

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Main Committee Room, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil** on **Tuesday 1 October 2019**.

(10.30 am - 1.15 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Sue Osborne
Louise Clarke (to 1.10pm)	Robin Pailthorpe (to 12.50pm)
Nicola Clark	Jeny Snell
Brian Hamilton	Mike Stanton
Charlie Hull	Rob Stickland



Also Present:

Neil Bloomfield	Linda Vijeh
Val Keitch	

Officers

Netta Meadows	Director (Strategy & Support Services)
Leisa Kelly	Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Barbie Markey	Specialist (Housing)
Jan Gamon	Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Vicki Dawson	Lead Specialist (Environmental Health)
Katy Menday	Leisure & Recreation Manager
Chereen Scott	Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Lynda Pincombe	Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Richard Birch	Lead Specialist (Communications, Marketing & Media)
Jo Gale	Specialist (Scrutiny)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)

48. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Note – in error, the agenda referred to the last meeting as being held on 30 September, but should have referred to 3 September 2019.

49. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Maxwell and Gerard Tucker.

50. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

51. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

Two members of the public wished to address members regarding the Environment Strategy. The Chairman invited them to speak when the Environment Strategy was considered rather than under Public Question time.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

53. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman informed members that both Vice-Chairmen and he were due to attend a Scrutiny Chairing Skills course at the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) in mid-October. One of the Vice-Chairmen would also be attending Financial Scrutiny Skills course at the CfPS in November.

The Specialist (Scrutiny) reminded members that information had been circulated regarding the Local Government Scrutiny Conference being held in early December. Councillors Sue Osborne and Brian Hamilton expressed an interest in attending.

54. Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 - 2023 (Agenda Item 7)

The Specialist (Strategic Planning) and the Specialist (Housing) introduced the report which gave members of the Scrutiny Committee an opportunity to consider and comment on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Needs Assessment and the first draft of the countywide Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2023, before being considered by District Executive later in the year.

The Specialist (Strategic Planning) provided a brief overview of the strategy and highlighted key element. She noted the strategy was quite concise and evidenced by the needs assessment.

During discussion several queries, comments and suggestions were raised, some of which included:

- Table 15 at para 2.23 – was a reason known for the higher numbers of long term vacant dwellings in South Somerset compared to the other districts?
- Feel there needs to be more reference to show the input of voluntary organisations who help regarding homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Was it known how much Airbnb may be taking properties or accommodation off the market?
- This council has done good work regarding homelessness and wish to thank the efforts of all staff involved.
- Could more work be done with schools and perhaps encourage schools to do a project on the issue.
- Should Public Space Protection Orders be referred to in the strategy?

- The strategy is a weighty document but very readable and comprehensive.
- Minor Typo - Table 3 – the word silver in the column header was spelt incorrectly.
- The action plan needs to include work to understand the reasons why notices to quit are being served.

Both officers responded to points of detail including:

- The number of empty properties had been discussed with the appropriate officers and they were not aware of any particular reason for the higher proportion of empty properties in the district.
- Further detail regarding the differences between beggars and rough sleepers. SSDC worked with other agencies to address the situations where beggars were pertaining to be rough sleepers / homeless.
- Acknowledge comments about the valued work of voluntary organisations and the suggestion would be passed back to the group.
- An update would be sought regarding whether enforcement action regarding empty properties was being actively enforced, and a response circulated to members.
- From talking to landlords, indications were that Airbnb was having some impact.
- In partnership with the YMCA work is done in schools to educate young people about accommodation issues and options, however an obstacle is the schools already having so much on their curriculum.
- Accommodation that accepts pets has been discussed by the Homefinder Partnership and was being addressed, and some of the larger landlords had now reviewed and changing their policy.
- Work on rural housing was ongoing and Housing Needs Survey data was also used to inform planning decisions.
- Concerns and suggestions made would be fed back to the group.

At the end of discussion, members thanked the officers for attending and answering questions.

55. Environment Strategy (Agenda Item 8)

The Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning) introduced the report and briefly reminded members of the process and work undertaken to date. She explained that since the Task and Finish Group had last met, the comments made at the last workshop had been included in to the latest version of the draft strategy. A stakeholder consultation event had taken place in mid September to provide an opportunity for comment. The strategy had been strengthened following comments and would continue to evolve over time. During October, she would be attending the Annual Parish Meetings organised by SSDC in each Area to discuss how we engage and involve local communities.

Two members of the public then addressed members about the strategy, their comments included:

- Some concerns that the strategy as it stands doesn't go quite far enough.
- Should be more reference to ecology, nature and nature depletion as there will be new legislation soon. Ask that a priority outcome is included for nature recovery. Also feel this element should be included within the Open Spaces Strategy.
- A brief overview of the current climate situation.

- Strategy as it stands is a business as usual document but feel it should evolve into something else.
- Near the start of the document it should be made more clear that it's interim and time limited, and within a defined timeframe it will be replaced with a more comprehensive one.
- Congratulations of what's been done so far.

During discussion members raised several comments and queries, some of which included?

- Statistics are included about waste, but we understood there were difficulties getting specific data regarding the SSDC area, is the figure quoted accurate?
- The word 'sequestration' is used several times in the report but it is a term that many people may not understand. Suggest alternative wording is used.
- Table at 8.1, last section, refers to planting of 1000 trees which seems a small figure.
- The Environment Strategy is creating a lot positivity in parishes and they are keen to engage with us, but how best should they go about feeding back to us?
- When will electric vehicle charging points be district wide? Understand there are non-standard connectors so it's an issue that needs to be looked into.
- Cycling – it's not easy to find out information about where cycle paths are.
- There needs to be more engagement with housing developers regarding green canopies, insulation, drainage and renewable energy. Does there need to be more guidance included in the Local Plan?
- There is little reference to farming in the strategy as it's felt this is an area better suited to other organisations. Feel there should be some explanation of this within the strategy, as people living in a rural area will expect there to be reference to food and farming.
- We seem to be the only local authority who has engaged with the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) in developing their Environment Strategy.
- It's a good document given the timescales involved.

The Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning), Directory (Strategy & Support Services) and the Leisure & Recreation Manager responded to points of detail raised during discussion by members and the public representatives. Some of their responses included:

- The waste figure had been provided by the Somerset Waste Partnership. Difficulties with sourcing data and statistics specific to the SSDC area was regarding continuous data monitoring rather than once-off figures.
- Through various channels of communications we will be encouraging people to sign up to become involved. We can't do everything on our own and need the support of our communities.
- 1000 trees is a minimum commitment, would like to do more but more background work and information is required in order to make robust decisions about what, when and where.
- Public transport – can only be addressed through national policy as in rural area it is prohibitive cost wise.
- A cycling review has recently been undertaken in Yeovil. Agree there is work to be done.
- There is a conflict between the need to deliver homes and to deliver homes within the Environment Strategy. The issue continues to be discussed at length.
- Strategy does refer to it being interim. It's hoped the strategy will feed in to all decision making by SSDC.

- This is a high level strategy. When developing the delivery plan, SSDC land will be considered and will be looking to form a nature partnership.
- Acknowledge comments made about agriculture, and some wording would be included in the final strategy. Officers would also look at revised wording or an explanation for the term sequestration.

At the end of discussion, members were content that the strategy be supported but recommended two actions before the final strategy is presented to full Council for adoption:

- The word 'sequestration' should be replaced with alternative wording as it was felt many people may not understand the term.
- An explanation should be included as to why there is little reference to food, farming and agriculture.

Members thanked officers for attending the meeting and the work undertaken with the strategy.

56. Somerset Climate Emergency Framework (Agenda Item 9)

The Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning) presented the report which informed members about the emergence of a framework for developing a countywide Climate Strategy, and to seek comment from the Scrutiny Committee in order to shape further prior to the framework being considered by the District Executive in November. She explained the work done to date, governance, the anticipated timelines, and that SSDC were the first local authority in Somerset to consider the report and framework.

During discussion some of the comments raised included:

- Regarding the appendix in the framework and what other Somerset authorities were doing - there was reference to funding, but no mention of funding under SSDC, was there a reason for this?
- What steps are going to be taken to avoid duplication?
- Feel there should be a work stream regarding health as climate change could affect public health.
- Impact from flooding of the Levels is also an issue.

The Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning) responded to points of detail raised during discussion, and her comments included:

- SSDC had allocated funding to develop our own Environment Strategy and had so far committed £10,000 towards the development of the county-wide strategy. It was possible that SSDC would be asked to contribute more, but this would need to be accompanied by a clear expenditure plan.
- Care would be taken to ensure there is no unnecessary duplication.
- Health and the climate strategy had been discussed by the Health & Wellbeing Board, and has been agreed as the focus for the next Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

The Chairman thanked the officer for her input and work. Members were content to note:

- the timeline for delivery of the Strategy.
- the intended consultation activities and to share the opportunity to contribute with residents and community

57. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 5 September 2019 (Agenda Item 10)

The Chairman reminded members that issues and comments raised regarding items on the District Executive agenda for September had all been addressed at the Scrutiny Committee and hence there were no updates to report.

58. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 3 October 2019 (Agenda Item 11)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 3 October 2019 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to questions were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers.

Adoption of the South Somerset Environment Strategy (Agenda Item 6)

Members considered this item in full as an item on the Scrutiny agenda. Officers responded to points of detail raised during discussion.

- Members supported the strategy, but recommended some actions before the final strategy is presented to full Council for adoption:
 - The word ‘sequestration’ should be replaced with alternative wording as it was felt many people may not understand the term.
 - An explanation should be included as to why there is little reference to food, farming and agriculture.

Heart of the South West Joint Committee Governance Review Report (Agenda Item 7)

- Members were content that the recommendations go forward, and many felt the improved accountability and transparency was welcome.
- Whilst acknowledging the report template was not SSSC’s, some members found it surprising that there was no report heading regarding climate / environment implications considering the work underway for a county-wide Climate Strategy.

Community Capital Grant Request to the Parochial Church Council of All Saints Church, Isle Brewers (Agenda Item 8)

- Members were content that the recommendation go forward, but sought clarification of what would happen if the awaited Lottery funding did not come forward?

Adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Definition of Anti-Semitism (Agenda Item 9)

- No comments.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 10)

- No comments.

Wincanton Town Centre Strategy Governance and Finance (Confidential) (Agenda item 13)

- No comments.

The Future Management of the Council's Leisure Facilities (Confidential) (Agenda item 14)

- No comments.
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59. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 12)

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

Environment Strategy - The Specialist (Scrutiny) read out an update on behalf of the Task and Finish Group Chairman. It was noted that SSDC were well ahead of the other districts, and he was happy with progress of both the SSDC Environment Strategy and the countywide Climate Strategy.

Council Tax Support – The September meeting was postponed as officers had been unable to conclude all the research tasked by the group. The Specialist (Scrutiny) would be circulating some preparatory work for members of the group in coming weeks, in readiness for the next meeting.

60. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 13)

Councillor Sue Osborne, as one of the representatives on the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Joint Scrutiny Panel, fed back to members regarding some of the items discussed at a meeting she had recently attended. She noted they were getting a good reputation for delivery and action. The SRA were keen to talk to partner authorities about the work, and she suggested that the Scrutiny Committee recommend that the SRA attend a future meeting of full Council to talk about the work they are doing, and this was endorsed by Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Mike Stanton, as the SSDC member appointed to the SRA, also suggested that members may find the latest annual report and also a report on the review of sustainable drainage systems of interest. In response, the Specialist (Scrutiny) advised members that she would add links to the documents on the members portal for ease of reference.

61. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 14)

The Specialist (Scrutiny) reminded members that she had circulated an email to all Council members asking for ideas regarding topics or issues for Scrutiny to consider adding to the work programme. She noted some responses had been received, all of which had been from members of the Scrutiny Committee.

The ideas suggested in response to the email and during discussion included:

- Tackling loneliness and isolation
- Equalities
- Planning - delegation and committee structure criteria

- Housing developers – environmental requirements e.g. orientation to maximise solar gain
- Potential for SSDC to build houses as an investment opportunity
- Gigaclear – as the contract has been terminated for delivering Somerset and Devon broadband – is now the time to look at how we can support our rural communities. Is the previously allocated funding which was withdrawn still available?
- Impact of Airbnb
- Management companies and public open space – ensuring governance is robust.
- CIL – is it being monitored and the money collected being reported.
- IT and communication – how long to answer phones and where we are with the website.

Listening to comments made, the Director (Strategy & Commissioning) suggested that Scrutiny could look at delivery of housing and also undertake a full review of the Equalities Policy if it was of interest. The Specialist (Scrutiny) advised that many of the suggestions would be suitable for Task and Finish work. The Director also noted that for some subjects it may be more appropriate and efficient for members to receive a report or presentation with a discussion, before considering whether a Task and Finish review was necessary.

Due to the number of suggestions, the Specialist (Scrutiny) suggested that she could a draft scoring exercise with the members concerned and then bring the results back to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration, and this was agreed by members.

62. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 15)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 5 November 2019 at 10.30am, in Council Chamber B, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman