

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SCRUTINY
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2007**

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

* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apologies for absence

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:
Cllrs H D Bastone, D W May, M F Saltern, R J Tucker.

Officers in attendance for all items: Member Support Services Manager. Item 6 (minute SC.17/07 below refers): Chief Executive items 6 and 7 (minute SC.17/07 and SC.18/07 below refers), Strategic Director (Community), Economic Development Officer. Item 7 (minute SC.18/07 below refers): Head of Community Regeneration and Head of Planning and Building Control.

SC.15/07 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny held on 26 July 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A Member expressed their desire to have the opportunity to be able to re-scrutinise South West Water in 12 -18 months, stating that some of the discussions centred on future work and require monitoring.

SC.16/07 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:

In respect of item 6: 'Post Office Network Change Programme' (minute SC.17/07 below refers), Cllr Baverstock wished for it to be noted that he was a member of Postwatch. In addition, it was recorded that Cllr Baldry had a Post Office pension but had obtained a dispensation to partake in the debate and discussion on any related matters.

SC.17/07 POST OFFICE NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME

The Chairman welcomed Tim Nickells, Network Development Manager South West to the meeting of the Scrutiny Group. Mr Nickells proceeded to inform Members that following the governments consultation exercise, 2,500 Post Office closures were proposed nationally.

The Post Office had written to Local Authorities requesting information that they felt was relevant and should be considered when selecting Post Offices for closure, for example significant new developments.

At the beginning of the planning stage data was interrogated and a list produced of potential Post Office branches that could be suitable for closure. The criteria for closure included the size of the branch in terms of customer usage, the proximity to other Post Offices and the financial impact in terms of the financial benefits to the Post Office. It was estimated that there would be an equal urban and rural split for the proposed closures.

Once the list of potential closure sites had been produced, Members were informed that each site was visited with an appraisal of the terrain and other facilities being undertaken.

Mr Nickells also stated that there would be further communications with the Local Authorities nearer the time of the closures.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- a.) whether possible redundancies were taken into account when selecting branches for closure. Members were informed that compulsory compensation for the termination of contracts would be awarded;
- b.) the definition of rural. For the benefits of this exercise, the rural population was defined as not being in excess of 10,000 residents;
- c.) the closures being a necessary exercise and it being accepted that closures had to be made. Scrutiny noted that previous closures had been on a voluntary basis however the Post Office now felt that the only way to progress the network was for it to take a lead on the closure programme;
- d.) the loss of subsidiary business products. A Member expressed their dismay at the loss of services that the Post Office used to provide. For example, the issuing of television licenses and pensions. In response, it was suggested that developments in technology had resulted in changes in buying products and services. Members were informed that despite the loss of some additional business the Post Office had become market leaders in other areas for example foreign currency;
- e.) the setting of criteria for closure and the knock on effect for local shops. Assurances were given that the effect on local shops was considered in accordance with the previously stated criteria;
- f.) community Post Offices. A Member enquired whether Post Offices could be operated and paid for by the community. Mr Nickells informed Members that this was possible, however it would still be at a cost to the Post Office An alternative that was being considered

was the introduction of 30 to 50 mobile Post Offices, with such a service already operating on the Devon and Cornwall border. The service offered a good life line to remote areas that had poor public transport routes. The Government had suggested in its report that future services for mobile Post Offices could be delivered on a joint working basis with Local Authorities that operate mobile libraries, therefore sharing the overheads.

RESOLVED

1. That the Post Office Change Programme be considered further at a future meeting of full Council;
2. That Scrutiny regrets the reduction in government use of Post Offices (e.g. through encouraging the crediting of pensions directly into bank accounts). Such practices have had a resulting detrimental affect on their viability;
3. That Scrutiny states its serious concern regarding the proposed closures on communities within the South Hams, particularly in relation to accessibility for the elderly and immobile and those generally socially disadvantaged.

SC.18/07 **SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS – VALUE FOR MONEY**

Consideration was given to a report that questioned whether the residents of the South Hams were getting sufficient value for money from Section 106 Agreements (S106).

Officers explained that there were 3 areas that S106 monies could be spent. These were

- Defining the nature of development to achieve planning objectives
- Mitigating the impact of development
- Compensating for loss or damage caused by development

Members were informed that the Planning and Building Control Service was considering recruiting additional staff members to monitor and deal with the administration of S106 Agreements.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- a) the involvement of other authorities (for example the local education authority). Officers informed Members that, as local planning authority, the Council took the lead in negotiations, but working in partnership with other stakeholders;
- b) the posts as outlined in the presented report. Members considered the proposals to be an excellent suggestion, but questioned whether

additional legal support would be required. Officers advised that an effective administration system should minimise the call on legal advice. It is anticipated that the posts will be self financing through S106 agreements, with a standard rate for small developments and a negotiated rate for large developments;

- c) deciding where the money was spent. Officers advised that set formulae can enable progress. Such an approach already existed for education, public open space and affordable housing, the last of these currently being reviewed and refreshed. The Public Spaces Strategy also provided an objective view on how and where S106 monies could be spent;
- d) quarterly reports for Scrutiny. A Member asked whether quarterly reports setting out the position on S106 agreements and approaching deadlines for expenditure could be presented to the Scrutiny Group on a quarterly basis. Officers felt that once the proposed posts had been recruited, such reporting would be achievable;
- e) the Wimpey development at Staddiscombe. A Member expressed his concern that the S106 monies negotiated for this development were utilised in Plymouth rather than the South Hams. Members were advised that the negotiations reflected the pattern of needs of people living on the development site who would substantially rely on facilities in Plymouth. Members considered that better control and management of development on the urban fringes was needed. It was hoped that the Plymouth Urban Fringe Development Plan Document would address such issues in the future.

RESOLVED

1. That a quarterly monitoring report be presented to Scrutiny from 1 April 2008 on the progress being made with Section 106 Agreements, particularly focusing on schemes where deadlines to utilise monies was approaching;

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that:

2. The Section 106 register (as outlined in Appendix 1 of the presented report) be amended to be more reader friendly and understandable to interested parties, with planning obligation being transparent and predictable;
3. The Group commend the best practice used by other authorities and encourage the implementation of such working methods, in instances where officers identify them as being beneficial to the Council;
4. A formula based approach for calculating Section 106 contributions be encouraged as far as is practically possible;

5. With the onus being on self-financing, the staffing proposals (as outlined in paragraph 11 of the presented report) be implemented at the earliest opportunity possible;
6. Scrutiny recognise that Section 106 Agreements for Sherford were to be a major challenge to the Council and wish for a report to be brought to the Executive at the earliest opportunity possible;
7. In the future for any development on the urban fringes of the South Hams, any Section 106 monies should be sought to be spent in the South Hams as far as is practically possible.

SC.19/07 **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – PROGRESS REPORT**

Consideration was given to a report that informed Members of the achievement against selected Performance Indicators (PI's) for quarter 1 within 2007/08.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- a) the percentage of telephone calls answered within 20 seconds (PI CST 1). The Executive Member informed that the drop in the number of telephone calls answered in the target time was due to the sheer volume being received. The Member advised that 3.7 out of 6.5 members of staff were answering calls solely regarding waste issues. The point was made that the switchboard may also be a contributing factor to the delay.

Members expressed their frustration at the lack of an officer explanation being provided with the data and asked that an explanation and solution to the problem be sought with Members being advised accordingly;

- b) the levels of staff turnover. Whilst not meeting its target, Members were not concerned by the level of staff turnover bearing in mind the size of the Council. Members felt that natural wastage presented the opportunity for efficiencies to be made and allow for the review of posts which could be productive.

RESOLVED

That Scrutiny note and comment on Part A and Part B on the performance against the national and local indicators which currently form the Council's Balanced Scorecard, set out in Appendix a, for the 2007/08 performance indicator year (Quarter 1 = April 07 – June 07).

SC.20/07 SCRUTINY SHADOWING ROLES

Members provided an update on the progress of their respective shadowing roles. It was apparent that many Members were in constant contact with their Executive counterpart and the arrangement was working well.

SC.21/07 NEEDS OF YOUNGER PEOPLE

Members considered a briefing paper detailing the work undertaken by the Scrutiny sub-committee. The Chairman commended the group on their enthusiasm and thanked them for their on going work and progress being made.

SC.22/07 AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OF SCRUTINY

Members were made aware that there were currently no items programmed for the Scrutiny Group meeting of 18 October 2007. A Member suggested an update from the children and young people sub-committee with Gill Till, Children and Young Peoples Officer also being invited to attend this meeting.

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

Chairman