

South Somerset District Council

Draft Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held at the **Council Chamber - Council Offices** on **Thursday 7 November 2019**.

(9.30 am - 12.45 pm)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
John Clark
Adam Dance

Sarah Dyke (until 11.45am)
Peter Gubbins
Tony Lock
Peter Seib



Also Present:

Sue Osborne
Mike Stanton

Mike Lewis

Officers

Clare Pestell	Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Martin Woods	Director (Service Delivery)
Paul Fitzgerald	Section 151 Officer
Angela Watson	Monitoring Officer
Jo Morris	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Nicola Hix	Interim Section 151 Officer
Dan Bennett	Property and Development Project Manager
Richard Birch	Lead Specialist (Communications, Marketing & Media)
Joe Walsh	Specialist (Economic Development)
Toffer Beattie	Specialist (Projects & Programmes)
Sharon Jones	Customer Focussed Team Manager
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
Cath Temple	Specialist (Performance)
Ian Timms	Yeovil Refresh Project Manager
Neil Waddleton	Case Services Team Leader, Service Delivery
Kirsty Larkins	Case Services Manager

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

61. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the District Executive meeting held on 3rd October 2019, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

62. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Henry Hobhouse, Alex Parmley – Chief Executive and Netta Meadows – Director – Strategy and Support Services.

63. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by members of the Committee.

64. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

65. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman made no announcements.

66. SSDC Transformation Programme - Progress Report (Agenda Item 6)

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services including Transformation introduced the report and advised that the report also included an update on service delivery improvement.

In response to the comments raised by the Scrutiny Committee, the Director – Service Delivery, Transformation Lead, Case Services Team Leader – Service Delivery and Customer Connect – Team Manager advised that:

- The response to the staff engagement survey was around 60% and the findings were discussed at the Staff Consultative Panel and fed through to the various services of the Council to look at any lessons that could be learnt from the results.
- A summary of the results of the staff survey would be published on the Members Portal.
- The Graduate Scheme was proving successful and was open to mature students as well as young people.
- Further work was being undertaken to develop Mobile 360 throughout the whole of the District.
- Planning Validation times had reduced significantly due to additional hours within the Planning Service.
- The process for validation had not changed. Parish and Town Councils received a hard copy of the planning application and plans which were sent out on the same day that the application was registered.
- There was a drive to reduce the amount of direct telephone access and to promote 24/7 access through the website. Work was being continually undertaken to improve web presence to provide a better service, encourage the use of email contact and call backs.
- A lot of work had been undertaken to make services more accessible. The new Petters House Front of House was a new technology enabled space with self-service customer access points. Customers had access to a multi skilled team who were able to offer advice on a range of services and encourage the use of online technology.
- Community Access points were also available in Chard, Crewkerne and Wincanton.

- 70% of total services, which were available on both the website and over the telephone, were completed by self-service via the website.
- A lot of time had been spent training new staff in the Connect Team to help shift customers to self-service which would allow officers to spend more time with those customers who were not able to access on line services.
- Enquiries dealt with at the first point of contact had risen to almost 80% due to the time being invested in training.
- Call waiting times were longer than hoped at times but whilst customers were waiting messages about channel shift were being delivered and they also had the option to leave a voicemail.
- The development of the customer relationship management system and integration with the back office processes had been delayed due to problems with the Civica Platform. The impact of these two areas had mostly affected the back office rather than the public.

During the discussion, members made the following comments:

- There were still concerns with IT that needed to be addressed and a lot more work to be undertaken.
- Improvements in service delivery were moving in the right direction.
- Thanks were expressed to staff for all their hard work during a difficult time.

At the conclusion of the debate, members were content to note the progress report on the SSDC Transformation Programme.

RESOLVED: That District Executive noted the report.

Reason: To note the quarterly update on the progress of the council's Transformation Programme.

67. Corporate Performance Report 2019-20: 2nd Quarter (Agenda Item 7)

The Chair as Portfolio for Strategy and Housing noted that the design and presentation of the report was much clearer and more understandable than previous reports with direction of travel clearly presented. She referred to the target on the number of cases of homelessness and queried whether this target should be included in the report as the Council had no control over the number of cases of homelessness.

