

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in **Council Chamber B, Council Offices, Brympton Way** on **Tuesday 4 September 2018**.

(10.00 am - 12.15 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer	Tony Lock
John Clark	Alan Smith
John Field	Rob Stickland
Carol Goodall	Gerard Tucker
Mike Lock	Martin Wales

Also Present:

Jason Baker	Peter Seib
Jo Roundell Greene	

Officers

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Netta Meadows	Director (Strategy & Commissioning)
Paul Fitzgerald	Section 151 Officer
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
David Julian	Economic Development Manager
Helen Morris	Revenues Team Leader
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Specialist
Becky Sanders	Case Services Officer (Support Services)

39. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Norris and Colin Winder.

41. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

42. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

No issues were raised from previous meetings.

44. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman informed members that she would be attending a Transformation Board meeting the following day, and if anyone had any issues they wished her to raise to send details through via email.

45. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 2 August 2018 (Agenda Item 7)

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

46. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 6 September 2018 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 6 September 2018 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to most comments and questions were provided at the Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officer, director or Portfolio Holder.

Proposed Designation of Herne Hill, Ilminster as a Local Nature Reserve (Agenda item 6)

- Scrutiny supported the recommendations
- Members queried if status as a Local Nature Reserve would have any weight in terms of planning.

Revisions to the Statement of Community Involvement in Respect of Neighbourhood Plans (Agenda item 7)

- Scrutiny sought clarity as to how many Neighbourhood Plans are currently underway.
- Members queried if there was a breakdown of the costs to SSDC for supporting each Plan, and if there were expenses to SSDC above the grant funding available.
- Page 11, para 2.38, second bullet point – Members asked if officers were aware of any groups who had applied for the additional grant of £8,000.
- Members sought clarity about revisions to Neighbourhood Plans and whether there is a requirement for them to be updated when the Local Plan is revised.

The 'Making' of the South Petherton Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda item 8)

- Members asked how much weight the Neighbourhood Plan carried until it is 'made' – and at what point does it become a material consideration for planning?

The East Coker Neighbourhood Plan Referendum (Agenda item 9)

- No comments.

Update on Superfast Broadband for Rural Businesses (Agenda item 10)

- Members queried if phase 2 of the programme had a set end date?
- Members acknowledged that Superfast Broadband speeds are still low in some rural areas.
- Scrutiny commented that the delivery and availability of Superfast Broadband across the district is patchy. There is a need to map and identify poor broadband areas to see what we may be able to do.
- Some members queried if the state aid criteria was for a fixed timeframe.

Financial Strategy and Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20 (Agenda item 11)

- Members asked for further information regarding some technical points in the report, and thanked the Section 151 officer for his explanations.
- Page 106, table 6b – ‘Other Earmarked Reserves’ – members asked from where the figure of 1216 had been derived as it wasn’t clear in the report. *(Post Meeting Note: the required information was circulated shortly after the meeting to Scrutiny and District Executive Members)*

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 12)

- Scrutiny noted the item scheduled for December – Local Plan Review – and sought reassurance that all members will have some involvement prior to the report.

SSDC Operational Office Accommodation – Update on Review of Options for Brympton Way and Petters House (Confidential) (Agenda item 15)

- Scrutiny made several comments in closed session.

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

Members noted the updates provided by the Case Services Officer on each of the Task and Finish Groups currently in progress.

Customer Accessibility – some members have trialled using the new website which is under development, and comments have been made about the design and ease of use.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2019 – the public consultation ended on 2 September 2018, and responses were now being analysed by officers.

Homefinder Somerset Plain English – no updates since the last meeting.

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

Members noted the updates on matters of interest provided by the Case Services Officer:

- At a previous meeting it had been asked if the budget for Transformation could be collated together for ease of reference. The Lead Specialist (Finance) has looked into the matter, and the layout of the budget monitoring page for future Transformation update reports has been modified.
- At the last meeting, an update was requested regarding precepting for the Somerset Rivers Authority. The Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill is due its second reading in the House of Commons in late October. Page 115 (section 5) of the Financial strategy report (on the District Executive agenda for 6 Sept 2018) explains that the assumption is the current arrangements for precepting remain in place for the foreseeable future.

49. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

Members discussed items on the Scrutiny Work Programme.

There was much disappointment expressed that the Economic Development Strategy had slipped to October. Members raised several comments and concerns about the process to inform the strategy, and the majority of members requested some information be provided to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee if possible

The Chairman reminded members that at a previous meeting it had been suggested that Scrutiny look at the impact Business Rates are having on Yeovil Town Centre and if there is anything that SSDC might be able to do. She noted that the Revenues Team Leader was present to answer questions on the matter.

During discussion, the Revenues Team Leader responded to points of detail regarding Business Rates re-valuation, the reliefs available, promotion and distribution of the reliefs. She noted that the team were not receiving feedback from businesses that Business Rates were a reason for vacating premises.

At the end of discussion, most members felt investigating the issue further at the current time might conflict with work of the Yeovil Refresh, Chard Regeneration and Wincanton Regeneration projects. It was agreed not to request a further report or undertake a Task and Finish Group but for the matter to be kept under consideration when any future reports regarding the Yeovil Refresh, Chard Regeneration and Wincanton Regeneration projects come forward.

50. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for Tuesday 2 October 2018 at 10.00am in Council Chamber B, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman