

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 27 February 2018.**

(10.05 am - 12.25 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Jason Baker	Tony Lock
Dave Bulmer	Alan Smith
John Clark	Rob Stickland
Carol Goodall	Gerard Tucker
Mike Lock	Colin Winder

Also Present:

Jo Roundell Greene	Val Keitch
Henry Hobhouse	Angie Singleton

Officers

Netta Meadows	Director (Strategy & Commissioning)
Martin Woods	Director (Service Delivery)
Clare Pestell	Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
David Julian	Economic Development Manager
Justine Parton	Yeovil Innovation Centre Manager
Garry Green	Engineering & Property Services Manager
Nicola Hix	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Caroline White	Commercial Property, Land and Development Manger
David Clews	Policy Planner (Spatial Policy)
James Divall	Neighbourhood Development Officer (East/South)
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Specialist
Becky Sanders	Case Services Officer (Support Services)

119. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

120. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Field, David Norris and Martin Wale.

121. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Colin Winder declared a personal interest for item 10 on the District Executive agenda – The Making of the Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan, as he is ward member for Wincanton and also lives in the town.

122. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

124. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Mike Lock to the Scrutiny Committee.

She also reminded members that following the Performance Monitoring workshops, it had been agreed that members would receive regular updates regarding progress to implement the new Performance Framework and Key Performance Indicators (KPI). The Director for Strategy & Commissioning had been invited to attend this meeting to provide a brief verbal update. Elements provided by the Director in the update included:

- The Council Plan and Annual Action Plan had been agreed at Council.
- Work had commenced on the detailed definition for each KPI.
- Some of the measures were new and so new baseline data was being established.
- Looking to benchmark against other authorities and so need to be clear that it is like for like data that is being examined.
- Targets were being set and creating a cycle for reporting.
- Looking at how best to present the information as there have been some concerns in the past.
- First report in the new style will be the first quarter report due in July and will be an opportunity to make comments about the style.

The Chairman reminded members there would be an informal meeting for Scrutiny members on 13 March with the Transformation Programme Manager to discuss elements of Transformation, and the Scrutiny Specialist provided further information.

(NB. During the meeting there had also been discussion about meeting with SWAP regarding risks associated with Transformation and possibly extending the invite for the informal meeting to Audit Committee members – however shortly after the Scrutiny Committee it was ascertained that SWAP could not commit to the time frames).

125. Yeovil Innovation Centre (Agenda Item 7)

The Economic Development Manager presented the report which answered specific questions raised by Scrutiny Committee in relation to the operation of the Yeovil Innovation Centre. He had no further updates to the report and noted he was happy to take any further questions.

During a short discussion, the Economic Development Manager and Director for Commercial Services & Income Generation responded to points of detail, their comments included:

- The Innovation Centre offered basic business advice to allow for business growth. However this may not be the same approach as provided by other Innovation or Business Centres where they have higher tech businesses.
- It was felt the Centre catered for a niche market in the area responding to customer demand. Many of the businesses grew and moved on elsewhere, and a lower than the national average of businesses failed within three years.
- The Centre was always intended to be an incubation and innovation centre.
- Continually reviewing to see where further benefit could be added, and evolving as required.
- We are in regular contact with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Growth Hub, and it is disappointing that they are using an alternative venue for business events.
- Business Plan will be revised in the coming year
- Information about 'The Hive', including history about the trial and funding. It was still running but demand had not been as high as may have been wished for. The space was currently unavailable for several weeks due to being booked out as a Transformation Assessment Centre.
- There was still a principle of hot desking and renting a desk for the day, as the space provided both a social and business environment.

At the end of discussion the Chairman suggested that when the business plan is revised that the Scrutiny Committee are able to have a look through and comment, and this was agreed.

Members thanked the officers for the report.

ACTION: That the report be noted.

126. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 1 February 2018 (Agenda Item 8)

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

127. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 March 2018 (Agenda Item 9)

Members considered the reports within the District agenda for 1 March 2018 and made comments including:

District-wide Voluntary Sector Grants 2018/19 (Agenda item 6)

- Members noted the revised/updated information in the appendices regarding Somerset Rural Youth Project and Somerset Film – and were content that all the recommendations go forward.

SSDC Review of Operational Office Accommodation – Progress Report on Area Presence (Agenda item 7)

- Recommendation 1 – a timeframe was stated of 2 years but are there any timeframes for when preliminary proposals may come forward.
- Page 25, para 8 – it was noted that the Members' Leadership and Development Project Group had also discussed the possibility of touchdown or hub spaces

based at medical centres and other some other venues but these were not mentioned in the report.

- Page 25, para 8 – members were supportive of the ideas put forward for possible hubs and touchdown spaces, and felt it would be an opportunity to maximise engagement with communities.
- Members asked what the current situation is regarding discussions with Somerset County Council and the One Public Estate scheme, as we should not be duplicating the OPE.
- Members sought re-assurance that existing commercial commitments regarding any of our property would be addressed appropriately, and in a timely manner, with those involved.

Business Rates Relief – Local Discretionary Relief, Year 2 (Agenda item 8)

- Scrutiny made no comments.

South Somerset District Council Car Park Charging Policy Paper (Agenda item 9)

- Page 34, para 2 – Scrutiny noted the report referred to Scrutiny Committee requesting a Task And Finish Review and wished to make clear this had not been the case, the Chief Executive had suggested officers produce a report when Scrutiny Committee stated that they were not going to undertake the Car Park Charges review in the immediate future, due to priorities and resources.
- Some members felt that increasing charges in Yeovil and the market towns would be at odds with regeneration plans for some of the towns.
- Members felt people often parked where it was free, and charges in some towns were already displacing some parking onto nearby residential estates.
- Some members felt if implementing inflationary increases it should be done at regular intervals but only if cost effective to do so regarding administration costs.
- Scrutiny were strongly against the idea of introducing a flat rate charge for parking on Sundays, as there was little evidence to support the rationale and proposed charges. For example what other Councils charge for Sunday. It was felt the income potential from doing so was not enough to consider undertaking a consultation and trial.
- Members were against applying a 10% increase to charges at the current time as many businesses and the retail sector were already struggling in the current economic climate.
- Many members felt applying an increase at the current time was the wrong time, especially for Yeovil with the imminent launch of the Yeovil Refresh.
- It was also noted that residents, commuters and businesses had endured years of highway road closures and various utility works in , and around, Yeovil which had caused prolonged disruption and already had a big impact upon business in the town.
- It was felt the statutory consultation period of 28 days was too short for such a potentially contentious issue.
- Page 37, para 17 – Scrutiny queried how accurate and realistic was the projected income figure?
- Members felt there was a very high reputational risk to SSDC of implementing increases to car parking charges at the current time and that this may not be reflected adequately in the risk matrix.
- Retail centres in the smaller market towns were reducing and being replaced with residential dwellings with inadequate parking, and hence some car parks were being used for long term parking by residents.

- Members acknowledged that whilst they felt now was the wrong time to implement increases to parking charges, that it was also unlikely there would be a right time.
- Scrutiny proposed an alternative set of recommendations:
 - i. To apply an automatic 4 yearly inflationary increase, subject to it being cost effective to apply such an increase, – with the first increase being made effective from July 2019.
 - ii. In the event that any surplus is generated, this be ring fenced for projects in accordance with CPE legislation and guidelines (this includes public transport, road improvements and environmental improvements; such as public land, free public access to water or recreational facilities);
 - iii. Recommend a full market charges, benchmarking, and car park operational review as part of the car park strategy update to ensure alignment in the area. This is to be carried out by officers in the financial year 2018/2019 for implementation in July 2019; subject to being approved at District Executive.
 - iv. At the time of the statutory consultation, the proposed changes and the reasons for them be clearly communicated as part of the explanation for the consultation.

(NB – In summary, compared to the original recommendations in the District Executive report this is: Rec A – deleted, Rec B – no change, Rec C – changed, Rec D – falls away due to change of Rec C, Rec E – no change, Rec F – deleted, Rec G – falls away due to deletion of Rec F, plus – an additional rec regarding communication)

The ‘Making’ of the Wincanton Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda item 10)

- Scrutiny raised no concerns.

Key4Life – At Risk Preventative programme in Somerset (Agenda item 11)

- Scrutiny raised no concerns and endorsed the work undertaken.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 12)

- Members noted that quarterly reporting of Performance needed to be added to the forward plan from July or August onwards.

CONFIDENTIAL – Exclusion of the Press and Public (Agenda item 14)

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 items 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).

SSDC Review of Operational Office Accommodation – Feasibility Study Comparison of South Somerset District Council’s Future Head Office Options (Confidential) (Agenda item 15)

- Scrutiny Committee made several comments in confidential session.

128. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 10)

Members noted the updates provided by the Scrutiny Manager on each of the Task and Finish Groups currently in progress or commencing in the near future.

Homefinder Somerset Plain English Policy – No updates since the last meeting.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019 – she had met with the Lead Specialist (Vulnerable Customers) who would circulate a draft timetable shortly. It was anticipated that only two meetings would be needed.

Customer Accessibility – it had been hoped the group would have started by now, however there had been a need to co-ordinate with many staff. It was also noted the new Lead Specialist for Communications was not due to start work with the authority until mid-March.

129. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 11)

There were no updates on matters of interest.

130. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

The Scrutiny Specialist advised that the report regarding Charges for Pre-Application Planning Advice would now be scheduled for June or July.

She also reminded members that last month the calling of an overview report of the Yeovil refresh had been supported. An initial report request form had therefore been drafted and was presented on screen for comment.

Before reviewing the documents it was suggested that the report should wait until completion of the Yeovil Refresh consultation. It was also noted that further information had been provided about the Yeovil Refresh in a confidential report to Area South Committee, however it was acknowledged that other members may not have had sight of the report.

It was agreed to hold the report request on the Yeovil Refresh until all Scrutiny Members had viewed the Area South report or until the end of the public consultation.

131. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 10.00am on Tuesday 3 April in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way.

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Chairman