

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee (Informal)** held by video conference using Zoom meeting software on **Tuesday 1 June 2021**.

(10.30 am - 12.00 pm)

**Present:**

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

Robin Bastable  
Karl Gill  
Brian Hamilton  
Paul Maxwell

Sue Osborne  
Robin Pailthorpe  
Crispin Raikes  
Linda Vijeh



**Also Present:**

John Clark  
Sarah Dyke

Tony Lock

**Officers**

Jill Byron  
Kirsty Larkins  
Jo Wilkins  
Robert Orrett  
Stephanie Gold  
Becky Sanders

Monitoring Officer  
Director (Service Delivery)  
Specialist (Strategic Planning)  
Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager  
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)  
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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**13. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlie Hull, Oliver Patrick and Jeny Snell.

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**14. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)**

There were no declarations of interest.

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**15. Public question time (Agenda Item 3)**

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

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**16. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 4)**

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

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## **17. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Karl Gill who is a new member on Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman advised members that the Scrutiny Chairmen had now attended all four Area Committees and gave a brief overview of what had been discussed. It had been suggested that the Scrutiny function could be more transparent, and so going forward, a trial would take place whereby responses from District Executive members and officers to comments raised at Scrutiny Committee would be circulated to all members for information.

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## **18. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 13 May 2021 (Agenda Item 6)**

There were no updates on reports considered by District Executive members at the May meeting.

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## **19. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 3 June 2021 (Agenda Item 7)**

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 3 June 2021 (Informal Consultative meeting) and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee (Informal Meeting) by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except those marked with an asterisk.

### **Relocation of Emergency Accommodation (Agenda item 5)**

- Regarding the Homes England grant – is there any update about the outcome or when the outcome may be known? Also would the outcome of the Homes England grant impact the funding figure detailed in the recommendation at paragraph 5?
- Members sought clarification about provision of emergency accommodation for females and also provision for anyone with pets.
- Financial implications - Members asked if agreeing this funding would impact on other projects coming forward?

### **Dealing with Planning Applications: Our Approach to Negotiation (Agenda item 6)**

- Members queried the suggestion that amendments to planning applications would result in an extension of time, and is the intention of this to ensure applications stay within the 8-9 week timeframe and amendments are discouraged.
- Members sought clarification about charges for pre-application advice – do charges apply to small applications as well as larger ones?
- One member expressed his frustration with the planning service provided which he felt was poor. He felt the whole situation with the planning service was very concerning with little on the ground seeming to change.
- Another member noted that he felt things were getting better and that supportive comments were being expressed by some parishes.

- A member noted that it was important at the pre-application stage for officers to be candid about the information being provided.
- Members asked if there was a replacement Lead for the planning service?
- Members noted it was acknowledged by the team and officers that the planning service isn't fixed and work was ongoing to streamline processes and improve the service.
- The Chairman noted that new processes were being trialled and it would be good to receive some feedback at a later date about how effective the changes have been or the lessons learned.

### **The 'Making' of the Queen Camel Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda item 7)**

- No comments.

### **The 'Making' of the Martock Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda item 8)**

- A member asked how many other neighbourhood plans were currently going through the process.

### **Investments Assets Update Report (Agenda item 9)**

*(Scrutiny did not go into confidential session)*

- Members acknowledged an update from the Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager that the graph '20/21 Performance Against Budget' would be moved from the confidential appendix into the public report.
- Para 9 in confidential appendix – referring to the coloured table, it was observed that there are a number of investments that seem to be showing as a nil or negative return in the future, members asked for some further explanation on the reasons for these assumptions.
- Some members suggested a briefing or workshop for members to help understand in more detail the approach for our investments (what and where) would be useful
- Members sought clarification about delivery of commercial investments going forward as the current director would be Chief Executive in a few days. Members sought reassurance that there would be no conflicts of interest – especially regarding our directorship in some of the companies.
- Members requested an update regarding the Marks & Spencer (M&S) store as it was believed the company were reviewing their land holdings.
- Members also requested an update regarding Yeovil Town Football Club and what the current status was.
- Members congratulated the team on their work, especially during current circumstances.
- It was noted there was some budget remaining for investment – some members queried if this would be impacted by the unitary decision in a few months time?

### **District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 10)**

- August – Review of Commercial Strategy – it was noted Clare Pestell's name was detailed for the report. Members queried if this was correct given that Clare would be CEO in the near future.
- Some members queried if there should be a report added for around July due to the pending decision from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government regarding local government reorganisation in Somerset?

**20. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 8)**

The Chairman provided a brief verbal update on the progress of Task and Finish groups including:

Productivity Analysis – no update.

SSDC Environment Strategy – the Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) is meeting with the budget manager shortly to discuss the switch to R.E.G.O (Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin), based on the recommendations from the task and finish group members. This would mean our current provider will only source electricity from renewable sources for the rest of the contract.

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**21. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 9)**

The Chairman reminded members that meetings would continue to be held virtually until the end of July.

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**22. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 10)**

During a brief discussion about the Work Programme, members made the following suggestions for items to be included in the future:

- There had recently been a major technical issue with members accessing their tablets and emails. A report was requested about what had happened, why, rectification and lessons learned etc.
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – a date needs be confirmed. It would be useful to have an update on funding received and distributed, and whether the scheme is as effective as Section 106 obligations.
- Broadband – the item has featured on the work programme for some time – a date needs to be confirmed for an update.

At the end of discussion, the Chairman advised members that there would also be a discussion with the Performance Specialist at the next Scrutiny meeting regarding Key Performance Indicators.

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**23. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 11)**

Members noted that the next meeting of members of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 10.30am on Tuesday 29 June 2021, and was likely to be held as an informal virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman