

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee (Informal)** held by video-conference using Zoom meeting software **on Tuesday 3 August 2021.**

(10.00 am - 11.55 am)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable
Louise Clarke
Karl Gill
Brian Hamilton
Paul Maxwell

Sue Osborne
Robin Pailthorpe
Crispin Raikes
Linda Vijeh



Also Present:

John Clark Tony Lock

Officers

Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Cath Temple	Specialist (Performance)
Toffer Beattie	Lead Specialist (Digital Change)
Jo Wilkins	Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

36. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of previous meetings held on 13 April 2021 (Special Meeting), and 11 May, 1 June and 29 June 2021 (Informal Meetings) were approved as correct records and would be signed by the Chairman.

37. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlie Hull and Oliver Patrick. The Chairman informed members that Councillor Jeny Snell had stood down from the Committee due to work commitments.

38. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

39. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

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

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

41. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- At a recent discussion with members regarding the unitary decision, he had offered to the Leader and Deputy Leader that if there was something they felt could be assisted by the Scrutiny Committee, that we would welcome the opportunity to engage.
 - Linked to the above, he queried if there was any appetite for Scrutiny to look at the costs of the advisory poll for the local government reorganisation? He suggested the matter could be discussed under the Work Programme if there was any interest.
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42. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 1 July 2021 and 8 July 2021 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman noted that the trial of circulating the responses from District Executive members and officers to comments raised at Scrutiny Committee appeared to be being quite well received, and the trial would continue. He reminded members that at the previous meeting a councillor had asked for more detail and a breakdown of figures in the CEO expenditure programme.

In response, the councillor who raised the query, acknowledged that he had received an initial response from the Lead Specialist (Finance) but the figures were still grouped in large chunks. He had asked for a further breakdown, with definitions, of where the money went as large sums were involved.

The Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development), noted that she had received a message just before the meeting from the Lead Specialist (Finance) confirming that members would receive a more detailed response within the next day or two.

43. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5 August 2021 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 5 August 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 by an asterisk:

Community Grant to Stoke Sub Hamdon Parish Council - Referred from Area North Committee (Agenda item 6)

- No questions.

Adoption of Cyber Security Strategy (Agenda item 7)

- Members suggested comprehensive training for cyber security should be available to councillors. Whilst there were mixed opinions about whether it should be voluntary or mandatory training, a quick show of hands indicated a majority supporting mandatory training.
- A member suggested if cyber security training could be made available online and possibly alongside GDPR training.
- Members queried how many cyber attack attempts the authority had been exposed to, and if any had been successful?
- A member asked what the authority were doing in terms of backing up data in case of a ransomware attack, and also whether anything was being done about restricting use of portable storage devices such as USB devices?

Corporate Performance Report 2021-22: 1st Quarter (Agenda item 8)

- *A member expressed concern and disappointment that there was nothing included within the report regarding monitoring of planning enforcement.
- Members noted that there had been some difficulties accessing the full report via the link in the agenda. When the report had been published separately as a supplement it was still difficult to read due to the layout, and members suggested that the layout format needed to be reviewed for future reports.
- A member noted that some performance data was missing for Health & Wellbeing indicators, and asked what was being done to resolve the gaps and source the data? - as it was difficult to monitor and improve without data.

Scheme of Delegation for the A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling (Agenda item 9)

- A member noted the subject had been ongoing for some time and queried why SSDC were only getting involved now?
- Will SSDC be engaging with the appropriate Town and Parish Councils about the dualling?
- One member referred to previous issues regarding a lack of communication with Ilminster Town Council, however she suggested that this situation had now been rectified, and contact had been made recently.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 10)

- Members noted that currently September would be a very busy meeting, but October was light. Concerns were raised about the number of reports due to come forward at the next meeting and whether there would be enough time for reports to be fully read and digested. Members suggested that the Forward Plan be reviewed to consider if any reports could be moved to a future month.
- Regarding the item for 'Review of the Chard Regeneration Project' - some members queried what this would involve and whether it was something that Scrutiny might need to be involved in?

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

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

SSDC Environment Strategy - Energy Supplier - an informal discussion had taken place prior to this meeting about the Task and Finish work regarding the Council's energy supplier and the possible implications of the unitary decision. Recognising the importance of the Environment Strategy and Climate Change Strategy, members had given a steer that the group should continue to work with officers to investigate a new contract for green energy. A meeting in the near future of the Task and Finish group would be arranged by the Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development).

SSDC Environment Strategy - Refresh - A Task and Finish group would be convened to look at the achievements so far and to prioritise projects going forward. The Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) would circulate an invite shortly to all members about joining the group. Councillors Gerard Tucker, Karl Gill, Crispin Raikes, Paul Maxwell and Sue Osborne volunteered to be on the group.

Council Tax Support Scheme - There was a need to reconvene the group for a short Task and Finish review of the scheme. The Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) would circulate an invite shortly to all members about joining the group. The Specialist reminded members that a new scheme had been implemented for this year and hence it was important to review how it was going. Councillor Rob Stickland, who chaired the last review, had kindly agreed to input to this years review, plus Councillors Karl Gill, Sue Osborne and Linda Vjeh also volunteered to be on the group.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their input and help with the Task and Finish work.

45. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 10)

The Chairman made reference to the current issues with delays to waste and recycling collections. He acknowledged that all members were likely being contacted by the public and local councils regarding the issues and what's happening. He queried whether as a Committee, we should be compiling a list of questions for our representatives on the Somerset Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel to raise at the next panel meeting in September?

During discussion, several comments and suggestions were raised, including:

- Some properties haven't had a collection for multiple weeks.
- Isolated properties and small hamlets seem to often experience missed collections.
- What knowledge transfer was there when the contractor changed? How much local knowledge was lost?
- Suspending the garden waste has compounded issues.
- Reputational risk to the council is high.
- Somerset Waste Partnership should bring a report to District Executive sooner rather than later.
- People need to know and understand why the situation is like it is.
- Acknowledge this is national problem at the moment and not just Somerset.
- How will the current situation be addressed to get things back on track?
- We're in a position to share experiences to help improve the roll out of Recycle More in the remaining districts.
- Would question what mapping data Suez is using?
- A set of questions would be a good idea, either from Scrutiny members or collated from all members.
- Meetings of the Panel are public.

The Chairman noted it was clear members felt collating questions would be useful, and requested that the Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) collate questions from members - either via email or a member workshop, and this was agreed.

46. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman noted that concerns regarding the subject of Section 106s and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) had also been raised at a recent Audit Committee meeting. The idea of a joint workshop had been suggested for Scrutiny and Audit members, and he asked if members were wanting to know more about the subject and if they would be happy to have a joint session.

In response, a member who was also on the Audit Committee clarified it was a joint briefing session rather than a workshop that had been suggested, in order to help save some officer time. He commented the situation regarding S106s and CIL needed looking into as soon as possible.

During a brief discussion, some of the comments raised included:

- Need to understand how S106s and CIL are monitored, and the governance for CIL.
- Need confidence that a system is in place that's working as there are implications for larger infrastructure projects.
- Used to have regular updates at Area Committees for S106s.
- Concern that some funds will be lost if time frames expire.

The Chairman noted that members were happy for further engagement regarding S106s and CIL, and requested that the Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) liaise with the appropriate officers to arrange a joint Scrutiny and Audit member briefing.

The Chairman referred to a current consultation underway by Somerset County Council regarding public transport in Somerset (as part of the National Bus Strategy). He highlighted his concerns about the level of engagement with parishes especially given it was August.

During a brief discussion, he suggested that Scrutiny should ask if there was a role and opportunity for the SSDC Communications team to promote the county consultation. It was agreed that the Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) should contact the Communications team to discuss.

The Chairman advised members that there had been the intention for Specialist (Strategic Planning) to attend the September meeting of Scrutiny Committee to provide a Local Plan update. However this was unlikely until the unitary situation was a little more clear, and hence the item was more likely to be considered at the October meeting.

A member referred to the recent flooding events in the Chard area, and noted she understood a statutory report was being drafted. She asked if Scrutiny may have sight of the report as she felt it may be useful to check our contingency plans. The Specialist (Scrutiny and Member Development) to follow up if possible.

The Chairman noted he hoped the Committee would give the same support to our representatives on the Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel, similar to as had been discussed earlier in the meeting regarding the Waste Panel.

47. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 31 August 2021 - as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman