

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in **Council Chamber B - Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Tuesday 7 January 2020.**

(10.35 am - 12.30 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Sue Osborne
Nicola Clark	Robin Pailthorpe
Brian Hamilton	Jeny Snell
Charlie Hull	Mike Stanton
Mike Lewis	Rob Stickland (to 12 noon)
Mike Lock	Gerard Tucker (from 10.50am)



Also Present:

John Clark

Officers

Netta Meadows	Director (Strategy & Support Services)
Nicola Hix	Interim Section 151 Officer
James Divall	Income Opportunity Development Manager
Jan Gamon	Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Robert Orrett	Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager
Jo Gale	Specialist (Members)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)

77. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 1)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Paul Maxwell.

78. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

79. Public question time (Agenda Item 3)

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

80. Issues arising from previous meetings (Agenda Item 4)

One member noted that a question had been raised at the previous meeting about the level of staff numbers currently in SSDC, but to date the information had not been received. The Specialist (Members) commented she would follow up the action with the report author.

81. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Mike Lewis to Scrutiny Committee. He also reminded members that there would be an informal briefing about the Council Plan following close of the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Vice Chairman referred to progress of the Environment Strategy and noted tight timeframes were involved. An open public consultation event for each district council area had been arranged, and the first session would be on 20 January in Mendip.

82. Productivity Analysis - Verbal Update (Agenda Item 6)

The Income & Opportunities Manager provided a brief verbal update on the work undertaken to date to create and use a productivity analysis tool. The tool was being created in order to understand the cost of services, products and processes, in order to inform future management decisions. Thinking ahead to 2021/22 it was hoped that a Task and Finish Group could be established to help look at policies for fees and charges, but also to consider products and services the authority could offer in general.

In response to queries raised during discussion, the Income & Opportunities Manager and the Interim Section 151 Officer clarified some aspects including:

- The Task and Finish Group would look at products offered, the level of fees and the amount of profit margins.
- A public consultation could possibly be carried out as part of the process and to help establish what the public and businesses want.
- The process of reviewing fees needs to tie in with the budget process, but there is also a need to ensure that the authority was no open to challenge.
- There is a need to benchmark with other authorities and also to follow good practice.
- Fees and charges are usually considered in October for the following financial year.
- Involving a Task and Finish Group would enable transparency and help offer reassurance that all relevant data is being considered appropriately.

At the end of discussion, members supported the establishing of a Task and Finish Group to consider fees and charges. The Specialist (Members) confirmed she would circulate an email to all members inviting them to join the Task and Finish Group.

83. Monitoring SSDC Council Tax Support Scheme - Draft Report of the Task and Finish Group (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group introduced the report which presented the findings of the group that had conducted a monitoring review of the SSDC Tax Support Scheme. He brought to the attention of the committee the recommendations for the next Task and Finish group in preparation for the 2021/22 scheme, and commented that this would be a much more extensive piece of work to assess how the scheme could work better for those people also in receipt Universal Credit.

During a brief discussion, members commended the group for the thorough piece of work and comprehensive report. Members were content to endorse the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group to District Executive and Full Council.

Councillor Charlie Hull expressed an interest in being part of the group for the next review.

84. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 7 November 2019 and 5 December 2019 (Agenda Item 8)

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

85. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 9 January 2020 (Agenda Item 9)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 9 January 2020 and made comments as detailed below. Responses to questions were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers, except those marked by an asterisk.

Somerset Waste Partnership Annual Report and Draft Business Plan 2019-24 (Agenda Item 6)

- Para 5.5 – members suggested that many readers may not understand who or what SUEZ was as it looked like an acronym – a short explanatory statement would be useful.
- What confidence was there that the Recycle More targets were achievable? Will there be any penalties or implications if the targets are not met?
- *Para 5.5 makes reference to some costs being shared by partners in accordance with household numbers – some members queried if an indication of the possible costs was known and had been budgeted for.
- Some members queried if there was a contingency in place should the roll out of Recycle More not go as expected.
- Page 17 – Point 1.3.2b – Given the Environment Strategy, several members felt it was important that SWP continue to investigate the possibility of alternative fuelled refuse vehicles.

District-wide Strategic Grants – Funding Arrangements with CASS and SPARK 2020-21 (Agenda Item 7)

- Members commended the work done by CASS to restructure themselves following removal of the SCC core grant.
- Some members queried if SPARK were working towards financial sustainability. If there was a need for financial support on an annual basis some members queried if a grant was the most appropriate way forward.
- Members felt there was a need to ensure there was no duplication of services provided by CASS, SPARK and SSDC. A member noted that some of the work of SPARK was similar to that provided by the Community Council for Somerset.

- Some members felt more detail of what the organisations do, their output and what they are achieving would be useful.
- Some members felt a mid-review progress report to Scrutiny would be of interest prior to agreeing any funding for the following year. Members acknowledged the suggestion made by the Director (Strategy & Support Services) that it would be beneficial for Scrutiny to review the commissioning model in the near future.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2020/21 (Agenda Item 8)

- Scrutiny endorsed the recommendations in the report of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (attached as appendix 1 to the District Executive report).

2020/21 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Update (Agenda Item 9)

- Members raised no comments and were content that the recommendations go forward.

Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants / Loans and Other Financial Assistance (Agenda Item 10)

- *A member questioned if under Loan Policy 2: Loans for landlords point 7 should be will or intends to charge rent up to and no more than £50.00 above the Local Housing Allowance rate?
- *A member sought clarification if this could be used to help with private water supply issues.

Commercial Assets Update Report (Agenda Item 11)

- Graph at para 15 – some members noted that it would have been useful to have had the projections also included in the graph.
- Para 20 – portfolio graph – some members expressed concern at the percentage associated with retail, which is a sector currently struggling and likely to continue.
- A member asked if there was any chance under the Commercial Strategy that we would be able to provide low rent housing in South Somerset.
- Members asked for an update regarding the SSDC Opium Power Ltd final cable run.

CONFIDENTIAL – Exclusion of the Press and Public

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the Committee resolved that the press and public be excluded from the following items in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, i.e. "Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Commercial Assets Update Report (Agenda Item 11) – Confidential Appendix

- Members asked several points of detail and members acknowledged the answers provided by the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager.

- Regarding a particular project – it was noted that some aspects had a life span, and it was suggested that profiling information (in a similar format to the other investments) would be useful.
- Regarding the graph in para 6 (of the confidential appendix) – some members felt the information would be easier to interpret if presented as a histogram.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

- No comments.

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

Members noted the updates provided by the Specialist (Members) about Task and Finish Groups. She noted that the review of the Council Tax Support Scheme (2020/21) would hopefully conclude at District Executive on 9 January 2020.

She noted she would circulate an email to all non-executive members inviting members to join the new Task and Finish Groups. The following Scrutiny Committee members expressed an interest in being part of the groups below, as had been agreed at the previous meeting:

Task & Finish Group	Members
Productivity, Fees and Charges	Robin Bastable, Nicola Clark, Jeny Snell, Brain Hamilton, Crispin Raikes and Gerard Tucker.
Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22	Tim Kerley, Sue Osborne, Jeny Snell, Ro Stickland and Charlie Hull.
Impact of short term lettings in South Somerset, how to minimise risks and maximise positive economic impact (Airbnb type rentals)	Brian Hamilton, Sue Osborne, Nicola Clark.
Environment Strategy	Charlie Hull and Mike Stanton.

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

There were no updates on matters of interest.

88. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 12)

A member suggested that it may be useful to add a report to the Work Programme for a 6 month review of the Members Portal. It was acknowledged that members were encouraged to use the portal to request services to work more effectively with the new operating model, however there had been some issues, and hence it would be useful to review the success of the portal to assess if the portal was working as envisaged.

Members were content to note the Work Programme.

89. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 4 February 2020 at 10.30am in Chamber B, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

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Chairman