

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held at the **Council Chamber - Council Offices** on **Tuesday 30 July 2019**.

(1.30 pm - 3.15 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Robin Pailthorpe
Louise Clarke	David Recardo
Nicola Clark	Jeny Snell
Brian Hamilton	Mike Stanton
Paul Maxwell	Gerard Tucker
Sue Osborne	



Also Present:

Gina Seaton	Linda Vijeh
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Officers

Netta Meadows	Director (Strategy & Support Services)
Martin Woods	Director (Service Delivery)
Sharon Jones	Customer Focussed Team Manager
Ben Warman	Specialist (Support Services - IT)
Robert Orrett	Commercial Property Manager
Cath Temple	Specialist (Performance)
Jo Gale	Scrutiny Specialist
Becky Sanders	Case Services Officer (Support Services)

20. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

21. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rob Stickland and Charlie Hull. Councillor David Recardo was in attendance at the meeting as substitute for Councillor Rob Stickland.

22. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

23. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

A member of the public addressed members and raised several queries and concerns including:

- Regarding the Investment Strategy. Why had SSDC invested in housing outside the district? Regarding Opium Power, had the company been consolidated and what reassurance was there that SSDC had control of the company? She also understood there were some outstanding issues regarding the recent Christchurch acquisition. Who would pay / cover for any failed investments?
- A common complaint in her village was that planning conditions seemed to be created in order to make a development acceptable, and then not enforced.
- How many complaints had been received about service performance relating to Transformation?

The Director (Service Delivery) provided a response to the planning issues raised and explained briefly about the enforcement process.

The Commercial, Land and Development Manager noted that a written response had been provided regarding the investment queries, but acknowledged it may not yet have been received. He explained that the Investment properties were purely about financial returns, and the return from the Marlborough housing development was being used to support regeneration projects within the SSDC area.

Regarding service performance and the number of complaints regarding Transformation, the Director (Strategy and Support Services) explained that it would be difficult to define whether things were solely Transformation related. All complaints would need to be analysed and an opinion formed as to whether the complaints received were service complaints or directly related to Transformation.

After listening to comments made, members expressed an interest to see the response that had been sent to the customer regarding Opium Power and the Christchurch investment. Verbal consent was gained from the customer, and it was agreed with officers that the response would be circulated to all members of the Scrutiny Committee.

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

In response to a comment raised about reviewing the time for future Scrutiny Committee meetings, the Chairman reminded members that the matter would be on the agenda for discussion at the September meeting.

25. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no Chairman's announcements.

26. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 4 July 2019 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman advised that the Scrutiny comments had been noted and were referred to in the minutes of District Executive.

27. Customer Focussed Performance (Agenda Item 8)

The Customer Focussed Team Manager provided members with a presentation which included information about:

- Moving towards a digital council
- Supporting customers
- Changes made since January 2018
- The new technology enabled space for customers at Petters House – Connect
- Successes so far
- Current phone performance – including statistics for wait times and calls dealt with at first point of contact
- Plans for improvements
- Targets for the future

Members were briefly shown a demonstration of the new Customer Access Points which had opened fully for customer use across the district the previous week.

During discussion the Customer Focussed Team Manager responded to points of detail including:

- Acknowledge comments that some customers may be waiting 5 days for an email response to queries or requests. Would like to see turnaround times of one day but currently this was not possible due to the required technology not being in place yet.
- Regarding wifi at Connect – only the Customer Access Points and office systems were on a secure network. However a public WiFi was also available.
- Some service requests raised via the Members Portal did not yet link directly with systems, but instead generated an email which was leading to some delays in resolving requests.
- Only in the very initial stages of looking at replacement call centre software. Risk mitigation for dips in service when new software is installed or if the current software has problems, will be carefully considered.
- There were currently 18/19 FTE staff within the team, of which 5 are agency staff. When all systems are in place and fully operation it was anticipated there would be 19 to 20 FTE staff.
- The team were experiencing a fairly quick turnover of staff. Some staff the posts had not been their first choice of role within the Transformation process, and as opportunities had arisen, several staff had changed jobs internally or left the authority.
- Part of the additional funding approved by District Executive in July would enable more cross-training and staffing at the Connect centre.
- Difficult to provide figures regarding how many people are available at a time to answer calls and how many calls per hour, as there are peaks and troughs throughout the day.
- Messages are posted on the website if the there team were experiencing a high number of calls.
- The current software did not have a function for a call queue numbering system.
- If customers were experiencing difficulty getting through on the phone the advice was to leave a voicemail. For the future, the team were also looking to roll out Customer Access Points into libraries where possible which would help to broaden access.
- The current call handling system/software has been in place for several years and is not connected to Civica or been included in the Transformation process. The current

system would no longer be supported from mid 2020 and hence new software would need to be sourced from that date going forward

At the end of discussion, the Chairman thanked the Customer Focussed Team Manager for attending the meeting and answering questions raised by members.

28. Quarterly Corporate Performance Report 2019-20 - Quarter 1 (Q1) (Agenda Item 9)

The Director (Strategy & Commissioning) introduced the report and noted officers had considered previous comments made by Scrutiny Committee, in order to develop the new format of report as detailed in the agenda.

One member acknowledged he was expecting a change to the reporting, but it was so much so that it was now difficult to compare the figures with those of the previous year. In response, the Director (Strategy & Commissioning) explained the measures had changed to reflect changes in the Council Plan.

Some members also expressed concern that while figures for some measures showed targets were being met, in reality, in some cases this was not what customers were experiencing, and it was felt a narrative should be provided within the report.

During discussion members raised comments and questions, and the Director (Strategy & Support Services), Director (Service Delivery) and Specialist (Performance) responded to points of detail, including:

- A brief explanation as to how figures regarding planning measures were derived, including influencing factors such as agreed extensions of time etc.
- The number of planning applications with extensions of time were monitored.
- Monitoring the number of planning applications delayed at validation was in progress. Steps were being taken to explain the process for submitting planning applications in a more clear way.
- Performance information regarding the number of online accounts activated, number of phone calls and response times was available but were not measures included within the quarterly performance reports.
- The current report was not general management information but showed performance against indicators linked to the delivery of the Council Plan.
- Regarding the three Environment measures – officers were trying to obtain the raw data from the Somerset Waste Partnership in order to extract the figures for the SSDC area, however this was difficult as the rounds of waste vehicles crossed district boundaries.
- Additional data for some measures and other general performance data could be added to the members portal.
- The data that used to be published within a weekly list for planning applications received and determined, continued to be available on the website but in a different format to the previous weekly lists. Guidance was due to be circulated to parishes soon in order to assist clerks in obtaining required information via the website.
- Acknowledge comments raised by members regarding delays in being notified of planning applications verified.

The Chairman thanked officers for the report and responding to the questions raised.

29. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 1 August 2019 (Agenda Item 10)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 1 August 2019 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to questions were provided at Scrutiny Committee, or after the Scrutiny meeting, by the relevant officers.

Corporate Performance Report 2019-20: 1st Quarter (Agenda Item 6)

- Members received a presentation and considered the Corporate Performance Report as a separate item on the Scrutiny agenda. Comments and questions were made at that time and responses received from officers. There were no comments made by Scrutiny Committee for District Executive to consider.

2019/20 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th June 2019 (Agenda Item 7)

- Given the revised forecast spend, as detailed at para 6, some members felt it would be beneficial if Scrutiny could be provided with the latest detail of all the council's assets / investments (what's been purchased or disposed of), and the income received from each asset.
- Page 22 and 25 - Some members sought clarity regarding funds allocated to the Lufton 2000 project. Is there still funding allocated to this project which is not yet spent? – if so, is that funding at risk as it has been allocated for many years – or could the funds be re-allocated elsewhere?

2019/20 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th June 2019 (Agenda Item 8)

- Table 3 at para 14 (page 29) – members queried the reason for the differing figures in the first two columns regarding parking fee income, and also the totals figure.
- Members sought clarification about how CIL was monitored, and where the amounts collected and distributed were reported.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 9)

- No comments were made.

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

Members noted the updates provided by the Scrutiny Specialist or Chairman on each of the Task and Finish Groups currently in progress, including:

Environment Strategy – an update on much of the work had been included in the members workshop held before the Scrutiny Committee meeting. The Task and Finish Group would next meet in September.

Council Tax Support – the meeting of the group had been delayed and they were now due to meet on 1 August 2019.

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

There were no updates on matters of interest.

32. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

The Specialist (Scrutiny) noted that a report on the Commercial Strategy was due to at the next meeting of District Executive. Given the comments raised earlier in this meeting she would liaise with the relevant Director about possibly having a separate report for discussion at the next Scrutiny Committee or to arrange an informal workshop for Scrutiny members. Members expressed preference for a workshop.

She also commented that at the next meeting there would be a report to discuss future meeting arrangements of the Scrutiny Committee.

For clarification she reminded Committee that there would be two workshops for members prior to the next meeting of Scrutiny Committee on 3 September. Firstly a workshop for the Environment Strategy, followed by one regarding the Commercial Strategy and Investments.

In response to comments raised during a brief discussion, the Specialist (Scrutiny) clarified that she would discuss with appropriate officers to see if any Business Rate reliefs would need to be reviewed due to the Environment Strategy work. In response, another member also suggested that the Environment Strategy may have an impact on other strategies and policies within the Council, for example public transport and planning.

33. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 3 September at 1.30pm in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman