

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held at the **Main Committee Room - Council Offices** on **Tuesday 5 February 2019**.

(10.00 am - 1.20 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Sue Steele (Chairman)

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|---------------|------------------------|
| Dave Bulmer | Mike Lock (to 12.55pm) |
| John Clark | Tony Lock (to 12.40pm) |
| John Field | Alan Smith |
| Carol Goodall | Gerard Tucker |



Also Present:

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|--------------------|-----------------|
| Jason Baker | Sylvia Seal |
| Val Keitch | Angie Singleton |
| Jo Roundell Greene | |

Officers

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| Netta Meadows | Director (Strategy & Support Services) |
| Jan Gamon | Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning) |
| Jo Wilkins | Specialist (Strategic Planning) |
| Jo Manley | Specialist (Strategic Planning) |
| Anna-Maria Lenz | Specialist (Strategic Planning) |
| Chereen Scott | Specialist (Strategic Planning) |
| Peter Paddon | Lead Specialist (Economy) |
| Joe Walsh | Specialist (Economic Development) |
| Leisa Kelly | Specialist (Strategic Planning) |
| Charlotte Jones | Lead Specialist (People, Performance & Change) |
| Paul Fitzgerald | Section 151 Officer |
| Nicola Hix | Lead Specialist (Finance) |
| Paul Matravers | Specialist - Finance |
| Cath Temple | Specialist (Performance) |
| Vicki Dawson | Lead Specialist (Environmental Health) |
| Jo Gale | Scrutiny Specialist |
| Becky Sanders | Case Services Officer (Support Services) |

101. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

102. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Norris, Rob Stickland, Martin Wale and Colin Winder.

103. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

104. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

106. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman noted she had been due to attend a meeting of the Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel on 1 February, however the meeting had been postponed due to adverse weather.

She also informed members and officers present that the meeting was being filmed for training purposes.

107. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 10 January 2019 (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.

108. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7 February 2019 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 7 February 2019 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to comments were provided at the Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officer or Portfolio Holder.

Funding For Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) (Agenda item 6)

- Page 7, table at para 18 - members sought clarification that the plans mentioned at point 1 and the feedback referred to at point 2a had been received, and queried what actions had been taken as a result, and had the plans influenced this report.
- Members expressed their disappointment that SCC had cut core funding to CASS.
- Members acknowledged that CASS do fantastic work to support residents and wished to convey their thanks to the staff and volunteers.
- Page 8, para 21 – some members queried if other options had been explored in addition to options 1A and 1B detailed in the report, for example if CASS could share with another facility somewhere.

- Top of page 9, point 3 – short term grant for research – some members noted the timeframes for this were tight and queried if the timescales were realistic given the situation.
- Some members queried if CASS had considered narrowing the support they provide, and also whether there was any other support that officers or members could provide other than financial.
- Members noted the impact of the SCC cuts needed to be monitored and there would be a need for CASS to prioritise. Scrutiny requested to be kept informed of progress.

Local Plan Review 2016-2036 Preferred Options For Consultation (Agenda item 7)

- Members noted that Appendix 3 was not labelled as Appx 3 in the supplement pack and page numbers on the cover of supplement pack would aid navigation of the reports.
- Page 14, Para 15a, some members questioned why the ‘villages’ category had been introduced.
- Members commented this was a very large report and was ideally needed in paper form to digest the information fully. It was acknowledged there had been a slight delay in receiving paper agendas due to recent adverse weather, but many members still felt more time was needed in order to scrutinise all the information.
- Page 14, para 15a – some members sought clarification about the dwelling figures stated, had these been derived from our own calculations and evidence, prescribed in regulation or via third party, likewise with the proposed loss of employment land.
- Members sought clarification that the infrastructure associated with 14,510 dwellings had been factored in.
- Page 17, figure 4 – members felt it would be useful if the table was cross-referenced to the appropriate map(s) in the relevant appendix.
- Members asked about the concept of a new garden town and whether the idea had been dropped in the review of the Local Plan.

SSDC Council Plan Update 2019-20 (Agenda item 8)

- Members commended the way the report was presented, and commented it was very clear and easy to read.
- Regarding the Priority Projects (pages 28 to 33), members felt it was important that residents are kept informed / updated on progress.

Economic Development Strategy (2019-2028) Delivery Budget (Agenda item 9)

- Members acknowledged that tourism, food and drink were reflected in the proposal, but noted agriculture was not mentioned and felt it should feature more strongly within the report.
- Members welcomed the report, and requested an interim mid-year update to report on progress being made.
- Page 41, point 2.2 – Some members sought clarification regarding the request for £10k as it was believed a number of years ago a large budget was set aside for broadband.
- Some members queried if there was any emergency budget available for businesses facing crisis should there be a no-deal Brexit.
- Some members asked if the authority should set aside a resource to explore external funding options.

- Page 42, point 5.5 – members suggested that using the specific example of Crewkerne may cause some confusion.

Adoption of the Somerset Housing Strategy (2019-2023) (Agenda item 10)

- Members sought clarification that this strategy would link to the Local Plan.
- Page 44, para 7 and Appendix C (Page 51) – members sought clarification as to whether the action plan was an early draft or not – as para 7 states it is but the appendix itself does not refer to it being draft.
- Page 51, no. 1, first action bullet point – members felt the term ‘community of practice’ needed an explanation or be re-phrased in a different way.
- Pages 51 to 54 – some members felt many of the actions detailed should be more specific (SMART).

2018/19 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31 December 2018 (Agenda item 11)

- Car parking income – some members noted this was now predicted to be down on budget, and requested an explanation for the difference given the forecast figures in Q1 and Q2. Members queried if the expected of car parking income had been adjusted for next year.
- Some members asked if it was known if the footfall to the town centres had declined, and if the footfall correlated to the car parking figures.
- In addition to the comments above, one councillor had forwarded a number of detailed queries to the report authors in advance of the meeting, and verbal responses were provided at the meeting.

2018/19 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31 December 2018 (Agenda item 12)

- Members noted the update from the Lead Specialist (Finance) regarding Table 1 on page 78 – where some of the rows did not add up correctly but the totals in the columns were correct.

2019/20 Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan (Agenda item 13)

- Members sought clarification that SSDC were still receiving approximately 7% return on commercial investments.
- Page 96, bottom of table 2 – Other Earmarked Reserves – members noted last year the Section 151 officer had provided a breakdown of the figure which had been useful, and asked if a breakdown could be provided again this year.
- Page 95, para 41 – members felt it would be beneficial if further information could be provided regarding funding for regeneration projects.
- Page 117, members noted the savings regarding car parking income, and sought clarification how these figure related to the shortfall detailed in the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report.
- Page 145 – some members sought clarification about some points of detail:
 - How long will the life extension provide?
 - Is the funding to extend the life of the facility or to fix/repair something that is broken?

- In addition to the comments above, one councillor had forwarded a number of queries to the report authors in advance of the meeting, and verbal responses were provided at the meeting.

SSDC Capital Strategy 2019/20 (Agenda item 14)

- Members sought reassurance that the Finance, Commercial Services and Income Generation teams now had the all necessary staff and skills required.
- Members commented they felt there should be a risk matrix included in the report.

SSDC Investment Strategy 2019/20 (Agenda item 15)

- Some members felt some information could be more transparent in future reporting.
- Some members also queried if there had been any advice from central Government about restricting the nature, or amount, of investments made by local authorities.
- Members commented they felt there should be a risk matrix included in the report.

Council Tax Discount Review (Agenda item 16)

Members noted the report had been discussed at the previous meeting. No further comments were raised. The comments detailed below are those raised at the January meeting:

- 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.

Corporate Performance Report 2018-19: 3rd Quarter (Agenda item 17)

- Page 203, indicator 8 and page 204 indicator 11- members noted the decline in performance and asked if there were specific reasons for the decline, and also sought reassurance the issues were being addressed.
- Page 204, indicator 12 – members queried if it was known when figures would be made available?
- Indicators 9 to 11 – some members noted it had been brought to their attention by residents that once a planning application had been approved, there seemed to be some delays when discharging conditions, which was consequently delaying development. Other members also sought information on the current position regarding staffing of the planning team and the timeframes from receiving an application to validation.
- Members commended the format of the report which was now easier to read and understand.
- Page 199 – members felt the terminology relating to the diagrams should refer to above or below target.
- Page 208, indicator 24 – members felt the target figure in relation to the performance figure was confusing or that the metric needed a better explanation.
- Page 209, indicator 25 – members queried if the figures would be better as a percentage.
- Some members commented that the colouring in places was confusing and suggested that if an indicator was on target or better it could be green.

- Members noted some targets were still not set and queried the timeframes for when they would be detailed.

Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants / Loans and Other Financial Assistance (Agenda item 18)

- Members were content that the recommendation go forward but noted it would be useful to have detail of the budget in order to give some context to the policy.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 19)

- It was noted that an item on the Local Plan Review was listed for March, and queried if this was another report or the one that is included in this February agenda.
 - Members queried if the Queen Camel Community Land Trust purchase of the old school site was still ongoing?
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109. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 9)

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.

Customer Accessibility – No updates since last the last meeting.

Council Tax Support Scheme 19/20 – The report on the 19/20 scheme had been agreed by Council in January. Task and Finish meetings to consider the 20/21 scheme would commence in the next few months. Officers would be meeting next week to set out a high-level project plan based on the recommendations of the 19/20 Scrutiny Task and Finish report.

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

There were no updates on matters of interest.

111. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

The Scrutiny Specialist noted that following the previous meeting she had contacted the Income & Opportunities Manager regarding the Scrutiny Committee offer of help with a fees and charges review. She informed members that the Income & Opportunities Manager had successfully obtained a grant for £7,000 from the Local Government Association (LGA), to bring in consultancy expertise regarding productivity and to support an internal team at SSDC to review the Council's fees and charges. Therefore at the current time the Scrutiny Specialist was unsure if the Scrutiny Committee would be able to add anything further than the LGA. Members agreed to remove this item from the Work Programme.

The Scrutiny Specialist also reminded members that she had circulated two emails - one with an update regarding the Troubled Families Programme, and the other some links to

information about the Yeovil Refresh. Members were asked to consider the information circulated and email any further comments or concerns to her to follow up if necessary.

Members were content to note the Scrutiny Work Programme.

112. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

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

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Chairman