

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held at the **Council Chamber - Council Offices** on **Tuesday 3 September 2019**.

(1.40 pm - 2.55 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Paul Maxwell
Louise Clarke	Robin Pailthorpe
Brian Hamilton	Mike Stanton
Charlie Hull	Gerard Tucker



Also Present:

John Clark	Linda Vijeh
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Officers

Robert Orrett	Commercial Property Manager
Clare Pestell	Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Paul Fitzgerald	Section 151 Officer
Jan Gamon	Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Leisa Kelly	Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Jo Gale	Specialist (Scrutiny)
Becky Sanders	Case Services Officer (Support Services)

34. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

35. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nicola Clark, Sue Osborne, Jeny Snell and Rob Stickland.

36. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

37. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

39. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no Chairman's announcements.

40. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 1 August 2019 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman commented there was little to report. Scrutiny comments had been noted and were referred to in the minutes of District Executive.

In response to a comment about who should report back from District Executive, the Specialist (Scrutiny) explained that historically the Chairman of Scrutiny Committee had attended District Executive meetings. However, for the last few Scrutiny Committee meetings most comments regarding District Executive reports had been answered at Scrutiny by the relevant officers, and hence no-one had attended District Executive to officially represent the Scrutiny Committee.

41. Commercial Strategy 2017-2021 Mid-Term Review and Update (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman acknowledged that Scrutiny Committee members had received a useful and informative presentation at a workshop prior to this committee meeting.

The Portfolio Holder (Economy and Income Generation) introduced the item, noting that to date the investments had been successful and details were provided in the report.

During discussion the Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation), Portfolio Holder (Economy & Income Generation), Section 151 Officer, and the Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager responded to points of detail. Some of the queries and comments raised by members included.

- Regarding the assessment groups (IAG and DAG) – members asked that as the current Monitoring Officer and S.151 Officer were due to leave around the end of the year, if there would be any gap in expertise.
- Members sought reassurance that the S.151 Officer was happy with the level of funding proposed and the proposed increase in delegated powers
- If the Opium project was not fully operational by October – what will the financial implications be?
- Given changes on the High Streets nationally, and that Marks and Spencer has announced store closures etc. – what assurances were there regarding the stability/security of the income stream from the investment in the Yeovil store?
- Members sought reassurance that there is a mix of rental types and dates of leases were staggered, and hence multiple investments were not due to expire at similar times.

- Members asked if all expenditure associated with any predicted void periods are taken account of in financial projections.
- Regarding Elleston, members asked if there was intention for the company to go out to market seeking contracts and tenders and to potential diversify in the future.
- Members queried when all the investment properties/projects had been purchased and finalised, if the costs associated with running the Commercial Services and Income Generation Team would reduce?
- Members asked if there was any intention to work with other local authorities to manage assets and property investments.

Answers to all the comments raised were provided by the officers, and members were satisfied to support the recommendations as detailed in the agenda report.

Officers also explained there were different frameworks under which the local authority could invest, and return against risk always had to be assessed. The more income that could be generated, the more revenue funding would be available to support services and projects.

At the end of discussion, the Chairman thanked officers for holding the members workshop and attending the committee meeting to answer questions.

42. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 5 September 2019 (Agenda Item 9)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 5 September 2019 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to questions were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers.

Allowenshay Private Water Supply (PWS) (Agenda Item 6)

- No comments.

Financial Strategy (Agenda Item 7)

- No comments

Commercial Strategy 2017-2021 (Interim Update 2019) (Agenda Item 8)

Members noted they had received an informative and useful presentation at an informal member workshop prior to the meeting of Scrutiny Committee.

- Regarding the assessment groups (IAG and DAG) – members asked that as the current Monitoring Officer and S.151 Officer were due to leave around the end of the year, if there would be any gap in expertise.
- Members sought reassurance that the S.151 Officer was happy with the level of funding proposed and the proposed increase in delegated powers
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Accelerating Housing Supply in South Somerset – Housing Infrastructure Fund (Agenda Item 9)

- *Item withdrawn from the agenda.*

Public Space Protection Orders: Yeovil (Agenda Item 10)

- No comments.

The ‘Making’ of the Castle Cary and Ansford Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda item 11)

- No comments.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

- No comments.

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

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

Environment Strategy – work was ongoing and a workshop had been held prior to the Scrutiny Committee meeting. Much work had been undertaken in a short space of time. The strategy would go up the line internally and then to Somerset County Council before coming back down to local communities.

Council Tax Support – The Chairman read out an update on behalf of the Task and Finish Group Chairman. It was unlikely the policy would change for the coming year but could the year following – timescales were very tight for this year and government policy was also fluid at the current time.

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

There were no updates on matters of interest.

45. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

The Specialist (Scrutiny) reminded members to suggest items for the work programme. She explained that she could shortly email all members of Council to see if there were further ideas for items or topics for Scrutiny to look into.

During a short discussion, some future items for the work programme were suggested including:

- Roll-out of 5g - concerns regarding impact on health.
- Extra funding has been allocated to support the Customer Focus and Planning services – should monitor how the funding has been utilised and the effectiveness.
- Specific Task and Finish issues were likely to come forward from the emerging Environment Strategy.
- Aspects of planning policies - implications with the emerging Environment Strategy.

In response to ideas raised, the Specialist (Scrutiny) recalled that the Director (Strategy & Support Services) had previously noted that the breakdown of extra funding allocated to services would be reported via quarterly performance reporting. The Specialist reminded members there was a need to focus on outcomes where Scrutiny could make a tangible difference. She advised that a template and scoring process were available to help structure items coming forward for the work programme, and she would circulate the documents to members of the committee. She also suggested some topics for members to consider based on member feedback around their casework including:

- Loneliness – what are SSDC doing and links with partners.
- Impact of Universal Credit – possibility of working with neighbouring authorities which might have a greater impact.
- Following on from ideas already suggested during discussion, Scrutiny would be well placed to look at service standards – could offer to do customer journey testing.

The Chairman suggested waiting for sight of the next performance and budget reports due in November, before making a decision about whether to include an item regarding monitoring the funding allocated for extra support for services was included on the work programme.

At the end of discussion, members confirmed they were content that the Specialist (Scrutiny) contact all members of Council for ideas regarding topics or issues for Scrutiny to consider adding to the work programme.

ACTION: Specialist (Scrutiny) to contact all members to ask for ideas regarding topics or issues for Scrutiny to consider adding to the work programme.

46. Scrutiny Committee - Future Meeting Time (Agenda Item 13)

The Chairman introduced the item and reminded members that the current 1.30pm start time had been for a trial period of time.

During a short discussion it was generally agreed the day was fine, but mixed opinions about the start time were expressed. It was acknowledged that times needed to be carefully considered, especially as a number of members had commitments regarding school hours. Some members questioned if there was a need to meet monthly or whether there was potential to have meetings on alternate months.

At the end of discussion, it was agreed that future committee meetings should revert back to mornings, but to the slightly later start time of 10.30am.

47. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 1st October 2019 at the new time of 10.30am, in the Main Committee Room, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman