

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SCRUTINY
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2009**

MEMBERS

* Cllr C M Pannell - Chairman

* Cllr K J Baldry - Vice-Chairman

∅ Cllr J H Baverstock

∅ Cllr P H Cook

∅ Cllr G J Fielden

* Cllr R D Gilbert

* Cllr J W Squire

* Cllr J A Westacott MBE

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllrs H D Bastone, J I G Blackler, J D Hawkins, M J Howarth, D W May, M F Saltern
and R J Tucker

Officers in attendance:

For all items: Chief Executive, Strategic Director (Resources), Member Support
Services Manager, Member Support Officer and Communications Manager

Item 7: (Minute SC.18/09 below refers) Head of Environment Services;

Item 8: (Minute SC.19/09 below refers) Monitoring Officer;

Items 9 and 10 (Minutes SC.20/09 and SC.21/09 below refer) Head of Improvement
and Improvement Programme Manager.

SC.16/09 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny held on 23 July 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC.17/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none were made.

SC.18/09 STREET SWEEPING

The Head of Environment Services presented a report to Members that provided a background to the arrangements in place and the range of issues incurred by the service in order to maintain a clean environment. One of the key ongoing challenges for the authority was the split of duties between the District Council and the County Council with regard to the clearing of litter and detritus.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- a) A Member commented on the improvement in the appearance of Totnes with regard to street litter since the introduction of seagull proof waste refuse sacks. However, she pointed out that once emptied they were prone to blow away which had created some minor problems. The Group was informed that operators were instructed to replace sacks in the most appropriate manner available but they were aware of the issue;
- b) A Member asked why there were separate dog litter and general litter bins. In reply, the Officer informed that some areas popular with dog walkers, were areas where it would not be desirable for litter to accumulate around bins;
- c) With regard to litter generated from takeaways, the Officer informed that the authority did have the power to serve enforcement notices but that it was often a stipulation of an establishment's licence that litter was adequately managed. Therefore, if problems were occurring, it was suggested that town councils and local Members notify the Licensing Manager;
- d) It was requested that more facilities to deposit rubbish were installed during the Totnes Late Night Christmas shopping evenings and that a contract with stall holders be considered and discussed with the stall holder co-ordinator;
- e) A Member queried the zero percentage figure recorded for performance indicator BV 199c Fly Posting. The Group was informed that fly posting on shop fronts were not required to be included in the BV figures. However, he did agree to investigate this further and report the findings back to the Group. On the matter of graffiti, the Officer informed Members of a new kind of tag that was emerging which required the use of a fluorescent glass etching pen. The pens, which were easily available, posed serious potential health risks to anyone handling them should the contents come into contact with the skin;
- f) A Member raised a design issue with some litter bins whereby waste material did not always fall into the internal sack. This caused litter to backfill and clog up the bin which meant the lids would not close properly; giving the impression the bin was full. In reply, an Executive Member informed the Group that the bin had been superseded by an improved design. Nonetheless, the Officer agreed to investigate this matter further;

- g) With regard to the Revenue Budget (as detailed in Appendix 2 of the published agenda) a Member queried the disparity in the spend for Employees Headquarters estimated for 2008/09 and 2009/10. In reply, the Chief Executive suggested that it would be useful if Members were provided with details relating to the overall reallocation of overheads. The Strategic Director (Resources) also reminded Members that this information was available in the back of the 2009/10 budget book;
- h) On the matter of the mechanical street sweeper, it was suggested that Town and Parish Councils be contacted and asked to notify residents (e.g. by notices on lamp posts), that the sweeper would be in their area on a designated day/time with the request for cars not to be parked in the vicinity, that way allowing the sweeper to deal with detritus. This approach was preferred to the enforcement of a traffic order. It was also suggested that the officer contact Town and Parish councils to identify any areas requiring particular attention.

It was then:-

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that Scrutiny has considered the report and wishes to make the following comments:-

- 1) That Members be provided with an update on the status of BV199c Fly Posting;
- 2) That Members be provided with Revenue Budget figures regarding the reallocation of Employees Headquarters for 2009/10; and
- 3) That the Head of Environment Services arrange for notices to be issued to Town and Parish Councils to provide advance warning prior to an area being mechanically swept and whether there were any areas which required particular attention.

SC.19/09

CORPORATE SERVICES –BUDGET REVIEW

The Monitoring Officer presented a report that provided Members with a detailed budget analysis of Corporate Services. The Officer highlighted, that as part of the efficiencies required for the next financial year, a report was to be presented to the Executive on 8 October 2009 to propose that Land Charges introduce charges to recover their costs for street naming and numbering. The charges would be set to recover costs only and a report would be going to Executive on 8 October 2009 with this proposal.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) Vigorous sentiments were expressed with regard to the legal costs incurred by the Council with regard to Sherford. Currently, the costs were met from the local Planning Reserve budget. The strong view was expressed that the Council should not be incurring any costs and that these should be met by the developers and the Officer was asked to pursue this vigorously. In response, the Chief Executive advised that the issue was quite complex but that an update report would be produced for Members regarding the current position and emphasised that any legal agreement had to be right to protect, deliver and safeguard the Council. A Member expressed that he was highly critical of the failure of the developers to reimburse the Council and requested that the update report be presented at the earliest opportunity;
- b) A Member queried the rise in premises costs from £46,231 in 2008/09 to £57,800 in 2009/10. The Strategic Director (Resources) informed that the allocation was for area occupied and agreed to provide a detailed analysis of allocation versus costs. The Chief Executive advised Members that when looking at a particular service, it was right to ask if the accommodation provided value for money and if there were better ways to manage accommodation in the future e.g. by bringing in other organisations to best utilise any space;

The Member went further stating that he wished for more clarity with regard to the financial information that was presented to Members. He expressed that it was their role to scrutinise service budgets, and not just to accept the presented figures. Another Member noted that the budget figures presented were set last year and expressed that he would have liked to have seen the six month position. In response, the Strategic Director (Resources) replied that any material variances in budgets were presented to the Executive quarterly via the Revenue Budget Monitoring reports which monitored income and expenditure variations against the approved budget. In acknowledging that all Members received copies of these reports, a Member replied that it would still have been helpful to them to have had this information included in the presented report. In response, officers advised that the value in this particular scrutinising exercise was for Members to review the current year's budget allocation and to contribute recommendations for possible incorporation into the 2010/11 budget.

It was then:-

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and the following observations have been identified. That:-

- 1) Members are highly critical of the failure to reimburse the costs of the Council towards the Sherford Project and wish for an update report to be produced on the current position as soon as practically possible;
- 2) A letter be sent on behalf of the Scrutiny Group to the Monitoring Officer outlining the concerns raised in (1) above;
- 3) Members be provided with detailed analysis information on those budget areas with significant variances (e.g. the premises and supplies and services budget); and
- 4) For further service budget reports, the financial information be supplemented with explanations and comments to support any such variances.

SC.20/09 IMPROVEMENT SERVICE REVIEW – JOINT IMPROVEMENT UNIT

The Head of Improvement presented a report which provided a detailed analysis of the service. The Officer highlighted that during 2008/09, the Unit had a number of posts vacant, operating on 6.5 staff against an establishment of 10 for parts of the year and as a consequence, expenditure was considerably under budget. He also stated that their output suffered as a result. The current establishment included provision for 9.1 full time employees (FTE) and the Unit was to be reduced further by 1 FTE by the end of September. To further reduce costs, South Hams Matters magazine was to be procured differently and cost efficiencies were further being sought with the manner of the provision of the Citizens Panel. This was particularly important in view of the requirement for additional engagement to support the Duty to Involve and new Equalities Framework.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:

- a) It was noted that the savings that had been made through the joint working arrangements with West Devon Borough Council, would be reflected in the Council's budget savings to meet the projected £900,000 shortfall;

- b) A Member disagreed with the view that the reduction in staff numbers in this service was detrimental and expressed that in his view it had been a positive saving. When questioned, the Group was informed that it was a statutory requirement to consult with residents and involve and engage the community and surveys had to be undertaken, and at the right quantitative level, for the statistics extracted to be relevant. The Chief Executive advised Members that all options with regards to shared services would be presented at the Joint Shared Services Workshop on 6 October 2009 and that all the comments expressed today were useful to the wider issue;

The Member reiterated that he felt the whole service needed a review and was mystified by a lot of the content of the presented report. The Chief Executive informed that a lot of the language that had been used was in response to requirements by external auditors and that it was necessary for the Council to use the same language or it could be penalised;

- c) A Member questioned whether the costs incurred for the production of the South Hams Magazine constituted value for money. In reply, the Officer advised that it was proven that authorities who had good communications with the public were rated as performing better by their residents. He added that there was the added cost benefit of a reduction in calls to the customer service unit that would be reversed without the issuing of such publications. The Chief Executive added that all staff were fully aware of the financial imperative to save costs and that more advertising would help with the move towards zero costs;

Another Member voiced his support for the magazine and expressed his view that the Council derived very good value from it. The magazine assisted the Council to be reactive to residents needs for information and indeed did allow the Council the additional opportunity to promote its services and achievements;

- d) In conclusion the Head of Improvement was then thanked by all those present for his services to the Council and was wished well for the future.

It was then:-

RESOLVED

That the report be noted, and the comments recorded in the minutes above be considered in respect of the Joint Improvement Unit during the 2010/11 budget setting process.

SC.21/09 **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – PROGRESS REPORT**

The Improvement Programme Manager presented a report that updated Members on achievement against selected performance indicators for year end 2008/09 and in addition for Quarter 1 2009/10.

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- a) A Member commented on indicator N139 (page 32 of the published agenda) regarding the extent to which older people received the support they needed to live independently at home which seemed to indicate that approximately 60% of residents were dissatisfied. In response, the Lead Executive Member for Housing informed the Group that a Supporting People Review Strategy Document would be looking at issues such as the controversial move from sheltered wardens to floating wardens that had received much media attention. It would also address the range of issues arising as a result of an ageing population. Some of the statistics, he warned, were stark (e.g. it was forecast that in the future possibly over 40% of the total population would be over 65). The Council had significant input into that strategy and he reassured the Member that the Council was addressing the matter with regard to N139;
- b) With regard to CR2 (page 33 of the published agenda) regarding the percentage of all new homes affordable, the Lead Executive Member for Housing expressed the view that the whole indicator needed to be reviewed as it presented a lower figure than was justified. This was because prior to HPD the threshold had changed substantially and was now subject to viability. Thus it had become pointless to set a target as any attempt to go for the maximum percentage could be destroyed by viability. Members proceeded to endorse this view and requested that this indicator be revisited.

It was then:-

RESOLVED

That Scrutiny had noted and commented upon the PIs and in particular endorsed the views of the Lead Executive Member for Housing whereby Indicator CR2 (% of new homes affordable) should be revisited.

SC.22/09 **SCRUTINY SHADOWING ROLES**

The Shadow Scrutiny Member for a Clean Environment informed the Group that both he and his Executive counterpart had been on a familiarisation visit to staff engaged with collecting household recycling waste. He reported that both Members were very impressed by how hard and enthusiastically the staff worked and had observed that the service was efficiently run.

On the whole, the remaining Members informed that they were kept fully briefed by their Executive colleagues, and continued to meet frequently.

SC.23/09 **AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OF SCRUTINY**

Joint Meeting with West Devon Borough Council

It was confirmed that this informal meeting on the Devon Local Safeguarding Board would be held in the Cary Room at 10.30am on Monday 5 October 2009.

Visit to ICT

Members were reminded of the invitation by the Lead Executive Member for Community Affairs to visit the ICT Service on 8 October 2009 at 2.15pm.

Members wishing to attend were asked to meet in the reception area, where they would be met by the Head of ICT.

Devon PCT

The Group endorsed the suggestion that the PCT Representative for the South Hams, West Devon and Teignbridge districts be invited to attend the 19 November 2009 meeting.

Policing in Dartmouth

Members were satisfied to receive a written response from Superintendent Sharpe on the specific matter of policing in Dartmouth (minute SC.15/09 refers). However, when informed that Superintendent Sharpe confirmed her availability to attend a future Scrutiny Group meeting, the group felt that it would be an opportune time to look at the wider issues of policing and notably made reference to the recent changes in anti social behaviour responsibilities and recent adoption of the requirement to scrutinise the South Devon and Dartmoor Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Integrated Transport

Some Members emphasised the importance of a co-ordinated response to transport, particularly when constructing new developments. Therefore the Group expressed its wish for the Rural Devon County Council Transport Coordinator to be invited to a future meeting.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.30 pm).

Chairman