

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held in the **Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Thursday 9 January 2020.**

(9.30 - 11.50 am)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
John Clark
Sarah Dyke

Peter Gubbins
Henry Hobhouse
Tony Lock
Peter Seib



Also Present:

Mike Lewis
Sue Osborne

Mike Stanton

Officers:

Alex Parmley
Netta Meadows
Martin Woods
Chris Cooper
Mickey Green
Nicola Hix
Richard Ward
David Crisfield
Vicki Dawson
Robert Orrett
Angela Cox

Chief Executive
Director (Strategy & Support Services)
Director (Service Delivery)
Environment Services Manager
Managing Director, Somerset Waste Partnership
Interim Section 151 Officer
Monitoring Officer
Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Lead Specialist (Environmental Health)
Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager
Specialist - Democratic Services

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

85. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the District Executive meeting held on 5th December 2019, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

86. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Adam Dance.

87. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

88. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

89. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman welcomed Richard Ward as the interim Monitoring Officer for the Council and said she looked forward to working with him.

The Chairman spoke of the report and press releases regarding the future of Local Government in Somerset and noted that a Councillors briefing and 4 staff briefings had been held that week. She advised that although the County Council's preference was to create a unitary authority, the 4 district councils preferred closer working together.

90. Somerset Waste Partnership Annual Report and Draft Business Plan 2019 - 2024 (Agenda Item 6)

The Managing Director of the Somerset Waste Partnership provided Members with a short presentation on the work of the Partnership. He advised that the business plan was in a similar format to previous years and there were some minor changes to the Inter-Authority Agreement as the Partnership started a new collection contract with SUEZ. He advised that as the refuse collection moved to 3 weekly collections, so the recycling would change to accept more plastic. He noted that SUEZ were the market leader in the type of recycling collected in Somerset. He also spoke of:-

- Over 90% of the recycling collected was processed and re-used in the UK
- Garden waste collection days would change to become more efficient so less collection vehicles were needed.
- A new fleet of collection vehicles with in-cab technology would help with any missed collections.
- The majority of South Somerset would change to the new recycling system in September 2020 and the rest in June 2021.
- The 'Slim my waste, feed my face' campaign was aimed to reduce food waste going into the residual waste and encourage more recycling in a fun way.
- The Partnership would work with the SSDC Communications team to publicise the new recycling and collections.

In response to questions from Members, the Managing Director of the Somerset Waste Partnership advised:-

- They had received a grant to investigate commercial waste recycling.
- 18 Local Authorities across the country had already moved to 3 weekly waste collections.
- There would be support for alternative disposable nappies, additional collections or additional bins provided in exceptional circumstances.
- The costs being shared by partners in accordance with household numbers, referred to in the report was for the transfer of staff to SUEZ and the pension scheme contributions.

- Electric waste collection vehicles currently did not exist but they would be looked at when available.
- The waste incinerator at Avonmouth should be operating by the end of the month.
- There were no plans to stop the composting of garden waste at Dimmer.
- The Partnership would be refreshing its developer guidance on design requirements for residential properties.
- The waste collection vehicles were expected to last 10 years and a partial re-fleet was due in 2024/25 so alternative fuelled vehicles could be investigated.
- Publicity of the new recycling would be through online information, attendance at community events, roadshows, social media, working with partners, briefings to elected members, targeted Schools against Waste programme and, instructional videos.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked the Managing Director for attending and answering Members questions. Members unanimously agreed the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed:-

- a. the Somerset Waste Partnership's Draft Business Plan 2020-25.
- b. the Somerset Waste Partnership's draft budget for 2020/21.
- c. the amended Inter-Authority Agreement.

Reason: To confirm approval of the Somerset Waste Partnership's Draft Business Plan 2020-25, draft budget for 2020/21 and approval of the proposed revisions to the Waste Partnership's Inter-Authority Agreement.

91. District-wide strategic grants - funding arrangements with CASS and SPARK 2020-2021 (Agenda Item 7)

The Specialist for Strategic Planning introduced the Chief Executive Officers of Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) and SPARK Somerset. He said although previously there had been two year grant funding, the report now proposed a 1year funding agreement with a small percentage increase.

The Chief Executive Officer of Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) outlined the changes within the organisation, the services they offered and the new sources of funding for debt advice and to assist mental health clients with complex needs. She said they would continue to diversify their income.

The Chief Executive Officer of SPARK said the funding from SSDC was really appreciated. She advised that there had been a significant increase in the demand for their service and their emphasis was on support for community based groups. They had recently secured funding from NHS England to support volunteers countywide.

In response to a question, the Chief Executive Officer of Citizens Advice South Somerset advised that they had received funding from Wessex Water to provide support in the

Westfield community as it had been identified that the residents were the least likely to leave their community area.

During a short debate, Members expressed their support and appreciation for the valuable voluntary work carried out by Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) and SPARK Somerset, and Members unanimously supported the funding as proposed.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- a. Agreed to a one year funding agreement for the period April 2020 to March 2021, for Citizens Advice South Somerset and SPARK.
- b. Agreed to a one-off increase of **£30,000** to the Grants Budget to:-
 - i. Provide an additional **£23,305** to Citizens Advice South Somerset to further mitigate against the effects of the removal of the County Council core grant.
 - ii. Provide an inflationary uplift of **£1,260** to the annual grant to SPARK
 - iii. Fund an initial allocation of **£5,435** as SSDC's contribution to the package of support work with the Citizens Advice as described in Section 5.1
- c. Agreed that the funding of CASS beyond 2021 would be subject to the outcome of the package of support work described in paragraph 4b(iii) above.
- d. Agreed that the future funding of SPARK beyond 2021 would be subject to the outcome of a wider piece of commissioning activity to be determined in line with emerging council priorities.
- e. Noted that Access for All's future was currently uncertain, and that until further investigative work had been completed on future sustainability, no commitment to funding was being sought.

Reason: To confirm the funding of two strategic voluntary sector partners, Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) and SPARK for the period 2020-2021, and to note the possible closure of Access for All.

92. Council Tax Support Scheme 2020/21 (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and said there was a degree of uncertainty as SSDC had not been notified if there were to be any changes to the prescribed requirements – the elements of the scheme that were set by central government, due to a lack of parliamentary time. He thanked the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and supporting officers for their work in reviewing the scheme and said that a more simplified scheme would be looked at in the following year.

There was no debate and the Chairman thanked the members of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group for their work in reviewing the scheme. Members unanimously agreed to propose the recommendations to Full Council.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend to Council:-

- a. that personal allowances and premiums are updated in line with those for Housing Benefit;
- b. that non-dependent deductions are updated in line with the annual percentage increase in Council Tax;
- c. that the non-dependent income bands are increased by the same percentage as those applied to the national Council Tax Support scheme for pensioners;
- d. that the hardship scheme budget be set at £30,000 for the 2020/21 financial year;
- e. to note the recommendations of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group attached at Appendix 1;
- f. to note the scheme has been amended to reflect changes to the Prescribed Requirements;
- g. that the 2020/21 Council Tax Support Scheme attached at Appendix 2 (to follow) is adopted;
- h. to note that the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme has been reflected within the overall Council Tax Base;
- i. that officers investigate a move to an income banded Council Tax Support scheme for the 2021/22 financial year.

Reason: To propose the Council Tax Support scheme for the 2020/21 financial year to Full Council for approval.

93. 2020/21 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Update (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and noted an incorrect figure in Table 1 and in paragraph 27, the Council did have external debt which was reported. He noted that the provisional government settlement had only been issued for consultation on 20 December so the report information was draft. The Council's work on the Environment Strategy, and other projects made pressures on the budget. Also funding had been put aside for volatility and uncertainty in a reserve for the capital programme. Savings from core council functions were still required.

The Chief Executive noted that the Council's Financial Strategy, adopted in September 2019 addressed how the Council was dealing with savings from core council functions.

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 estimates and next steps in respect of the draft Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme.
- b. Approve in principle the changes to budget estimates in respect of pressures and savings included within the report (para 17).

Reason: To update Members on the latest estimates for 2020/21 draft budget and Medium Term Financial Plan estimates for the period 2020/21 to 2024/25, together with an update on the Capital Programme.

94. Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants/Loans and other Financial Assistance (Agenda Item 10)

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services said that publicity of the grants available to residents was a key part of the service to make them aware of what was available.

The Chairman noted that the Disabled Facilities Grants provided an invaluable service to local residents in need.

The Lead Specialist for Environmental Health noted a correction in the Policy at 2.1.2 (b) that more than £5,000 per year was used on stairlifts in homes

During discussion it was noted that the Council Tax policy positively encouraged bringing empty properties back into use and this policy enabled that to happen through grants.

The Vice Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee noted that Loans Policy 2, Loans for Landlords, at point 7 could be explained more clearer regarding the £50 in addition to the Local Housing Rate. She thanked the Lead Specialist for Environmental Health for clarifying that the policy could not assist with private water supply issues.

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

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- a. 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 as in Appendix 1 of the report.

95. Commercial Assets Update Report (Agenda Item 11)

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development including Commercial Strategy outlined the purpose of the Council's commercial interests to support council services and noted that 8 new investments had been made in the previous 6 months. He said that the target income of 7% gross, 3% net had been achieved. A robust governance process and a cautious approach to risk was taken in assessing any potential investment and the 3% net return was after money had been set aside to repay the capital. A risk reserve of £6m was set aside in case of any failed assets. He noted the spread of the portfolio across a number of office, industrial, retail and housing. The higher risk and higher return projects remained the battery storage project and the housing development.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder and the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager advised:-

- Whilst the primary concern of the Commercial Strategy was investment, it also had some regard to environmental issues and environmental policies influenced the choice of investments.
- All investment involved some risk. At the beginning of the year 46% of investments were in High Street properties but that had now reduced to 17% by focusing on investment in other sectors

The Chief Executive advised that the Council was building a portfolio of investments and investment in retail was part of that and also part of the future regeneration of town centres.

The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee thanked the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager for answering their questions at the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

A question was raised relating to information contained in the confidential appendix to the report and it was:-

RESOLVED: That the following discussion 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).

During discussion, the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager responded to the question regarding future investments considered.

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

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- a. Noted progress made to date in acquiring new commercial investments
- b. Noted the return being achieved across the portfolio which is slightly above the Council's target of 7%.
- c. Noted progress being made in securing income from our existing assets and the contribution to the revenue budget in excess of the original £2.25m target.

- d. Noted progress being made in disposals and transfers of existing assets, resulting in a reduction of future liabilities associated with these assets.

Reason: To note the progress with implementing the Commercial Strategy agreed by Council including the commercial investments and management of the existing asset portfolio since the last half yearly update in June 2019.

96. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

The following additions to the Forward Plan were noted:-

- Time Extensions to Public Space Protection Orders for dog fouling, dogs on leads and dog exclusion area – February 2020
- Future of Local Government in Somerset – February 2020

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendment:
 - Time Extensions to Public Space Protection Orders for dog fouling, dogs on leads and dog exclusion area – February 2020
 - Future of Local Government in Somerset – February 2020
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B.

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

97. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 6th February 2020 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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Chairman

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Date

