

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **District Executive** held at the **Council Chamber, Brympton Way, Yeovil, Somerset on Thursday 6 September 2018.**

(9.30 am - 12.15 pm)

**Present:**

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker	Sylvia Seal
Peter Gubbins	Peter Seib
Henry Hobhouse	Nick Weeks
Jo Roundell Greene	

**Also Present:**

Mike Lewis	Gina Seaton
Tony Lock	Sue Steele
Sue Osborne	

**Officers**

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Netta Meadows	Director (Strategy & Commissioning)
Martin Woods	Director (Service Delivery)
Paul Fitzgerald	Section 151 Officer
Angela Watson	Monitoring Officer
Katy Menday	Leisure & Recreation Manager
David Clews	Policy Planner (Spatial Policy)
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
David Julian	Economic Development Manager
Nicola Hix	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Angela Cox	Democratic Services Specialist

**Note:** All decisions were approved without dissent unless shown otherwise.

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### **40. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)**

The minutes of the District Executive meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2018, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

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### **41. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Graham Middleton and Angie Singleton.

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### **42. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)**

Councillor Val Keitch declared a personal interest in Agenda item 6: Proposed designation of Herne Hill, Ilminster as a Local Nature Reserve as a member of Ilminster Town Council.

Councillor Peter Gubbins stated that as he lived in the Parish of West Coker, he had no interest to declare in Agenda item 9: East Coker Neighbourhood Plan Referendum.

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#### **43. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)**

It was agreed that members of the public wishing to speak would do so at the time the item was discussed during the meeting.

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#### **44. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)**

The Chairman paid tribute to Councillor Ric Pallister, the former Leader of Council. She said that his service to the Executive and the Council had been exceptional and all Councillors owed him a debt of gratitude.

The Chairman also noted that she would be making some small changes to the Executive Portfolio Holder responsibilities which would be circulated to Councillors shortly.

Finally, the Chairman welcomed Councillor Jason Baker to his first meeting of the District executive as the new Chairman of the Area West Committee.

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#### **45. Proposed Designation of Herne Hill, Ilminster as a Local Nature Reserve (Agenda Item 6)**

The Leisure and Recreation Manager advised that the report from Ilminster Town Council requested the designation of Herne Hill as a Local Nature Reserve. She said that she had visited the site and read the proposed Management Plan and agreed with its proposals. The area was a peaceful 8 acres of woodland and the Town Council as owners were obliged to protect its natural features. She concluded that it was appropriate to designate the area as a Local Nature Reserve.

In response to a question from the Scrutiny Committee, the Leisure and Recreation Manager confirmed that the designation would be mapped and have weight in planning terms.

Councillor Henry Hobhouse also suggested that an annual flora and fauna survey be carried out at the site.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members unanimously endorsed the proposal that Herne Hill become a Local Nature Reserve.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive agreed to:-

- a. Endorse the proposal that Herne Hill becomes a Local Nature

Reserve

- b. Delegate to Ilminster Town Council under s19 of the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949 the power to declare Herne Hill as land held and managed by the Town Council as a Local Nature Reserve

**Reason:** To agree that Ilminster Town Council be given delegated authority to declare and consult on the proposed designation of Local Nature Reserve status (LNR) for Herne Hill under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

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#### **46. Revisions to the Statement of Community Involvement in respect of Neighbourhood Plans (Agenda Item 7)**

The Director for Strategy and Commissioning introduced the report which proposed revisions to the Council's current Statement of Community Involvement.

In response to questions from the Scrutiny Committee, the Director for Strategy and Commissioning and the Policy Planner advised:-

- The grant of up to £20,000 which SSDC were able to claim from the Department for Housing Communities and Local Government towards the costs of progressing the Neighbourhood Plan was sufficient to cover all the costs incurred by SSDC, including the cost of the referendum.
- The basic grant of £8,000 went to all Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups but if there were particular complexities, they could seek additional funding, however, he was not aware of any groups which had qualified for this as yet.
- The Local Plan was currently under review and once it had been adopted then all Neighbourhood Plan steering groups would be encouraged to review their plans to ensure they complied.

During discussion, it was noted that the Planning Officer duty hours needed revising, the Community Right to Build, and, the requirement to keep Neighbourhood Plans current and up to date should be included in the final document. With these amendments to the text, Members unanimously agreed the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

**RESOLVED:** That the District Executive agreed to the proposed revisions to the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, with some minor text amendments.

**Reason:** To approve the proposed revisions to the December 2015 Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in order to comply with the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017.

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#### **47. The 'Making' of the South Petherton Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda Item 8)**

The Director for Strategy and Commissioning advised that when adopted, the South Petherton Neighbourhood Plan would carry the same weight as the Local Plan, and, the

area would benefit from 25% of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts from development in their area.

In response to questions from the Scrutiny Committee, the Policy Planner confirmed that once the Examiner's report was published, a Neighbourhood Plan became a material consideration, and, when it was adopted it was part of the statutory Local Plan.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members unanimously confirmed their agreement to the making of the South Petherton Neighbourhood Plan. The Chairman congratulated the residents of South Petherton for their work in bringing the plan forward.

**RESOLVED:** That the District Executive agreed to the making of the South Petherton Neighbourhood Plan.

**Reason:** To note the result of the Referendum in relation to the South Petherton Neighbourhood Plan and to confirm that the Plan be 'made' (or adopted).

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#### 48. The East Coker Neighbourhood Plan Referendum (Agenda Item 9)

The Committee were addressed by the Chair of the East Coker Neighbourhood Plan Steering group who advised that its production had taken almost 6 years to complete. She said that a wide range of consultation had taken place in the community and the independent examiner had supported the plan with some small modifications.

The Policy Planner confirmed that the further amendment required was the display of a map on two pages being condensed to one page for clarity and he did not wish to hold up the referendum process for this issue alone.

Members agreed to confirm the East Coker Neighbourhood Plan and to delegate the sign off of the final version of the Plan with any final minor text amendments to the Director for Strategy and Commissioning in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning in agreement with East Coker Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive:-

- a. agreed to the Examiner's report and recommendations for Proposed Modifications to the East Coker Neighbourhood Plan.
- b. agreed to the Council organising a referendum for local people on the Electoral Register as to whether they want South Somerset District Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for East Coker to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area.
- c. delegated responsibility to the Director for Strategy and Commissioning in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning to make any final minor text amendments to the Neighbourhood Plan, and to sign off the final version of the Plan in agreement with East Coker Parish Council and the Neighbourhood

Plan Steering Group.

**Reason:** To note the progress made on the preparation of the East Coker Neighbourhood Plan; to agree the independent Examiner's report and recommendations for Proposed Modifications; and to set out the process for 'making' the plan following a favourable local referendum to be organised by the District Council.

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**49. Update on Superfast Broadband for Rural Businesses (Agenda Item 10)**

The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Economic Development and Transformation noted her frustration that Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) were not confirming which areas they had connected to superfast broadband and where they would be connecting in the future.

The Lead Specialist – Economy advised that the Gigabit Voucher scheme operated through Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) could provide up to £3,000 for fibre broadband connections for businesses and up to £500 for private houses although there were often funding gaps. Because of State Aid rules, SSDC would not be able to offer their own scheme in isolation.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- An external aerial could boost broadband in a low reception area by up to 5GB but only where there was a mobile phone signal, and a satellite signal could be used instead.
- Parish Councils could be asked to provide details of low/no broadband cover in their area to provide a picture of coverage across the district.
- Grants made by Area Committees to rural communities to assist with local broadband connections must not be contrary to State Aid rules.

In response to questions from Members, the Lead Specialist – Economy advised:-

- Their focus had been to connect both rural businesses and rural communities and there were good examples of communities pooling money to have broadband installed.
- The rules of State Aid were not expected to be relaxed after exit from the EU until at least 2020/21.
- Gigaclear were a commercial service and as such were entitled to charge to connect to broadband through their equipment.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to confirm the recommendations of the report.

For information, the links to the Gigabit Voucher scheme are:-

[www.gigabitvoucherscheme.net](http://www.gigabitvoucherscheme.net)

<https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive:-

- a. Noted the content of the report.
- b. Agreed that officer time and resource be allocated to working with Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) and Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) (and other parties as necessary) to clarify and promote their voucher schemes to maximise the coverage of Superfast Broadband across the District
- c. Requested officers to report back to District Executive and Full Council as soon as sufficient information is available for members to take a decision on committing any SSDC funding to 'top-up' such a superfast broadband voucher scheme.

**Reason:** To provide members with an update on phase 2 of the Superfast Broadband Extension Programme.

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**50. Financial Strategy and Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20 (Agenda Item 11)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services said significant progress had been made by the Finance team and the budget gap for the current year and 2019/20 had now been closed. The Transformation programme was expected to deliver the required savings over the following 5 years. He also noted the possibility that the negative rate support grant due in 2019/20 may be abandoned by the Government

The Section 151 Officer noted there was a target to achieve £6m savings per year and to reduce the Council's reliance on the use of New Homes Bonus as part of the budget process. He noted that a cautious approach would be taken to commercial acquisitions and they would be included in the budget on completion. Somerset County Council had published an assessment of their finances and they were a potential additional risk to SSDC. He concluded that the Government had indicated they would allow Council Tax to rise by 3% or £5 and he had clarified a question raised at Scrutiny Committee regarding the "Other Earmarked Reserves" figure of £1.216m and provided a summary breakdown of that total figure.

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer and Lead Specialist – Finance, confirmed:-

- An analysis of the impact of the proposed SCC emergency budget was underway and if Members wished to mitigate any of their proposals then officers would need to analyse the impact and discuss this with Members.
- Both S106 and CIL funding was managed outside the core budget.
- Specific reserves would be added in future for treasury investment management and commercial acquisitions.

During discussion it was noted that one agreed, the proposed cuts to SCC services should be communicated to the Town and Parish Councils.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee thanked the Section 151 Officer for attending their meeting and answering their questions on points of detail and for providing additional clarification.

At the conclusion of the debate, the majority of Members were content to confirm the recommendations of the report.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive:-

- a. approved the Financial Strategy.
- b. noted the current position and timetable for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Budget estimates.

**Reason:** To confirm support for the updated Financial Strategy and provide Members with information regarding the initial Medium Term Financial Plan estimates for the period 2019/20 to 2022/24.

*(Voting: 7 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)*

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## **51. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)**

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee asked if it was possible to have information or a workshop on the Local Plan review ahead of the report to the Executive Committee

It was also requested that clarity be sought from the Local Government Boundary Commission as to when the SSDC Ward Boundaries would change and if this would happen ahead of the elections due in May 2019.

**RESOLVED:** That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following addition;
  - Current position of the Local Government Boundary Review
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B.

**Reason:** The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

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## **52. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)**

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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**53. Exclusion of Press and Public (Agenda Item 14)**

**RESOLVED:** That the following item be considered in Closed Session by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A under Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

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**54. SSDC Operational Office Accommodation - Update on review of options for Brympton Way and Petters House (Confidential) (Agenda Item 15)**

The Chief Executive provided Members with an update of the options researched by officers during the operational property review and asked Members to indicate where they should concentrate their future efforts.

Members discussed the proposed options at length and at the conclusion of the debate, they unanimously agreed that officers progress the two suggested options in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the District Executive agreed the recommendations of the report.

**Reason:** To update Members on findings and recommendations following the March 2018 District Executive report on SSDC operational office accommodation in Yeovil.

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Chairman

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Date