairman