

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** (Informal) held as a **Virtual Meeting** using **Zoom meeting software** on **Tuesday 30 November 2021**.

(10.30 am - 12.25 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Robin Pailthorpe (to 12.10pm)
Karl Gill	Oliver Patrick
Brian Hamilton	Crispin Raikes
Charlie Hull (to 11.55am)	Linda Vijeh
Sue Osborne	



Also Present:

Jason Baker	Gina Seaton
John Clark	Peter Seib
Adam Dance	

Officers

Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

78. Minutes (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 October 2021 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

79. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mike Lewis and Paul Maxwell.

80. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

81. Public question time (Agenda Item 4)

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

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

There were no issues raised from previous meetings.

83. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 6)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

84. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 7 October and 4 November 2021 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman reminded members that the Scrutiny Committee had not met earlier in November to consider the report on the District Executive agenda for 4 November. However Scrutiny members had considered the report informally and submitted comments by email for consideration. He noted the comments had been raised at District Executive and acknowledged.

85. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 2 December 2021 (Agenda Item 8)

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 2 December 2021 (Informal Consultative Meeting) and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee (Informal Meeting) by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except those marked by an asterisk:

Corporate Health & Safety Policy (Agenda item 6)

- *A member asked if there was anything relating to Health & Safety included within the corporate performance reporting, such as number incidents reported etc. They felt it would be useful for members to have an overview of the number and type of incidents.
- *Agenda page 15, paras 2.9 and 2.10 refer to RIDDOR – a member noted there was no explanation for the acronym, and that a brief explanation would be useful.
- *Agenda page 23, para 3.20 – asbestos – a member sought clarification that checks are carried out on properties we may look to purchase and also that the asbestos register is up to date for all properties the authority currently owns.
- *Agenda page 23, para 3.21 – it was noted reference was made to premises – does this include risks to all our land holdings, in particular small parcels of land? – are H & S inspections carried on all our land?
- *Agenda item 25, para 3.26 – small typo in the fourth bullet point about stress – ‘signs of’ is duplicated.

Chard Shop Front Design Guide (Agenda item 7)

- Regarding a grant scheme to help shop owners – a member enquired what the criteria would be and up to what percentage would we support?

- *A member noted a recent local press article (third party) seemed to infer that £4m was being spent in Chard, which they thought was incorrect. Clarification on the amount of funding was requested. If the detail reported in the press was indeed incorrect it was suggested that may be Comms could do something to help correct the detail in order to help manage public expectations.
- Some members sought clarity about how much weight the design guide would have in planning terms. Would it be enforceable when adopted as a statutory planning document?
- A member noted the guide was very retail focussed and queried if any consultation had taken place about possibly changing some of the premises into 'experience' venues as this would likely change some frontage requirements?

COVID Recovery and Renewal Strategy: six months progress report (Agenda item 8)

- Members noted 2024 was given as an end date which seems a long way away.
- *There are complaints from residents that their calls are not being answered or there are long delays – what can be done in the short term to improve the situation?
- *A member acknowledged that recruitment was challenging and queried how many staff were in Connect, and what the turnover of staff was, especially regarding those moving to other departments? (members acknowledged the detail of this query would be followed up by the Lead Specialist).

2021/22 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30 September 2021 (Agenda item 9)

- A member queried why the financial reports didn't go to Audit Committee, and suggested they did for comment.
- A member noted that the authority seemed to have shifted from net to gross budgeting. They suggested a briefing note for members would be useful to explain the difference between net and gross budgeting, and why the budget arrangements have been changed.
- A member commented for public reports these are not easy reading and it was difficult to keep track of the movements of funds.
- Para 12, table 1
 - some members sought clarity regarding the meaning of the black and red figures / text in the table, and what the information was trying to convey? It was also queried why the budget that had been set was not correct?
 - a member noted the employee expenditure was forecast to be £1m overspent as using agency staff.
 - Investment income is forecast to have £175k variance – is this regarding treasury investment or commercial properties?
- Page 103, para 26, second bullet point – which are the subsidiary companies being referred to? What happens if those companies go into administration?
- Page 106, para 34 – car parking shortfall of £350k – a member queried how this figure had been derived?
- Page 106, para 35 - the predicted shortfall is a big change to that previously reported - is some of this relating to moving from net to gross budgeting?
- *The Director for Commercial Services and Income Generation has left the authority and hence resigned their directorship of the SSDC companies – has someone else been appointed to be a director for each of the companies, or to have oversight in the interim? Understand that previously we may have had a

casting vote on the boards, what happens in the interim? (Members acknowledged that the Monitoring Officer would circulate a written response)

2021/22 Capital. Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30 September 2021 (Agenda item 10)

- Page 117, para 7, e) – a member sought clarity about what the 2m allocation of funding for the Octagon Theatre was for – is this for the Octagon redevelopment project, or for day to day maintenance of the theatre as it stands?
- Page 124, para 28 - reducing the capital reserves by £16m is significant and a member commented it felt like a draconian move and emptying the piggy bank. An explanation was requested.
- Page 125, para 31, table 7 – a member noted the short term for the loan to Opium Taunton, and commented some more figures would be useful. Given the repayments to date it was queried if the loan would ever be repaid? Were officers confident the loan would be repaid in the defined timeframe?
- A member felt it was unsatisfactory that members were being asked to make a decision based solely on the information provided within the report.

District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 12)

No comments

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 item 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).

Yeovil Refresh - Implementation (Agenda item 11)

- Members raised several comments and questions relating to the confidential appendix to the report.

86. Verbal update on Task and Finish reviews (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman referred to recent flooding events in the Chard and Ilminster areas. He informed members that he and the Vice-Chairmen had recently met with representatives from the Environment Agency and Somerset Rivers Authority to raise concerns about the flooding, and discuss the possibility of some Scrutiny Task and Finish work. From discussions, there was a possibility for some Task and Finish work looking at flooding events in different catchment areas, with the aim of a Task and Finish report being made by Easter 2022. The work of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of the Somerset Rivers Authority was acknowledged, however the Task and Finish work being proposed was about localism, and he asked for members thoughts on setting up a Task and Finish group.

In response, members expressed their general support for the idea. The Chairman advised that he would request the Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development) to circulate an invite for members to join the Task and Finish group.

Regarding other ongoing Task and Finish Groups, the Chairman provided a brief verbal update including:

- Council Tax Support Scheme (2022) - no update
- Productivity Analysis - on hold
- SSDC Environment Strategy - there will be a member workshop on 14 December - Environment Strategy prioritisation. Officers will be attending to discuss options and budget implications.

87. Update on matters of interest (Agenda Item 10)

The Chairman referred to the Local Government Reorganisation and a recent member workshop/briefing regarding the setting up of a Joint Scrutiny Committee. SSDC had been requested to put forward two representatives for the Joint Scrutiny Committee (both to be Liberal Democrats), and he informed members this would be Councillors Brian Hamilton and Paul Maxwell.

88. Scrutiny Work Programme (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman noted that the new Task and Finish group for flooding would be added to the Scrutiny Work Programme.

The status of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) item on the Work Programme was briefly discussed as a confidential member workshop had been held prior to this Scrutiny Committee meeting. It was suggested and agreed to delete the current CIL item from the programme but to request six-monthly updates, possibly April and October, to keep Scrutiny up to date.

During discussion it was agreed that the item on S106 SWAP audit findings should remain on the work programme. Members were content to note the Work Programme and the suggested updates to be made.

89. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 12)

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 4 January 2022 at 10.30am - as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman