

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SCRUTINY
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY, 12 JUNE 2008**

MEMBERS

* Cllr C M Pannell - Chairman

* Cllr K J Baldry - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr J H Baverstock

∅ Cllr R D Gilbert

* Cllr P H Cook

* Cllr J W Squire

∅ Cllr G J Fielden

* Cllr J A Westacott

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:

Cllrs N A Barnes, H D Bastone, J Brazil, T J Hewitt, M J Hicks, J T Pennington, M F Saltern and R J Tucker

Also in attendance but not participating:

Cllrs J I G Blackler, B F Cane, P W Hitchins, R J Vint and A Ward

Officers in attendance for all items: Strategic Director (Resources)
and Member Support Services Manager;

Item 6 (minute SC.3/08 below refers) Economic Development Officer

SC.1/08 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny, held on 24 April 2008, were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC.2/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting, these were recorded as follows:

Cllr J H Baverstock advised that in respect of item 6: 'Post Office Network Change Programme' (minute SC.3/08 below refers) he intended to present the matter and respond to Member questions in his capacity as a member of Postwatch. As a result of this involvement with Postwatch, Cllr Baverstock advised that he would abstain from the vote on this item.

SC.3/08 POST OFFICE NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME

Cllr Baverstock informed the group that Post Office Ltd had proposed the closure of 2500 post offices, 83 of which were in Devon with 9 in the South Hams. Of these 9, the proposal was for 6 to be closed and a further 3 to receive Outreach Services.

The Group was informed that Postwatch had been in discussions with Post Office Ltd since February 2008 and through those discussions had managed to influence a number of changes at that stage. However Members were informed that 83 Post Offices would still be closed in Devon, regardless of the consultation exercise.

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- a) the hourly rate that Post Office Ltd was willing to pay for hosting premises of an outreach service. Members were informed that if suitable host premises could not be found, then an outreach service would be withdrawn. Even in the event of such a withdrawal of the service, the criteria of 95% of people living within 3 miles of a Post Office would still be achieved;
- b) the capacity of the current main post offices in Totnes and Dartmouth. In light of the recommended closures of alternative post offices in these towns, Members were informed that existing issues of capacity were being considered by Post Office Ltd, with some improvements being investigated. The potential impact upon capacity of nearby post offices was a relevant issue when objecting to the proposed closures;
- c) village shops. Members were informed that a Government Select Committee had informed Post Office Ltd to avoid wherever possible the closure of a Post Office that would also result in the closure of a solitary remaining village shop;
- d) the use of mobile Post Offices. Cllr Baverstock informed the Group that 38 out of the 83 proposed closures in Devon were to be covered by an outreach service, some of which were proposed to have access to a mobile service. Members expressed the view that Post Office Ltd should be urged to provide a mobile service, covering the areas that were proposed to suffer a closure;
- e) the proposed closure of Townstal Post Office. In opposing the proposed closure, a local ward Member for Dartmouth informed the Group that the Townstal area had a larger population than that of lower Dartmouth and a population that was larger than Salcombe, due to the number of second homes. In addition, Townstal was also classified in the top 20 of deprived areas in Devon. With the establishment of the proposed supermarkets in the area the member questioned whether a Post Office could be located in one of these stores, which would also benefit the store by increasing its potential customer base. In response, Cllr Baverstock informed Members that Postwatch was sympathetic to the suggestion and stated that Royal Mail already had a franchise with SPAR. Cllr Baverstock also informed the Group that the justification for keeping the Post Office at Townstal in operation was increasing;

- f) post boxes. A non-group Member expressed concern that the loss of a Post Office would also result in the loss of a post box. In response, Cllr Baverstock informed the Group that should this be likely to occur, Royal Mail would seek an alternative location for the post box;
- g) the wish for a motion to Council to be submitted which reflected the views of the Group.

It was then **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and declared **CARRIED** that:-

RESOLVED

That a motion be invited to be submitted to the next Council meeting which invites representations to be made to Post Office Ltd which reflects Scrutiny's concerns as detailed below:-

- a) The Group objects to any closures, particularly those which have a detrimental impact on town and village communities;
- b) Priority be given to saving those post offices, which if closed were likely to lead to the closure of a sole village shop; and
- c) Should it be impossible to avert any full closures, a regular mobile service be implemented in those affected areas.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked Cllr Baverstock for answering Members questions and thanked him for all his hard work on this matter.

SC.4/08

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – PROGRESS REPORT

A report was considered which informed Members of the Council's achievement against selected Performance Indicators (PIs) for the year end 2007/08.

The report concluded that regular monitoring of indicators was an essential part of securing value for money for service users and the taxpayer. Any drop in performance would be identified quickly and action taken to investigate the likely cause and rectify the problem.

Members were informed that since publication, updates had been provided for PIs CR9, C10 and BV204. Members were informed that all the PIs related to the financial year 2007/08 and that new PIs would be coming into force this year, however guidance was still awaited from Government regarding the PI categories.

During discussion particular reference was made to:-

- a) CST 1 'percentage of telephone calls answered within 20 seconds'. A Group Member queried whether there would be an improvement in the service. In response, the Executive portfolio holder informed the Group that there was a slight improvement on the previous year and that the service was moving in the right direction. The Group was informed that during March and April 2008, a high volume of calls had been received due to both Council Tax letters being sent and residents ringing regarding bus passes.

A Member queried why the number of calls regarding bus passes was not anticipated when considering a letter had been sent to the Town and Parish Councils inviting residents to contact the Council if they had any queries. Members were informed that there was a move to identify such trends, during which the volume of calls dramatically increased which should help deal with some of these issues.

Officers informed Members that the Strategic Management Team was awaiting a report that would identify options available to further improve the service;

- b) ABC 7 'total number of households accommodated in B&B'. A non group Member queried whether the target should be lowered. In response, the Executive Member for Housing informed the Group that the officers aimed to have no persons residing in B&B accommodation;
- c) BV119a 'local street and environmental cleanliness – litter and detritus'. A Member made reference to the 4% figure in the presented appendix and questioned its meaning. In response, officers informed Members that the PI was a national target and the Council also had a local target which was more challenging. Members requested that in instances where there were local targets, these be included in the appendix. A Member suggested that an independent group should be commissioned to impartially examine the local street and environmental cleanliness. In response, officers agreed to speak with the officers responsible and the lead Executive Member;
- d) CR9 'number of new affordable homes completed' and CR10 'number of affordable homes currently being developed on site'. The Executive Member for Housing informed the Group that a new system to record these figures had been established, providing a firm point of control when entering data on to the Covalent System. The Group was informed that the Audit Committee felt the data recording of figures by officers required improving;

- e) inaccurate data. The Group expressed their deep frustration and concern at the level of inaccurate and omitted data that was contained in the presented appendix. Members strongly expressed the belief that until the recording system was tightened, it was pointless to even consider the PIs. In frustration, the Chairman advised that she was prepared to remove future such reports from an agenda if they were deemed incomplete upon report publication. Officers gave their assurances that the Strategic Management Team was prepared to speak with Heads of Service, to ensure the standard that the Group required was achieved, furthermore, Scrutiny was entitled, if still dissatisfied to call a Head of Service to a meeting to respond to its concerns;
- f) BV12 'working days lost due to sickness absence'. The Chairman of the Personnel Panel had requested for a breakdown of long term and short term sick and informed the Group that if the long term sick figures were removed from the PIs it would reduce the figure to 5.6 days lost per employee. The Member explained that a full and structured review was undertaken on those absent through long term sickness and a control mechanism was in place. A Member queried whether instances of long term sickness could be resolved sooner. In response, the Personnel Panel Chairman informed the Group, that the timescales were prescribed by Occupational Health.
- g) OT30 'cost of street cleaning'. A non group Member queried why the amount spent on street cleaning appeared to have been halved in the last year. In response, the Executive Member for a Clean Environment informed the Group that street cleaning staff had often been deployed for the waste collection service and that the presented figure was incorrect. The Group was also informed that Devon County Council was due to start a programme of weed control shortly.

RESOLVED

- i) That Scrutiny note and has commented on all sections Part A-D on the performance against the statutory Best Value Performance Indicators and local indicators which currently form the Council's Balanced Scorecard for the 2007/08 performance indicator year;
- ii) That the Group expresses its strong concerns and disappointment at the quality of performance information submitted, with particular emphasis given to the amount of inaccuracies, which were considered most unhelpful;

- iii) That for future Performance Indicator reports, the Chairman, on behalf of the Group, be given the ability to exercise her discretion and remove such reports from a meeting agenda, if they are still deemed inadequate.

SC.5/08 SCRUTINY SHADOWING ROLES

Members confirmed that they were kept fully briefed by their Executive counterparts, and continued to meet frequently. The Chairman was pleased with the way that the Leader of Council ensured she was kept well informed.

SC.6/07 AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OF SCRUTINY

a) Tone Leisure

The Group was informed that Tone Leisure representatives would be attending Scrutiny on 24 July 2008, 16 October 2008 and 19 March 2009. A Member also requested for an update on the Play Ranger activities to be provided at 24 July 2008 meeting.

b) Standards Board for England

The Chairman informed the Group that the Standards Board for England had indicated it would not be attending a future meeting of Scrutiny. However, the Monitoring Officer had suggested approaching them to attend a joint meeting with West Devon Borough Council to update on recent changes.

c) Highways Authority

The Group requested that a follow up letter be sent to the County Highways Authority inviting them to attend a future meeting.

d) Investment and Income

A Member requested the opportunity to examine the investment strategy and significant sources of income that the Council generated. In response, officers agreed to produce such a report for consideration at 17 December 2008 meeting.

e) South Hams Strategic Partnership

The Group agreed that the South Hams Strategic Partnership item should be removed from the future agenda items.

f) Grass Cutting

In light of concerns highlighted regarding the grass cutting regime, the Group requested that a brief summary report be produced and that the Head of Landscape and Leisure and Executive Portfolio Holder attend a future meeting of Scrutiny.

g) Staffing Levels

Members requested that the Head of Human Resources attend a future meeting of Scrutiny to discuss current staffing levels and the availability of officers across the Council. In acknowledging the inevitability of staff numbers reducing due to budgetary pressures, Members requested that a paper be produced on this matter for its consideration.

h) South West Water

Scrutiny wished for a representative to be invited to attend and outline progress it had made for 12 February 2009 meeting.

i) Devon PCT

It was requested that Devon PCT representatives be invited to attend the meeting of Scrutiny on 20 November 2008.

j) Digital Switchover

In order to evaluate whether the South Hams was prepared for the proposed digital switchover in April 2009, Members requested that the matter be investigated by Scrutiny.

k) Age Concern and the Children's Trust

Since the request of the Executive was made to invite representatives from these agencies, it was agreed that once responses had been received, these bodies would be programmed into the future agenda items.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.15 pm).

Chairman