

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held at the **Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil** on **Thursday 7 February 2019**.

(9.30 am - 12.50 pm)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Peter Gubbins
Henry Hobhouse
Graham Middleton
Jo Roundell Greene

Sylvia Seal
Peter Seib
Angie Singleton
Nick Weeks



Also Present:

Nick Colbert
Mike Lewis
Sue Osborne

Gina Seaton
Sue Steele
Colin Winder

Officers

Alex Parmley
Netta Meadows
Clare Pestell
Martin Woods
Paul Fitzgerald
Angela Watson
Nicola Hix
Angela Cox
Jan Gamon
Charlotte Jones
Leisa Kelly
Anna-Maria Lenz
Jo Manley
Chereen Scott
Jo Wilkins
Peter Paddon
David Crisfield
Vicki Dawson
Cath Temple
Angela Kerr

Chief Executive
Director (Strategy & Support Services)
Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Director (Service Delivery)
Section 151 Officer
Monitoring Officer
Lead Specialist (Finance)
Democratic Services Specialist
Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Lead Specialist (People, Performance & Change)
Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Lead Specialist (Economy)
Third Sector and Equalities Co-ordinator
Lead Specialist (Environmental Health)
Specialist (Performance)
Chief Executive, Citizens Advice South Somerset

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

105. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the District Executive meeting held on 10th January 2019, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

106. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Alex Parmley, Chief Executive, who joined the meeting at 12.00pm.

107. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

108. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

The Committee were addressed by a resident who represented the Save the Shudrick Valley residents. He noted that the Shudrick Valley site had previously been proposed for housing but had been lost at a planning appeal where the planning inspector had cited his reasons for refusal as harm to the landscape, heritage and conservation of the area. He questioned how these issues could be addressed as the site was now included in the Local Plan Review at Agenda item 7.

A resident of Ilminster expressed her concern that the Shudrick Valley site was back in the Local Plan and asked who was responsible for doing this?

A resident asked if the reappearance of the Shudrick Valley site in the Local Plan related to the Comber Park site at Kingstone?

A resident of Kingstone asked what had changed to bring the Shudrick Valley site back into the Local Plan when it had so recently been refused permission by a planning inspector?

The Chairman and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning said that the questions raised would be answered during consideration of Agenda item 7: Local Plan Review.

109. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

110. Funding for Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) (Agenda Item 6)

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Culture introduced the report and advised that all the Citizens Advice bureaux across Somerset had their budgets cut by 100% which represented a loss of £419,000. She noted the valuable work which they undertook on behalf of the County's vulnerable residents and she introduced Angela Kerr, their Chief Executive to speak in support of the recommendations.

The Chief Executive of Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) said she appreciated the support of the District Council and it had been helpful to discuss their funding with officers and Councillors. She said the loss of core funding was sudden but not

unexpected but regretted the risk of the severed relationship with the County Council. She said the use of modern technology was helping their efficiency together with collaboration with other Citizens Advice bureaux across Somerset to share staffing. She concluded that it would be a challenge to maintain their outreach work but she was bid writing for additional funding and was confident the service would be maintained during 2019/20.

During discussion, Members expressed their support for Citizens Advice South Somerset and the valuable services they provided to vulnerable residents.

It was noted that the grant funding was part of the draft budget to be proposed to Council at Agenda item 13 and the recommendation was amended to reflect this. Members fully supported the additional one-off financial contribution for the year 2019/20 of up to £32,000 to Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) and agreed to receive a further report by December 2019 with proposals for consolidating and securing the long-term future of CASS.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to:-

- a. note the report and support the inclusion of £32,000 to Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) within the draft budget to be recommended to Council, included in Item 13 on the agenda within the 2019/20 budget
- b. receive a further report by, December 2019, with proposals for consolidating and securing the long-term future of CASS beyond March 31st 2020.

Reason: To confirm one off additional financial contributions to mitigate the County Council cuts to the core funding of Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS).

111. Local Plan Review 2016-2036 Preferred Options for Consultation (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning (Place Making) advised that the consultation on the issues and options had taken place and the responses had informed the proposed further consultation (Preferred Options document). She noted there was a new formula for calculating the housing requirement in the area which meant 14,510 properties to be built which equated to 726 per year. She said the majority of new housing would be in Yeovil followed by the Market Towns and Rural Centres though the employment land requirements were not complete it was appropriate to continue with the consultation.

The Specialist (Strategic Planning) said the consultation document had been prepared in line with the new National Planning Performance Framework (NPPF) published in July 2018 and was constantly measured against the housing land supply. In response to the public questions regarding the Shudrick Valley site in Ilminster, she said that although they were aware of the history, Ilminster was a sustainable market town and it could not be discounted for future development. The proposed upgrades to the A358 and A303

were of significance. She had no immediate knowledge of the proposed Carnival site in Kingstone and would provide a written answer to this question.

Written answer:

The Preferred Options site at Shudrick Lane is not related to planning application number 18/02609/FUL: erection of buildings to store and aid the construction of carnival floats. Ilminster Town Council, are the named applicant on the planning application, submitting on behalf of the Carnival Club, benefiting from a 50% discount in the application fee. There have been concerns raised from interested parties, including the neighbouring Parish Council's/Meetings regarding the lack of consultation prior to the application being submitted, however advice from Legal Services has confirmed that there is nothing procedurally incorrect with the approach that has been taken.

The second Specialist (Strategic Planning) noted that the district wide figure for employment land had reduced from the adopted Local Plan figure of 140 hectares to 91 hectares due to revised economic projections equating to less jobs requiring employment land/premises. This was partly due to the ageing population and a rise in people working from home. She was currently working through the review to produce evidence by settlement.

In response to questions from Members, the Specialists Strategic Planning and the Lead Specialist, Strategic Planning advised that:-

- The employment policy had evolved significantly from the previous plan and was supportive of businesses in market towns. If businesses came forward the policies would support them.
- If the planning appeal at Foxes Run, Castle Cary is dismissed then the site would be removed from the Plan.
- The submission for a garden town/village near Babcary was not being proposed in the Preferred Options document.
- There was a new category in the settlement hierarchy for Villages.
- The annual target of 726 dwellings had only been exceeded twice in the past 10 years. The delivery of housing was a priority project in the new Council Plan.
- The Growth Deal for Oxfordshire includes the delivery of 100,000 homes by 2031 and introduces so called 'planning flexibilities' for the authorities in the county. These include the introduction of a county-wide 3 year housing land supply being applied whilst the new Joint Spatial Plan is being prepared, as well as a bespoke Housing Delivery Test

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- The area needed inward investment in order to achieve the 726 dwellings per year.
- There was a need in rural communities for good quality broadband connections
- The Government should review their policies if Councils were unable to achieve the housing figures.
- The Council Plan priority projects 5 and 6 should help towards opening some of the key sites for development.

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

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to:-

- a. approve for consultation the Regulation 18 Local Plan Review 2016-2036 Preferred Options document (published in a separate appendix) in June 2019.
- b. delegate responsibility for the production, technical editing and styling of the consultation document to the Lead Specialist-Strategic Planning in association with the Director, Strategy and Support Services and the Portfolio Holder Strategic Planning (Place Making).

Reason: To agree to consultation on the Local Plan Review 2016-2036 Preferred Options document in June 2019.

112. SSDC Council Plan Update 2019-20 (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Policy introduced the report and thanked officers for their work in compiling the refreshed Council Plan.

The Lead Specialist - Strategic Planning reminded Members that the plan had been presented at the Area Committees and several workshops. The six priority projects would be monitored through project boards and the plan now included Area Chapters, a performance monitoring plan and key performance indicators.

In response to questions from Members, the Lead Specialist – Performance confirmed that the Communications team would use all the communication channels available to promote the plan and there would be six monthly reports to the Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to propose the updated Council Plan and key performance indicators for 2019-20 to Full Council for approval.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend that Council:-

- a. agree the updated Council Plan and key performance indicators for 2019-20;
- b. note the detailed milestones and desired outcomes for each Priority Project;
- c. agree the Area Chapters;
- d. agree the KPIs and performance monitoring plan.

Reason: To propose that Council agree the adoption of the South Somerset District Council (SSDC) Council Plan 2019-20, together with a revised set of Key Performance Indicators.

113. Economic Development Strategy (2019 - 2028) Delivery Budget (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Environment Development and Transformation introduced the report and thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their comments. She noted that Crewkerne would be the next market town to benefit from a regeneration strategy and action plan.

In response to questions from Members, the Lead Specialist – Economy and the Director for Strategy and Support Services confirmed:-

- To successfully use the potential funding set aside to extend the broadband programme across the district, the money must be spent within EU funding rules and specialist advice was needed to achieve this.
- In the last week, the Government had announced that all District Councils would receive £17,500 in 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years (£35,000 in total), to assist with planning for and meeting local implications of Brexit. Although the Council had no plans yet, a staff workshop would look at this.
- There may be Government funding available at short notice for regeneration and economic development schemes and so the team would work on having projects ready for this.

During discussion, it was suggested that the Council work with landowners to plant trees to support and grow a local sustainable economy however, it was noted this was part of the Council Plan and could be achieved in discussion with the Streetscene team.

At the conclusion of the debate, it was noted that the proposed funding was part of the draft budget at Agenda item 13 and the recommendation was amended to reflect this. Members were content to confirm the amended recommendation.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive supported the one off revenue funding of £200,000 for the Economic Development Strategy (EDS) Delivery Programme, with £146,000 allocated in 2019/20 and the remaining £54,000 in the 2020/21 budget as included within the draft budget for 2019/20 and 2020/21 to be recommended to Council.

Reason: To agree an Economic Development Strategy (EDS) 2019 – 2028 Delivery Budget for 2019/20 and 2020/21.

114. Adoption of the Somerset Housing Strategy (2019-2023) (Agenda Item 10)

The Lead Specialist Strategic Planning advised that the Somerset Housing Strategy had been put together by the 5 Somerset Councils, local Housing Associations and the National Park and she was confident it was a fair reflection of the priorities across the County. The draft Action Plan for South Somerset was in accord with the Council Plan and it would be subject to periodic revision.

In response to questions from Members, the Lead Specialist, Strategic Planning confirmed that:-

- Her team had analysed the service cuts proposed by the County Council and knew where SSDC could work most effectively to minimise their effects.
- Some of the data used in the Strategy could have been more up to date but this was a County-wide strategy.
- The intention of the Strategy was to support, shape and enable appropriate housing in the areas of need.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to adopt the Somerset Housing Strategy and action plan for the district.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to adopt the Somerset Housing Strategy (it's Vision, Themes, Priorities and Objectives) and supported the action plan for the district.

Reason: To agree and adopt the Somerset Housing Strategy (SHS)

115. 2018/19 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31st December 2018 (Agenda Item 11)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and noted a small correction in the table at page 60 which should be a minus figure.

The Lead Specialist – Finance noted that there was a decline in car park income and the sale of season tickets. This may be due to the new car park at Yeovil District Hospital.

There was no debate and Members were content to confirm the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to:-

- a. note the current 2018/19 financial position of the Council;
- b. note the reasons for variations to the previously approved Directorate Budgets as detailed in paragraph 9, Table 1;
- c. note the virements made under delegated authority as detailed in Appendix B; and
- d. note the transfers made to and from reserves outlined in paragraph 28, Table 5 and the position of the Area Reserves as detailed in Appendix C and the Corporate Reserves as detailed in Appendix D.

Reason: To provide Members with the current projection of the forecast spending and income ("outturn") against the Council's approved Revenue Budget for the financial year, and to explain projected variations against budget.

(Voting: 9 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)

116. 2018/19 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31st December 2018 (Agenda Item 12)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and noted that almost £15m had been spent on capital projects during the year and it was projected to spend £24m by the end of the financial year. He noted there were some delayed projects which Members were required to confirm remained in the programme.

There was no debate and Members were content to confirm the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to:-

- a. note the content of the report;
- b. approve the revised Capital Programme spend profile as detailed in paragraph 7, Table 1.
- c. approve the projects listed on Appendix B remain in the capital programme.

Reason: To provide Members with an in-year projection in 2018/19 of the forecast spending ("outturn") against the Council's approved Capital Programme Budget, and to explain projected variations against individual projects and the Programme as a whole.

117. 2019/20 Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan (Agenda Item 13)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and advised that a balanced budget was presented for 2019/20 whilst maintaining services to the public. Funding was being committed to the priority regeneration projects in Yeovil and Chard so they would be fully funded and an increase in Council Tax of 2.85% was proposed. He concluded by thanking the Finance staff for their work in producing the balanced budget.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services and the Section 151 Officer advised:-

- The level of Business Rates was set by the Government and SSDC were the collection agency.
- The Council's investments were producing the returns expected.
- Officers would check and report where the funding previously set aside for flooding issues had been allocated.
- There was no fixed timetable for the Council to embark on short term borrowing and it would depend upon income from investments.
- The Government Guidance on income generation for Local Authorities was around the scale of risk which they were entering into. The guidance was for prudent investment and proportionate financing.

The Section 151 Officer drew Members attention to his officer conclusion on page 104 in which he gave reassurance that the budget was robust and the levels of reserves and balances had been reviewed and were adequate. He noted there was uncertainty in future years from the Government's Fair Funding Review and the review of New Homes Bonus but he said good progress was being made and a clear strategy was in place.

At the conclusion of the debate, the majority of Members were content to propose the recommendations for confirmation by Full Council.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- a. recommend that Full Council approves the Net Revenue Budget for 2019/20 of **£16,197,800**, as set out in the Revenue Account Summary (paragraph 46) and in detail in Appendix A for the District Executive and four Area Committees, subject to any final amendments;
 - b. recommend to Full Council a 2019/20 Council tax annual increase of 2.85%, increasing the annual Band D rate by £4.63 to £167.11. Full Council to note this new annual rate comprises £165.26 for SSDC services, raising £9,959,571, and £1.85 on behalf of the Somerset Rivers Authority, raising £111,492;
 - c. recommends to Full Council the reprioritisation of £2.5m from the MTFP support fund to Regeneration as detailed in paragraph 43;
- recommends that Full Council approves the additions to the Capital Programme for new capital bids of £1.7395m as shown in Appendix D.

Reason: To set out the Draft Budget and proposed council tax for 2019/20 to enable Executive to recommend proposals to Full Council for approval. The report is based on the Medium Term Financial Plan (Revenue Budgets for 2019/20 to 2023/24) and also includes proposed additions to the Capital Programme.

(Voting: 9 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)

118. SSDC Capital Strategy 2019/20 (Agenda Item 14)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and advised that as the Council purchased assets, the capital increased. He thanked the South West Audit Partnership for their assistance in reviewing the commercial investments which also informed the Capital Strategy and proposed it be forwarded to Council for approval.

In response to questions from the Scrutiny Committee it was noted that the commercial strategy arrangements had been reviewed within the Audit Plan by the South West Audit Partnership.

At the conclusion of the debate, the majority of Members were content to propose the SSDC Capital Strategy 2019/20 to Full Council for approval.

RESOLVED: That District Executive reviewed and recommended the capital strategy and the borrowing and investment limits for approval to Full Council.

Reason: The capital strategy is an annual report which must be approved by Full Council before the start of the financial year in line with the revised CIPFA Prudential Code.

(Voting: 9 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)

119. SSDC Investment Strategy 2019/20 (Agenda Item 15)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and advised the strategy would be reviewed annually. There was Member involvement in the decision making and the Leader of Council was informed of any risk.

In response to a question, the Section 151 Officer and Director for Income Generation confirmed the net yield figure was intended to introduce an element of transparency in the Council's investments. This was the net contribution to the revenue budget after accounting provisions and sinking funds. The Council's balance sheet was increasing in value and a 3.6% return was very good in the current market conditions.

The Portfolio Holder for Income Generation confirmed that the investment in housing in Marlborough would produce an income from April onwards and the battery storage project was not yet on-line.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to propose the SSDC Investment Strategy 2019/20 to Full Council for approval.

RESOLVED: That District Executive reviewed and recommended that the Full Council approve the Investment Strategy for 2019/20.

Reason: The investment strategy must be approved by Full Council by 31 March each year in line with regulations.

120. Council Tax Discount Review (Agenda Item 16)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services noted the report was re-presented from the previous meeting to address Members concerns that the percentage premium could dissuade developers from investing in empty properties. However, he said the Government had considered this and their view was it would stop long-term empty properties and provide a strong incentive to bring them back into use. In response to a question, he said it was possible for two people to transfer a property between them if any discretionary period was allowed.

The recommendation was proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Members.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive approved the increase in the Empty Home Premium on empty properties to the maximum percentage, as detailed in the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018.

Reason: To approve an increase to the Empty Home Premium charged on properties that have been empty for 2 years or more, in accordance with the Rating (property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018.

121. Corporate Performance Report 2018-19: 3rd Quarter (Agenda Item 17)

The Chairman introduced Cath Temple, the new Specialist – Performance to Members.

The Lead Specialist – People, Performance and Change presented the report noting useful feedback from the Scrutiny Committee to help with future reports. Despite recent changes, overall performance for quarter three was still strong, and work would continue with service leads to retain teams' focus on the key performance indicators.

During discussion, some Members expressed unease with the arrow icon for 'direction of travel' in the report and it was agreed to remove them in future. It was also noted the working age population in employment was tracked by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and although people worked beyond 64, they were entitled to claim a pension. Customer preferences have changed the profile of council tax collection across the year, with many moving from 10 to 12 monthly payments.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to note the Corporate Performance Report 2018-19: 3rd Quarter.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive noted the Corporate Performance Report 2018-19: 3rd Quarter.

Reason: To note the current position of the council's agreed key performance indicators for the period from October to December 2018 (Q3).

122. Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants/Loans and other Financial Assistance (Agenda Item 18)

The Portfolio Holder for Private Sector Housing advised that the last Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants and Loans had been adopted in 2017 and it was now sensible to update it.

The Lead Specialist, Environmental Health advised that the budget for empty property grants, loans for homeowners and houses in multiple occupation was £60,000 each. The Disabled Facilities Grants were not yet known for the following year but they had been £1m in the current year. She said they were in discussion with Somerset County Council and the Careline service over the continuation of the Handyperson scheme.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to agree the Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants, Loans and other Financial Assistance.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive agreed that the Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants/Loans and other Financial Assistance in Appendix 1 concerning the provision of financial assistance for private sector housing and associated matters, including disabled facilities grants be adopted as the future policy of the Council.

Reason: To adopt the Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants/Loans and other Financial Assistance in Appendix 1

123. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 19)

The following amendments to the Executive Forward Plan were noted:-

- Local Plan Review – removed from March 2019
- Commercial Strategy 2017-2021 - mid term review and update – added for August 2019

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments;
 - Local Plan Review – removed from March 2019
 - Commercial Strategy 2017-2021 - mid term review and update – added for August 2019
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B.

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

124. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 20)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 7th March 2019 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil commencing at 9.30 a.m.

Chairman

Date