

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SCRUTINY  
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY, 21 JUNE 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

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:

Cllrs N A Barnes, B F Carson, P W Hitchins, R M Lawrence, D M O'Callaghan,  
J T Pennington, S L Rankin, M F Saltern.

Also in attendance but not participating:

Cllrs M J Howarth and J Brazil

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

Item 7 (see SC.04/07 below) Strategic Director (Operations) and Head of Business  
Development

Item 8 (see SC.05/07) Corporate Improvement Officer.

**SC.01/07 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny held on 19 April 2007 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**SC.02/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**SC.03/07 INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRUTINY FUNCTION**

The Member Support Services Manager on behalf of the Chief Executive, referred to the broad role of Scrutiny and particularly to the ability to review services provided by external bodies. This was an aspect of Scrutiny's role that the Government were looking to enhance through the current local Government Bill.

**SC.04/07 REVIEW OF CHANGES – WASTE COLLECTION**

A report was considered which provided Members with an update on the progress of changes to the household waste collection service within the District, together with identifying key achievements in relation to performance.

The report concluded that the waste collection service had been changed significantly over the past three years to accommodate changes in customer expectation and new legislation imposed on councils. The residents of the South Hams wanted to recycle and compost their waste and it was for this Council to determine how best to enable them to do so within the confines of a limited budget resource.

Officers advised that, at the meeting of Scrutiny on 22 February 2007 (SC.55/06 refers), a report was presented which reviewed the waste collection system and a waste project review team was established to look at ways of improving the service. The aim was to try and keep the level of recycling high but to achieve this with less cost and increased efficiency. Currently the service had a projected 17% overspend on the agreed budget. Problems had been exacerbated by the absence of the Head of Service on long term sick leave.

Officers further advised that the zoning technique of waste collection had proved inefficient and that the fleet of collection vehicles was ageing. A renewal programme of these vehicles had started and ways of replacing the old vehicles were being explored. The caged vehicles, which collected the dry recyclables, were being replaced with a clean refuse vehicle, which was thought to be the most efficient solution as it reduced the number of times that the vehicle had to be emptied.

During discussion, reference was made to:

- (i) the possibility that externalising the waste collection service could be considered in the future;
- (ii) the £20,000 cost of employing external advisors, funded by the Waste Resources Action Programme, to provide options on the rerouting of the waste collection rounds;
- (iii) why there had been a drop in productivity. Officers considered this to be a result of the new zoning work methodology which did not incentivise collection crews;
- (iv) the increase in vehicle accident rates. Officers attributed this to the drivers having to learn the new routes and become acquainted with the turning angles required, which was proving difficult. Officers also advised that there was also a national shortage of HGV drivers and those that were recruited were difficult to retain. Therefore the service was relying on agency staff who did not know the routes to fill the vacancies;

- (v) A Member's concern at the number of vehicle breakdowns and enquiry as to whether particular depots suffered more breakdowns than others. Officers advised that no particular depot experienced more breakdowns than others, however Ivybridge experienced more 'down time' due to the vehicles having to be transported to Tor Quarry for repairs;
- (vi) the cost of weekly collections of organic waste if this was introduced for the months of June, July and August. Officers advised that it would be an estimated cost of £250,000 and that it would not be possible to introduce in the current year;
- (vii) a pilot scheme in Totnes for the recycling of business waste. Officers advised that the financial viability of this would be assessed before consideration was given to introducing a district-wide service;
- (viii) the Council's current practice of writing off vehicles over 7 years compared to the industry standard of 5 years;
- (ix) a report on proposed remedial action, which Members were advised would be considered by the Environment Policy Development Group in September 2007 and, subject to approval, be implemented in November of that year;
- (x) Members' concerns at levels of fly-tipping. Officers advised that the bulky waste collection service would be reviewed this year.

In comparison to other authorities South Hams District Council remained second in the county for waste recycling.

### **RESOLVED**

That the Scrutiny Group notes the progress made in the introduction of the waste changes and supports further investigation to streamline the service and bring it back into budget.

Scrutiny notes with concern the dissatisfaction of South Hams residents with the service. In aiming to meet targets the service level to our residents must be paramount. We have particular concern with the reliability of vehicles. The Executive Member and Officers should make a further report to Scrutiny in six months (January 2008).

## SC.05/07 **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – PROGRESS UPDATE**

A report was considered which informed Members of the Council's achievement against selected Performance Indicators for the year ended March 2007.

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.

During discussion, reference was made to:-

- (i) the drop in performance when answering phone calls within 20 seconds. Officers advised that this drop was due to the significant increase in calls received when changes to waste collection were introduced. The Customer Services Team were further hampered by staff sickness;
- (ii) CST 3 and a Member's wish to see actual numbers of e-mails included;
- (iii) a reduction in the number of households on the housing register, when comparing figures for 2006/07 against those for the previous year;
- (iv) below target performance for the processing of benefit claims. Members were advised that the Council's performance compared favourably at a national level, achieving the highest grade in a Department of Work and Pensions assessment.

Concerns were raised at the high levels of staff sickness in the Revenues and Benefits Service. A Member had asked the Health and Safety Officer to look at the possible causes;

- (v) CR3, and a Member's suggestion that the target for the 'number of households considered to be in high housing need' of 800 seemed too generous and therefore needed to be revised;
- (vi) Members' concerns at the deficit in the 'number of new affordable homes completed'. It was noted that a report on this would be presented to the Community Policy Development Group;
- (vii) a Members' suggestion that a comparative table showing the cost of household waste collection for other comparable local authorities would be useful when considering the cost of collection for this Council. Officers agreed to re-circulate a table which showed all the statutory performance indicators in comparison to other comparable local authorities;

- (viii) the significant reduction of energy consumption at Council owned premises and that the target should be revised. The transfer of the Leisure Centres had affected the reduction of these levels and the target needed to be revised accordingly.

### **RESOLVED**

That Scrutiny noted and commented on the Council's performance against the national and local indicators which currently form the Council's Balanced Scorecard for the 2006/07 performance indicator year.

#### **SC.06/07 SCRUTINY SHADOWING ROLES**

Each Scrutiny member was asked to shadow a Member of the Executive. The Chairman and Vice Chairman would shadow the Leader and Deputy Leader respectively. The Chairman asked Scrutiny Members to notify her with their preference for shadowing roles before the next meeting.

#### **SC.07/07 AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OF SCRUTINY**

##### **a. Section 106 Agreements**

Members questioned whether South Hams residents were getting sufficient value for money from Section 106 Agreements and felt that the matter required investigation by Scrutiny.

##### **b. South Hams Strategic Partnership**

Members felt that the effectiveness of the Partnership should be investigated. In response, it was noted that a number of local authorities had undertaken similar studies on their respective local strategic partnerships.

##### **c. Cost of Hospital Transport**

Members requested officers to invite a representative from the Health Authority to respond to questions regarding the cost of hospital transport.

##### **d. Environment Agency**

Members wished to invite a representative from the Environment Agency to attend a Scrutiny meeting to discuss river management and their role within the planning process.

SC.08/07     **SCOPING PAPER ON THE NEEDS OF YOUNGER PEOPLE**

Cllr Baverstock presented a scoping paper on the needs of younger people. Members of Scrutiny concluded that a sub group of three Members Cllrs Baverstock, Squire and Westacott and the young persons champion be established to examine what South Hams District Council was doing to address the needs of younger people and what areas required attention.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.45 pm).

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Chairman