

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 July 2014

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 1 July 2014 in the Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(10.00am – 11.35am)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (in the Chair)

David Bulmer
Pauline Clarke
Nick Colbert

Carol Goodall
Tim Inglefield (to 10.50am)
Pauline Lock

Tony Lock
Nigel Mermagen

Substitutes:

Councillor Kim Turner for Councillor David Recardo.

Also present:

Councillors Tim Carroll, Ric Pallister and Sylvia Seal.

Officers:

Ian Potter	Revenues and Benefits Manager
Andrew Gillespie	Area Development Manager (West)
Kerri Bruce	MTIG Marketing Intern
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Becky Sanders	Democratic Services Officer

14. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 3 June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Maxwell, Graham Middleton, Sue Osborne, David Recardo and Martin Wale.

16. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

17. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public at the meeting.

18. Issues Arising from Previous Meetings (Agenda Item 5)

There were no issues arising from previous minutes.

19. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman commented she had attended the recent 'Meet the Interns' event which had been very interesting. One of the interns was developing an app for the Market Towns and she had invited her to give a quick demonstration to Scrutiny Committee under agenda item 12, 'update on matters of interest'.

20. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 5 June 2014 (Agenda item 7)

The Chairman noted that the Scrutiny comments had been considered at the meeting. She noted the minutes had not been circulated as the District Executive meeting for July had been cancelled.

21. Council Tax reduction Scheme – Year 1 review and thoughts for Year 3 (Agenda item 8)

The Revenues and Benefits Manager presented the report as detailed in the agenda and reminded members of the scheme, and highlighted issues and trends including:

- Falling case loads, which followed trend for housing benefit.
- A lot had been done to publicise the changes from Council tax Benefit to Council tax Reduction including consultation, pages on the website, press releases, drop-in sessions and personal letters to all recipients. However some people had still claimed they were not aware of the change.
- Much work had been done to help customers with the transition. There had been misunderstandings by some customers regarding the reminder process and so leaflets had been sent out to explain the process.
- Several clients had multiple budget issues and in many cases were referred to the Citizens Advice Bureau for help or debt advice.
- There had been no legal challenges to the scheme but representations had been received from Gingerbread.
- Been a bigger impact on the team than initially expected.
- Changes to the scheme for 2015/16 and beyond now need to be considered which included the issue of whether to take maintenance into account.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager responded to items raised during discussion, his responses included:

- Resources in the Revenues team were currently being reviewed. An extra post had been created due to the changes associated with the scheme but the impact of the volume of work had been more than expected.
- Collection fees for non-payment were based on an escalating process. If a customer reached the Liability Order stage there were additional costs depending on the action required by Enforcement Agents (formerly known as Bailiffs prior to April 2014). The leaflet produced about the reminder process explained the procedure in more detail. It was acknowledged that some people ignored letters and it was difficult to get them to engage.

- Cases were carefully considered before being referred to Enforcement Agents.
- In South Somerset there had been no appeals forwarded to tribunal
- Regarding figures in Appendix A of the agenda report, SSDC had received a CTR grant, however it was included within a larger grant and was difficult to identify individually. He noted he would find out the figure and circulate to members.

The Scrutiny Manager, commented that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme had been subject to a specific Task and Finish group as it was very technical, and queried what plans were in place for future monitoring and review. In response the Revenues and Benefits Manager noted that timescales were short for the scheme in 2015/16, but for future years another Task and Finish group might be required.

The Chairman thanked the officer for his comprehensive report.

ACTION: Members to note the report.

*Ian Potter, Revenues and Benefits Manager
ian.potter@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462690*

22. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 July 2014 (Agenda item 9)

Members noted that since the Scrutiny agenda had been published, the District Executive meeting to be held on 1 July had been cancelled.

23. Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel (PCP) (Agenda item 10)

Councillor Tony Lock, SSDC representative on the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel, provided a verbal update to members. He noted they had met twice since his last report, in March to consider the Commissioner's crime plan, and in June to consider the budget. Highlighted points included:

- There were proposals to change the delivery of policing services to the community
- A review of the property portfolio was taking place
- There were concerns about the budget in future years
- Regarding suspension of the Chief Constable, the Panel would know not anything until the Independent Police Complaints Commission had completed their investigation

During a brief discussion members comments included:

- Unfortunate that since the Police and Crime Commissioner had been in post there had been two instances with no Chief Constable.
- Communications regarding the property review and staffing changes had been poor, and there needed to be more interaction with elected members about such matters.

Members thanked Councillor Lock for the update.

ACTION:

- Members to note the update
- Democratic Services to add to add next update to the Work Programme for January 2015.

24. Verbal Update on Task & Finish Reviews (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman and Scrutiny Manager updated members on the progress of current Task and Finish reviews.

Discretionary Rate Relief

The group had met to consider responses to the recent internal consultation but the return rate had been very low. The consultation had now gone out externally and officers were continuing to work on a revised policy. A report to consider a new draft policy would be made to the August meeting of Scrutiny Committee for comment prior to going to District Executive.

Somerset Strategic Housing Framework

The group had met on 16th June, and would not meet again for some time until a 12 week consultation period had finished.

Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband

A member briefing has been arranged for early July to discuss with members how to progress the final report. Following this there would be a further public meeting of the Task and Finish Group.

Civil Contingencies

The group would be meeting in mid-July. It would be a detailed and intense piece of work which needed to be completed by early September.

ACTION: Members to note the updates.

25. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 12)

The Scrutiny Manager updated members that the Flooding Steering Group would be meeting on 9 July. 12 months on from when recommendations from the Flood Summit were adopted, there was a need to cross reference with the 20 Year Flood Action Plan and monitor what is not duplicated, and to consider how to monitor implementation of the 20 Year Flood Action Plan.

As mentioned under Chairman's announcements, the Chairman had invited the MTIG Marketing Intern (Market Towns Investment Group) to give a demonstration of the new Market Towns app. The Area Development Manager (West) and MTIG Marketing Intern introduced the app and explained that volunteers and businesses provided the content information and each had the ability to update their own information. It was highlighted the app was still in development and a number of updates would be made in the coming weeks.

The MTIG Marketing Intern agreed to forward details of the website publicising, and giving information, about how to download the app. Members noted that further information would be provided in the report on High Street Innovation Funding which was scheduled for the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 2 September.

ACTION: Members to note the updates.

26. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

The Scrutiny Manager noted she would try to arrange a presentation by a representative of Somerset County Council about Health Scrutiny, and also look to invite a representative from Cornwall Council to explain how they approach Health Scrutiny.

ACTION: Members to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

27. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held on Tuesday 5 August 2014 at 10.00am in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman