

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Tuesday 3 January 2023.**

(10.30 am - 12.07 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Tim Kerley
Ray Buckler	Sue Osborne
Brian Hamilton	Oliver Patrick
Andy Kendall	Lucy Trimmell



Also Present:

Tony Lock
Mike Best (on-line via Zoom)
John Clark (on-line via Zoom)
Peter Seib (on-line via Zoom)

Officers

Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Jan Gamon	Director (Place & recovery) – on-line via Zoom
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer & District Solicitor – on-line via Zoom
Robert Orrett	Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

75. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 November 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

76. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Karl Gill, Paul Maxwell and Robin Pailthorpe.

77. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

78. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

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

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

The Chairman reminded members that at the previous meeting they had considered a report on the District Executive agenda for December regarding Performance and Key Performance Indicators. At that time members had raised a concern particularly about the Council Tax Support statistics and had asked for an interim update. He had received the updated information which he shared with members, this included:

- The August figures had been detailed in the December report and indicated 98 days for the processing of new claimants.
- For September the figure went down to 92 days, and for October the figure was at 87, and November down to 77.
- The trend was showing positive and was improving. Having spoken to officers there was more work underway and he requested the Director (Service Delivery) for the information to be circulated to Scrutiny members.

A member noted he had raised a couple of questions at the previous meeting regarding item 6 and the absence of performance data for the Lufton site, and also detail regarding a line in item 7 (appendix A) regarding capital expenditure for Home Farm, Somerton. At the previous meeting the Lead Specialist (Finance) and the Director (Support, Strategy & Environmental Services) had noted they would provide a response but as yet he had not received any information. In response, the Director (Service Delivery) noted she would follow up on the queries with the relevant officers.

80. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

81. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 1 December 2022 (Agenda Item 7)

There were no verbal updates on reports considered by District Executive at the December meeting. A verbal update regarding monitoring of the processing of new claims for Council Tax Support had been provided at item 5 on this agenda.

82. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5 January 2023 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 5 January 2023 and raised comments and questions as detailed below. Responses to many questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers – except any marked by an asterisk.

Agenda item 6: Yeovil Refresh Scope Change Request (Pages 4 - 13)

- Para 2 Regarding allocation of the 891k, does this effectively mean it is being moved from one account to another?
- Recommendation a, what is the source of the Yeovil Refresh Transport workstream fund of £1.2m, and is this new money, or money that has already been allocated to Yeovil Refresh?
- *When this originally came to Full Council 2 years ago the borrowing term was set at 50 years – is this still correct?
- Concerns that this project has had bad press and costs have risen significantly. Is there a risk that this is going to be stopped due to budgetary pressures?
- Many trees have been lost through this project. Will these be replaced in future Yeovil Refresh public realm works?
- How can we be assured that there is enough money in the budget to complete this project if it hasn't gone out to tender yet? Do we have a discrepancy here?
- Recommendation b regarding the redesign of middle street - why is a redesign being done?
- Para 11 Is there a risk of further cost increases and subsequent funding shortfalls for the other public realm works in Wyndham Street, Westminster Street?
- Para 16 Regarding the risk identified with utilities, could this have been foreseen?
- Recommendation c – one member queried whether there was potential for the unlikely risks to become more likely?
- *Para 16 What is the total amount of all the compensation claims against utility companies at this time?
- Para 12 Regarding future applications for funding from the Future High Street Fund, is there a significant risk that these will not be secured?

Agenda item 7: Update on Section 106 Schemes (Pages 14 - 23)

- Appendix A appears to show that the total amount of unpaid S106 contributions across the district is around £5.4million. That amount of money is a significant contribution to the local economy – how can we ensure that this money is paid out?
- *How do the 10 Year expiry periods work? Will extension of time be granted where money is not claimed? Some of this data appears to be very close to this expiry period.
- Appendix A Regarding Land at Tanyard Broadway, what does OS mean?
- *Appendix A Regarding Land south of Kit Hill, money passed to British rail? What does this mean?
- *Appendix A Is there a risk that there is some data missing from this data set? Would it be a good idea to capture any missing data by asking for feedback from area committees?
- One member proposed that that this report and Appendix A, in its current form, should be circulated to all members via area committees to seek assistance in identifying any missing data. This proposal was seconded, and all members agreed.
- *Regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy Funding Statement 2021/2022 that has now been published on the South Somerset District Council website, why didn't this monitoring report come through the committee cycle for approval from members?

Agenda item 8: Investment Asset Update Report (Pages 24 - 39)

- *Regarding an investments review taking place on 18th January as part of LGR in Somerset, will this council get to see the outcomes of that?
- Page 26 – table 1. Are the values here in millions or thousands. The use of apostrophes is unclear.
- Page 31 Para 33 regarding the residential development Marlborough and the 3 flats still to be sold, is there a risk that this is going to be a significant loss for this council? This is concerning when spending taxpayers' money.
- Regarding the battery storage facility at Taunton, are we moving into a battery replacement phase yet?
- Para 41 Note 2 states: Interest costs shown above are an estimate based on the PWLB borrowing rates that were current at the time each investment business case was agreed. How is this relevant?
- Page 38 Table 4 Asset no.4 reports that 86% of this income will be void. Does this mean that one tenant is leaving but that there is another remaining tenant which makes up the other 14% of the rental income?
- One member proposed that the committee move into confidential session for the remainder of the discussion and this proposal was seconded.

The Committee considered the confidential appendix to the Investment Asset Update Report and raised questions in confidential session. The Committee unanimously voted to exclude the press and public from the room for consideration of the confidential appendix.

Agenda item 9: Report on Investment Property Lease Renewal (Pages 40 - 45)

- Members endorsed the report and there were no questions for the lead officer.

Agenda item 10: District Executive Forward Plan (Pages 46 - 50)

- Will a presentation on the Kick Start Scheme be going to the District Executive in February?
- *Regarding the TBC status of the external audit & value for money? When will this be going to the District Executive?

CONFIDENTIAL – Exclusion of the Press and Public

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Committee resolved that the press and public be excluded from the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, i.e. "Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Agenda item 13: Somerset's Cultural Flagship Venue - Permission to tender (Confidential) (Pages 53 - 57)

Members raised a number of questions in confidential session.

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

There were no updates on matters of interest.

84. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 10)

There were no updates or discussion. Members were content to note the Work Programme.

85. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted that the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 31 January 2023 at 10.30am, in the Council Chamber, SSDC Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman