

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Main Committee Room, Brympton Way on Tuesday 8 January 2019.**

(10.00 am - 11.45 am)

### **Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

Dave Bulmer	Tony Lock
John Clark	Alan Smith
John Field	Rob Stickland
Mike Lock	Gerard Tucker



### **Also Present:**

Val Keitch	Sylvia Seal
Jo Roundell Greene	Angie Singleton

### **Officers**

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Nicola Hix	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Jan Gamon	Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Helen Morris	Revenues Team Leader
Chereen Scott	Specialist (Strategy & Commissioning)
Kate English	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Maxine Wilson	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Jonathan Davey	Case Officer (Transformation)
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Specialist
Becky Sanders	Case Services Officer (Support Services)

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### **88. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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### **89. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carol Goodall, David Norris and Martin Wale.

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### **90. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

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### **91. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)**

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

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**92. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 5)**

The Chairman referred to the previous meeting and comments raised about planning performance and the impact of Transformation. She noted that no members had contacted her regarding their concerns, and she had therefore not made an appointment to meet with the Chief Executive. She understood that the members who had raised questions at the member briefing before Council in November, had now received a reply.

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**93. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)**

The Chairman reminded members that the time of the District Executive meeting on 10 January 2019 had been re-arranged to 2.00pm.

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**94. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 6 December 2018 (Agenda Item 7)**

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

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**95. Monitoring SSDC Council Tax Support Scheme - Draft Report of the Task and Finish Group (Agenda Item 8)**

The Chairman introduced the report and reminded members that the report would go forward to both District Executive and full Council.

The Scrutiny Specialist explained that the Committee needed to consider the report of the Task and Finish Group, suggest any amendments, and endorse the recommendations of the group to District Executive.

Members raised some questions and the Scrutiny Specialist responded to points of detail, including brief further information about:

- Monitoring the scheme and identifying trends
- Clarity regarding the position of the roll out of Universal Credit
- Nearby authorities operating a discount based banded scheme and the amount of evidence available

At the end of discussion members were content to endorse the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group to District Executive, subject to some minor amendments to the report:

- Page 5 of the Task and Finish report under the heading of 'Impact of Universal Credit' – wording of the first paragraph to be revised to clarify the position of Universal Credit.
- Table on Page 11 of the Task and Finish report – repositioning of comma for total paid in 15/16.
- End of last bullet point at bottom of page 14 of the Task and Finish Report - 'request around Hardship' should read 'request Hardship funding'.

**ACTION:** The Scrutiny Specialist to make amendments to the Task and Finish Group report and recirculate for consideration at the District Executive meeting.

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**96. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 10 January 2019 (Agenda Item 9)**

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 10 January 2019 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to most of the comments were provided at the Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officer or Portfolio Holder.

**Corporate peer Challenge; Follow Up Visit (Agenda item 6)**

- Members asked when they would be informed of what actions would be taken to address the recommendations made by the Peer Group, and the timeframes for any actions.
- Page 7, rec 5 of the Peer Group – members asked if we were satisfied that we have all the skills necessary.
- Members acknowledged that staff capacity was stretched at the current time, but sought reassurance that the costs of bringing in staff resources and consultants was being monitored. The response by the Chief Executive that such costs were contained within routine budget reports was acknowledged, but members noted the detail was not easy to refer to
- Page 7, rec 6 of the Peer Group – in terms of policy / strategy, members sought clarity about whether an investment project needed to be for profit or council service priorities, or whether it could be a mix of both.
- On hearing the responses of the Chief Executive about the actions currently being taken to address the recommendations made by the Peer Group, members felt it would be useful if similar information was circulated to all members with the next steps.
- Page 21 of the agenda, section 3 of the Peer report – members noted the unfortunate spelling typo needed to be amended.
- Page 19, point 2 – regarding ‘what additional services could we provide? Members asked if there was a timeframe involved, and if more training was required for commercialisation in some service areas?

**A303 Sparkford to Ilminster Dualling Scheme – Local Impact Report (Agenda item 7)**

- Members sought reassurance that there are sufficient resources available to compete the work required from SSDC.
- Members were content that the recommendations go forward.

**Assessing Needs and Opportunities for Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities in South Somerset (Agenda item 8)**

- It was noted the email regarding the workshop for members had originally been circulated just prior to Christmas, and it was suggested a reminder be sent.
- Page 41 – Athletics – regarding reference to public accessibility of the athletics track at Millfield School, it was noted that the school also had a pool but there was no reference to it in the swimming pool section on page 35, and for consistency it was felt it should be mentioned.

- Some members were surprised that there was little mention of outdoor sports pitches, and noted there was a strong desire for an all-weather pitch in Area East.

### **2019/20 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Update (Agenda item 9)**

- Members acknowledged the updates to the report provided by the Lead Specialist (Finance), including that in paragraph 46 - the word 'within' should say 'without', and in the table at para 14 – the reference to member training should say for 'all elected members' and not 'new cabinet'.
- Para 12 on page 47 – it was noted the last bullet points did not seem to refer to the table. The bullet point refers to Business Rates Retention whereas the table refers to 'deleted reduction of RSDG'. Members sought clarity as to what was being referred to – the Rural Services Delivery Grant or Business Rates Retention?
- Para 27 on page 49 – some members sought clarity about reference to an increase of £200k for investment income in 2019/20 as table 2a at para 9 refers to a figure of £502.9k which is the same as the previous update.
- Para 39 on page 51 – it was queried what proportion of the Business Rates Retentions was expected to come to SSDC?
- Para 58 on page 53 – it was noted that provisional figure of £200k to aid implementation of the Economic Development Strategy did not appear in any of the tables.

### **Council Tax Support Scheme 2019/20 (Agenda item 10)**

- No queries were raised as a Task and Finish Review had been undertaken by Scrutiny. However it was noted during discussion and endorsement of the Task and Finish report that some minor changes had been suggested to the report. A revised Task and Finish report highlighting the changes has been circulated to District Executive via e-mail yesterday (Wednesday).

### **Council Tax Discount Review (Agenda item 11)**

- Members noted the term 'Care Leavers' was a little confusing but acknowledged it was a term used in the Children's Society report.
- Members sought clarity as to how, or where, the empty properties income would be reported back and monitored.
- It was suggested that when corresponding with owners of empty properties to notify them of Council Tax liabilities, that the opportunity was taken to signpost them to empty property grants and other relevant information.

### **Business Rates Relief (Agenda item 12)**

- Members were content that the recommendations go forward.

### **SSDC Transformation Programme – Progress Report (Agenda item 13)**

- Page 95, Risk Matrix – members felt the heat map was confusing and queried the relevance of the numbers as no key was provided to the matrix.

**Notification of an Urgent Executive Decision – Short term funding facility required to SSDC Opium Power Ltd to accommodate VAT cashflow during VAT reclaim period (Agenda item 14)**

- Some members felt the matter was an issue that SSDC should possibly have been aware of at an earlier stage.
- It was acknowledged the loan provided a good return in the short-term, and had helped prevent the project from stalling.

**District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 15)**

- No comments.
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**97. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 10)**

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

**Homefinder Somerset Plain English policy** - No updates since the last meeting – all Councils have postponed work on this primarily due to Transformation type related activities.

**Customer Accessibility** – Website and portal services are continuing to be developed and testing with the task and finish group will take place soon.

**Council Tax Support Scheme 2020** – Task and Finish meetings are likely to commence following the local elections in May.

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**98. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 11)**

There were no updates on matters of interest.

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**99. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)**

The Scrutiny Specialist referred to the Work Programme, as detailed in the agenda, and suggested that members may wish to offer to help look at fees and charges given previous Task and Finish reviews that have been undertaken regarding fees.

She also noted there was little progress regarding the Precepting for Somerset Rivers Authority as the Bill was still awaiting passage through Parliament.

During a brief discussion members requested that the Scrutiny Specialist arrange for:

- A progress update regarding Yeovil Refresh to the February or March meeting if possible.
- A brief update on the Troubled Families Programme.
- A presentation by Somerset Waste Partnership to provide an overview to new members and provide an update on the Avonmouth facility – June onwards.

The Scrutiny Specialist advised that it would be useful if members could review the guidance and information that would be provided to new councillors appointed to the Scrutiny Committee from May. Members requested that the information be circulated in advance of a discussion at Committee.

Members were content to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

**ACTION:** The Scrutiny Specialist to arrange the requested project updates and presentation.

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**100. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 13)**

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 5 February 2019 at 10.00m in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way.

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Chairman