

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held as a **Virtual Meeting** using **Zoom meeting software** on **Tuesday 5 January 2021**.

(10.30 am - 12.45 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Crispin Raikes (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Sue Osborne
Nicola Clark	Robin Pailthorpe
Brian Hamilton	Oliver Patrick
Charlie Hull	Gerard Tucker
Mike Lewis	Linda Vijeh



Also Present:

John Clark	Val Keitch
Jason Baker	Peter Seib
Mike Best	

Officers

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Jo Nacey	Section 151 Officer
Jo Gale	Specialist (Members)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Clare Pestell	Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Strategy and Commissioning)
Karen Hunter	Digital Specialist (Business Relationship & Planning)
Helen Morris	Specialist Revenues Team Manager
Joe Walsh	Specialist (Economic Development)
Jo Boucher	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Adam Burgan	Arts & Entertainment Manager
Brendan Downes	Specialist (Procurement)
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
Mickey Green	Managing Director, Somerset Waste Partnership
David Clarke	Charcoal Blue Consultants
Mark Ford	Somerset Waste Partnership
Gary Wright	Charcoal Blue Consultants

209. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 December 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

210. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Louise Clarke, Paul Maxwell and Jeny Snell.

211. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

212. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

214. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no Chairman's announcements.

215. Monitoring SSDC Council Tax Support Scheme - Report of the Task and Finish Group for the 2021/22 Council Tax Support Scheme (Agenda Item 7)

The former Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) presented the report, which provided members with the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish group that conducted a monitoring review of the SSDC Tax Support Scheme.

She explained it involved thinking about the future economic landscape and how they looked at other authorities who had already moved to the banded scheme. She said there was a need to provide a balanced scheme from both the customer and Council's perspective in terms of financial resilience.

During a short discussion, members' comments included:

- There was a need for members and officers to work closely with each other to ensure the public be kept fully informed of the support that can be provided through this scheme.
- Felt area committees were a proactive way to provide regular communication to families in all areas regarding the council tax support available.
- Mindful that the extra £20 upgrade of universal credit may not continue beyond April 2021.
- Continuity is vital.
- Voiced their thanks at the excellent work of the officers.

Members fully endorsed the report and that the recommendations go forward to Full Council.

216. Member Portal - Verbal Update (Agenda Item 8)

The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) gave members a verbal update on the continuous improvement work being done regarding the Member Portal. With the aid of slides she informed members of the feedback response from the recent survey circulated to members in which 50% of members had participated including:

- Overall gave positive feedback and support for the portal as a function, however consider it not 'fit for purpose' and not very user friendly.
- Some members still have IT issues in accessing the portal and require more hands on support.
- Need to ensure the most relevant and up to date content is captured within the portal.
- Need to ensure the landing page it kept simple and easy to use.

She also showed members a mock-up of how she envisaged the future landing page of the portal to be, anticipating it to be more in line with the current staff portal and to include useful quick links for example: planning search, calendar of meetings, live feeds and useful contacts.

The Specialist (Business Relationship & Planning) also informed members that she would be working with the Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) to ensure that technology is delivered to support what member's want. She also explained the benefits of the Microsoft Modern workplace and the work to get a direct link into the members working environment.

The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) concluded that continuous and evolving work will be done over the next few months and invited members for comment.

During a short discussion, members' comments included:

- Believed a small working group should be set up once initial thoughts and ideas have been embellished by the Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) and brought back to committee in the near future.
- Need to 'Keep it simple'.
- Several members do not use the portal as they find it confusing, cumbersome and not very user friendly and therefore welcomed the work being done.
- Need to make sure there is sufficient IT access to allow clear communication to operate in order for members to work effectively.

The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) and Specialist (Business Relationship and Planning) appreciated the comments made and the struggles many members still had regarding IT and archiving issues. Work had been done over the Christmas period to address these issues and it was hoped that one to one contact with members who require further support could be resumed by the spring should restrictions allow.

217. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 3 December 2020 (Agenda Item 9)

There were no updates for reports considered by District Executive at the December meeting.

218. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 7 January 2021 (Agenda Item 10)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 7 January 2021 and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except those marked by an asterisk:

Somerset Waste Partnership Annual Report & Business Plan Update (Agenda Item 6)

- Members sought clarity regarding the procedure for waste collection within communal areas such as apartment blocks and the process for getting communication and awareness out to the planning service when consulting on new developments.
- Some members sought clarification regarding engagement with the large supermarkets over their commitments regarding their waste and recycling responsibilities.
- Page 13 – members queried whether there would be any implications for staff regarding the change of ownership following the restructure of Viridor.
- Page 20, 5.4 – Drive down carbon intensity of day to day fleet operations – a member asked for reassurance regarding the route planning to ensure they are efficient in terms of fuel economy.
- Page 21, 6.2 – Public sector Estates – a member queried whether the district council would be able to access statistical information at district level.
- Page 24, 8.4 – CRM system procurement – a member asked whether there were any current issues and would these be addressed prior to a new contract provider.
- Members wished it noted that it is critical to ensure engagement and relationships are developed with schools regarding the future of recycling and waste.
- *A member sought reassurance that the local community can still comment regarding the management and delivery of the Dimmer recycling centre in Castle Cary as there used to be a liaison group prior to the takeover of Viridor.

Council Tax Support scheme 2021/22 (Agenda Item 7)

- No comments

2021/22 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Update (Agenda Item 8)

- No comments.

Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan (Agenda Item 9)

- *Members noted that agriculture was not included as a specific point of growth or bedrock sector. They felt that agriculture was a significant area of priority across

Somerset and that this should be recognised in the report and included as a bedrock sector.

- *A member felt this report was focused on the economy of the sectors and that agriculture should be referenced to the environment to the economy.

Transformation Programme Assessment & Final Report (Agenda Item 10)

- *A member felt that the report should include a table of comparison regarding the number of FTE's before transformation and FTE's after transformation and the impact this has had.
- *Members asked about the number of staff that were furloughed in the first lockdown in March and subsequent current lockdown?
- *A member queried the impact the current planning phosphates issues was having on the planning service.
- Some members considered the report to be a 'light touch' on the number of contractual staff and identifying services that have struggled since transformation.
- Members felt that there were still many IT issues regarding the sharing of information digitally with departments across the council.

Octagon Theatre Development (Agenda Item 11)

- Members sought clarity regarding the procedural rules around the approval of this project and the amount of spend, and whether it should ultimately be a decision taken by Full Council.
- Members raised concern regarding the implications this could have on the other local venues within South Somerset and whether this would have an impact of future funding of such venues.
- Some members also questioned the timing of this project due to the current Covid 19 pandemic.
- Some members sought clarification as to whether the High Street Funding could be used to fund and support any of this project.
- Members sought clarification on the dependency of funding from the external arts council and whether the project would still be viable should no funding be received.
- A members raised concern regarding the capacity for additional car parking.
- Members sought reassurance that robust risk assessments have been undertaken on the business case in light of the Covid 19 pandemic.
- Members queried the timescale for when the Octagon Theatre would become self-sufficient financially.

Members agreed in principle to endorse the report and overall felt it was a positive move forward.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

- No comments.

Note – Scrutiny Committee did not go into confidential session

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

The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) provided a brief verbal update on the progress of work of Task and Finish groups, including:

Productivity Analysis – This group reconvened in December 2020 where officers provided a cost analysis and identified pest control as a significant cost discrepancy. It was agreed to come back in 2/3 months with more examples and identify areas within the Council where fees and charges needed to be looked at.

SSDC Environment Strategy – The Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) met with Community Practice Lead and the Portfolio Holder to get an idea of how Scrutiny can help. It was agreed a 6 month Task and Finish group be set up to review the Council's energy supplier as the current contract is due for renewal next year and she would be inviting members to join in due course. There is also a need to work with officers to maximise communication with all stakeholders.

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

The Chairman updated members that SLT have decided to cancel Area Committees and Audit Committees for January and February to free up capacity to support other vital work related to Covid. Full Council, DX, Scrutiny Committee and Regeneration Boards will continue as normal.

In response to a member question, the Director (Strategy & Commissioning) acknowledged concern regarding forthcoming planning application decisions and that further discussions are being made with the Area Chair to agree the best course of action.

221. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 13)

Members were content to note the work programme.

222. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 10.30am on Tuesday 2 February 2021, and likely to be held as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman