

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held at the **Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil BA20 2HT** on **Tuesday 28 February 2017**.

(10.00 am - 12.25 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Jason Baker	John Clark
Mike Beech	Val Keitch
Amanda Broom	Sue Osborne
Dave Bulmer	Rob Stickland

Officers

Colin McDonald	Corporate Strategic Housing Manager
Ian Potter	Revenues and Benefits Manager
Helen Rutter	Assistant Director (Communities)
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Manager
Becky Sanders	Democratic Services Officer

117. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

118. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Norris, Garry Shortland, Linda Vijeh and Martin Wale.

119. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

120. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

The Chairman invited the Scrutiny Manager to provide an update on the progress of seeking answers to queries raised during consideration of the item regarding Somerset Waste Partnership at the previous meeting.

The Scrutiny Manager reminded members that at the previous meeting it had been agreed that answers would be sought to the questions that had been raised, and for any not answered officers would approach the appropriate parties for further information. She referred to information that had been circulated to members outside of the meeting, and the remaining unanswered queries were presented on screen.

Members all agreed that the following outstanding queries and recommendations should be sent to the appropriate parties via a formal letter from the Chairman of Scrutiny on behalf of the Committee.

- To Somerset Waste Partnership:
 - Make the equalities impact assessment for the New Waste Treatment facility and associated Waste Transfer stations available including the details of all mitigation work that has been conducted and is planned to be carried out by the Waste Board and any service providers.
 - Amend the presentation of their Agendas and Summary of decision notices to make it clearer when an item is a decision making item and therefore is subject to the 5 day call in period or is an update/information only item.

- Somerset County Council:
 - Highways department to help us by providing information relating to any highway conditions attached to the Permission for the Waste Transfer site at Dimmer and how the residents' of Clanville can have their concerns surrounding the B3153 considered to see if any mitigation measures could be taken forward.
 - Minerals and Waste Policy Team revisit the wording in the Somerset Waste Core Strategy and make recommendations to Council to alter the policy to more clearly define what a Strategic Facility is to prevent confusion around Transfer Stations in the future.
 - Provide information on the website regarding the make-up of the Waste Scrutiny arrangements and links to agendas and minutes.
 - Amend the presentation of their Agendas and Summary of decision notices to make it clearer when an item is a decision making item and therefore is subject to the 5 day call in period or is an update/information only item.

122. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman provided a very brief update on the Transformation Board, noting there was not much to report and members were awaiting the monthly newsletter to be circulated. A Board meeting was scheduled for next week where it was hoped the current situation and progress would be more clear. Vice Chairman, Councillor John Clark also noted that at the previous meeting it had been raised that Scrutiny members were not receiving agenda papers in advance of the Transformation Board meetings, and the matter was on the agenda for the next Board meeting.

Vice-Chairman, Councillor Dave Bulmer, informed members that the last meeting of the Strategic Alliance had been cancelled. He had questioned with the Leader of the Council what the future was with the Alliance, and it had been confirmed that it was still wanted.

123. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 1 February 2017 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman noted that the Scrutiny comments had been considered and were included in the District Executive minutes which had been circulated.

124. Monitoring SSSDC National Non Domestic Rates Discretionary Relief Policy (Agenda Item 8)

The Scrutiny Manager presented the item and reminded members of the original Task and Finish Group a few years ago which had recommended future monitoring of the NNDR Discretionary Relief Policy.

The current group had looked at the original ambitions and also going forward. She explained there had been clarification about rural pubs criteria for relief into the future, and details about Small Business Rate Relief had been included in the Autumn Statement. Provisions had also been made to provide a 100% relief for properties that receive mandatory Rural Rate Relief that are also small and consequently have a low rateable value.

The group had therefore focussed on small scale charitable relief, and had recommended that small charities with an RV below 12,000 were topped up so that it was equivalent to small business rate relief. It was also recommended that Economic Development provide more advice for small businesses.

There was no discussion and members were content to support and endorse the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.

125. Discretionary Housing Payment Policy - Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Report (Agenda Item 9)

The Scrutiny Manager noted that unfortunately the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group had been unable to attend the meeting.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager provided a brief background to Discretionary Housing Payments and wider welfare reforms. He noted one of the difficulties for officers in making decisions and judgements was regarding the income and expenditure element of applicant's circumstances. The Task and Finish Group had particularly looked at the expenditure element and forming a basis for a framework that officers could use. He explained that a number of outside organisations including Shelter and Mind had been invited to meetings to help establish figures that might be appropriate in varying situations. All the information had led to the proposed revised policy coming forward.

He explained that the Scrutiny Manager had reviewed the proposed revised policy again since the agenda had been published, and had suggested some slight amendments for greater clarity – these being:

- Clarity about the DHP shortfalls – page 80
- Slight word changes to points F, G and 2 on page 83

The Scrutiny Manager highlighted to members the recommendations contained within the Task and Finish Group report. There was no discussion, and members were content to support and endorse the recommendations and report of the Task and Finish Group.

126. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 2 March 2017 (Agenda Item 10)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 2 March 2017 and made the following comments:

District-wide Voluntary Sector Grants 2017/18 (Agenda item 6)

- Members noted the slight reduction in grant to Access for All. Given the staff reductions at SSDC as we go through Transformation, Scrutiny queried if now was the right time to cut the funding to the Access for All.
- Members noted the good work of Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) and queried if they would be under increased pressure due to the wider roll-out of Universal Credit? Some members were concerned that CASS may require more money due to the current environment and peoples change in circumstances and sought re-assurance that there was a process to measure how well CASS were managing.
- Page 15 – top line of table refers to number of clients helped – Members queried the type of help provided and for what?
- Page 35 participation at Youth Days – the target wasn't met and members queried if there was any particular reason for this?
- Page 42 – bullet point refers to the InspirED project whereby schools will be able to engage with Take Art. Scrutiny queried if schools needed to pay for this and if not what the funding criteria is.
- Page 42 - members noted the participation figures for some Take Art activities had significantly reduced and queried if there was any reason for the trend?
- Page 45 – members noted the craft exhibition with the National Trust. Members acknowledge the National Trust is a membership organisation and members sought reassurance that people were not required to be a member in order to view the exhibition.
- In general Scrutiny felt narratives would be useful in future reports to explain targets or provide reasons for targets not being met.

Council Tax Penalties & Civil Penalties in Housing Benefit (Agenda item 7)

- Page 54 – Civil penalties and housing benefit – members noted that the paragraphs did not detail what the penalty is.
- Scrutiny noted the paragraph about Equalities was missing from the report, and sought reassurance that an Equalities Impact Assessment had been completed.

- Members also wished to clarify their understanding that April would effectively be an amnesty period.

Proposed Changes to Business Rates Relief Policy (Agenda item 8)

- Scrutiny endorsed the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.
- Scrutiny supported the recommendations in the District Executive report.

Review of Discretionary Housing Payments Policy (Agenda item 9)

- Scrutiny noted that since the agenda had been published that the Scrutiny Manager and the Revenues & Benefits Manager had reviewed the proposed revised policy again and had suggested some slight amendments for greater clarity – these being:
 - Clarity about the DHP shortfalls – page 80
 - Slight word changes to points F, G and 2 on page 83
- Scrutiny endorsed the report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.
- Scrutiny supported the recommendations in the District Executive report.

Quarterly Corporate performance and Complaints Monitoring Report – 3rd Quarter 2016/17 (Agenda item 10)

- Members commented that few of the performance measures provided monitoring information about standards or services as we progress through transformation.
- Scrutiny asked for narratives/suggested reasons for the fly-tipping indicators, especially as a rise is reported under PI 011.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 11)

- Scrutiny queried if the item scheduled for May - Intelligent Enforcement Proposal for Council Car Parks – was the item about Automatic Number Plate Recognition or if it was for something different?

127. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted the updates provided by the Scrutiny Manager on each of the Task and Finish Groups currently in progress:

Street Trading – Members explained that they had reviewed the consultation responses and were now working with the Licensing Manager to agree the details and compile the report and recommendations.

Consent for Disposal - The Corporate Strategic Housing Manager attended the committee to provide an overview of the latest situation across the district. Members agreed to re-open this Task and Finish group to specifically focus on existing policies and procedures to see if they are fit for purpose and achieving. As part of their work the

Task and Finish Group had raised some concern about the links of disposal of properties to the Rural Lettings Policy. He provided figures to illustrate the impact of the policy to date and the wider issues. Members agreed to give this further consideration and to assess the realistic outcomes that could be achieved by conducting a Task and Finish Exercise.

Council Tax Support – A new Task and Finish group has formed to look at the policy and if, and how, the policy/scheme could be amended to manage the decrease in government grant for administration costs.

Community Council for Somerset – The Scrutiny Manager noted there had been no progress since the last meeting of Scrutiny Committee.

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

Councillor John Clark noted there was not much to update regarding Devolution following the recent report to full Council. He noted that the local authorities were now hoping to move forward with a Joint Committee and the green paper should be published soon for consultation.

Members then discussed the possibilities of undertaking a Task and Finish exercise regarding devolution, and during a scoring process there was much discussion. Concerns were raised about the resources available and the time frames involved.

At the end of discussion there was general agreement that a decision on whether to convene a Task and Finish Group for Devolution should wait until the Scrutiny Chairman had met with the Chief Executive to discuss resources. Members also felt that if a Devolution Task and Finish exercise was to go ahead then a possible review of the Rural Lettings Policy would need to be put on hold.

129. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

There were no updates and members noted the Scrutiny Work Programme.

130. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be held at 10.00am on 4 April 2017, in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way.

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Chairman