The Specialist – Performance advised that the target for the number of cases of homelessness prevented/helped was a national target but was not relevant for this report and would be removed but would continue to be reported nationally.

During the discussion, members made the following comments:

- With regard to PCS7, PCS8, PCS9 and PCS10, it was noted that there had been a vast improvement on the figures and the turnaround in process had improved. It was important for this to be publicised.
- The Council Plan should be amended to reflect the recent adoption of the Environment Strategy to include the Delivery Plan and to allow for other key environmental projects to come forward.

- Support for reporting on the outcomes of the Environment Strategy at a corporate level and through the Area Chapters.
- It was unnecessary and a lot of work to add in two additional performance indicators as suggested by the Scrutiny Committee at the current time when the Planning Service was already overstretched.
- Electric Charging Points should be included in the Area Chapters.
- The Area Chapters should be regularly reviewed in light of SSDC declaring its recognition of a 'Climate Emergency' and the newly adopted Environment Strategy.

In response to the comments raised by the Scrutiny Committee, the Director – Service Delivery advised that the District Executive and Scrutiny Committee would receive update reports on the Service Recovery Plan which would include information on the number of extensions of time to determine planning applications and validation targets.

At the conclusion of the debate, members were content to note the report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive noted the report and the new format and requested that the Environment Strategy be included in future reports.

Reason: To note the current position of the Council's agreed key performance indicators and covers the period from July to August 2019 (Q2).

68. Update on Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband provision in South Somerset (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Commercial Strategy introduced the report and gave a detailed presentation on the proposals. Points covered in the presentation included:

- How the roll out of Connecting Devon and Somerset would work
- Other incentivised schemes
- Complications
- Rough figures for South Somerset
- Collaboration Agreement benefits
- The rationale for contributing to the Connecting Devon and Somerset superfast broadband rollout

It was agreed that a copy of the presentation slides would be circulated to members.

During the discussion, members made the following comments:

- Some premises included on the map were located in areas where BT had taken a commercial decision not yet to enable a cabinet due to development about to occur. There were also cabinets in other areas that were known to be coming forward.
- Premises could be eligible for funding through the Universal Service Obligation.
- Concerns over the commitment to deliver and the number of premises that would be rolled out.
- The recommendation in the report did not reflect an in principle decision.
- It was important for properties to have a decent broadband connection particularly those in hard to reach areas.

- There was too much uncertainty in the report to make a decision.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Commercial Strategy confirmed the following:

- The opportunity to formally join the Connecting Devon & Somerset programme was time limited and therefore an immediate decision in principle was required.
- The numbers published in the report were official and published in the Open Market Review consultation.
- The money would be spent in South Somerset and more premises would be connected as a result.
- There was no clarity on the rollout of the Universal Service Obligation whereas Connecting Devon and Somerset was a firm programme that would definitely proceed within an agreed timescale.
- The 12,500 premises included residential and business premises that would be unlikely to receive superfast broadband unless they were part of the subsidised roll out.

The Lead Specialist for Economy reiterated that the numbers outlined in the report were not precise but were the most accurate numbers available at this time. He confirmed that the Open Market Review process was designed to identify any areas of inaccuracy.

Members noted that the comments raised by the Scrutiny Committee had been answered by the Portfolio Holder and Officers at the meeting.

At the conclusion of the debate, a proposal was made to approve the recommendation outlined in the report subject to the inclusion of the Leader of the Council under recommendation 3. A vote was taken and the proposal was lost.

Following a further discussion, it was then agreed by the majority of members not to contribute financially to Connecting Devon and Somerset at this time for the following reasons:

- The absence of clarity in respect of some of the information.
- The impact of the General Election on the decision timeframes required by Connecting Devon and Somerset.
- The impact of the Universal Service Obligation.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- i. Noted the content of this report
- ii. Agreed not to contribute financially to Connecting Devon and Somerset at this time.

Reason: The absence of clarity in respect of some of the information, the impact of the General Election on the decision timeframes required by Connecting Devon and Somerset and the impact of the Universal Service Obligation.

69. Financial Strategy 2020/21 (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services introduced the report and advised that a letter had been received from the Director General, Local Government and Public Services clarifying that the Council would only receive the professional settlement statement in late December/early January. He drew members' attention to various points in the report including the deferral of the Fair Funding Review and Business Rates Funding Reform, the core Council Tax referendum threshold and the current New Homes Bonus scheme allocation being for one year only. He also referred to the ongoing uncertainty particularly beyond next year.

The S151 Officer advised that the report provided an updated Medium Term Financial Plan in response to information provided in the 2019 Spending Round. He was fairly confident in the figures presented to members for the 2020/21 budget but it was important to continue to operate with a medium and long term perspective in terms of financial decision making. The Financial Strategy was presenting the savings and targets that would enable the Council to set a balanced budget over the next three years. The Plans would be updated appropriately when further information was obtained as part of next years' budget round, the Autumn Statement and provisional statement in 12 months time.

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

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

- a. noted the updated 2020/21 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan estimates.
- b. noted and supported the updated Financial Strategy as a result of updated forecasts of estimated available resources.

Reason: To note the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) estimates further to the 2019 Spending Round, with an overview on the implications for the Financial Strategy agreed by District Executive in September.

70. 2019/20 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th September 2019 (Agenda Item 10)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services introduced the report and noted that members were being asked to approve a number of budget virements in relation to the re-allocation of travel allowance and training budgets as a result of the transformation restructuring. He referred to the major variances as outlined in Table 1 of the report and advised that overspends and income shortfalls were offset against underspending on finance corporate costs.

During the discussion, members made a number of comments with regard to car parking charges and whether a review was necessary. The Director – Service Delivery clarified

that a policy decision was made on car parking to include inflation and for this to be reviewed every four years.

In response to a comment raised by the Scrutiny Committee, members were informed that details of returns on investments were reported through the Commercial Strategy and Treasury Investment reports.

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

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

- a. noted current 2019/20 financial position of the Council;
- b. noted the reasons for variations to approved Directorate Budgets as detailed in paragraph 8, Table 1;
- c. noted the budget virements made under delegated authority as detailed in Appendix B;
- d. approved the budget virements included in Table 3;
- e. noted the transfers made to and from reserves outlined in paragraph 28 Table 5, the Area Reserves as detailed in Appendix C, and the Corporate Reserves as detailed in Appendix D.

Reason: To note and confirm the current projection of the forecast spending and income (“outturn”) against the Council’s approved Revenue Budget for the financial year, and to note the explained projected variations against budget.

71. 2019/20 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30th September 2019 (Agenda Item 11)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services introduced the report and noted that members were being asked to approve the revised Capital Programme spend profile and the projects to remain in the capital programme.

In response to a comment made by the Scrutiny Committee, the Chair advised that an officer had been asked to prepare a report for the Scrutiny Committee on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments.

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

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

- a. noted the content of the report;
- b. approved the revised Capital Programme spend profile as detailed in paragraph 7, Table 1;

- c. approved the projects listed on Appendix B remain in the capital programme.

Reason: To note and confirm the in-year projection in 2019/20 of the forecast spending (“outturn”) against the Council’s approved Capital Programme Budget, and to note the explanation of projected variations against individual projects and the Programme as a whole.

72. Yeovil Public Realm Design Guide (Agenda Item 12)

The Portfolio Holder and Yeovil Refresh Lead introduced the report and advised that there was considerable public interest in the overall Yeovil Refresh and felt that the consultation period should not be delayed until after the Christmas holiday period as recommended by the Scrutiny Committee.

The Yeovil Refresh Project Manager was welcomed and introduced to members. He advised that the Public Realm Design guide was a key component to the Yeovil Refresh and laid down the foundation for public realm schemes going forward. The intention was to adopt the design guide and associated shopfront guide as Supplementary Planning Documents. He advised that as the Council was currently in the period of purdah, the start of the consultation period would need to be delayed until after the General Election. The consultation would run for a 6 week period until the end of January.

During the discussion, members made the following comments:

- Consultation should not be delayed any further than necessary.
- Suggested the idea of a dedicated page on social media to capture comments.
- The quality of work undertaken was very impressive and thanks were expressed. to the Yeovil Refresh Project Manager and his team for all their hard work.

At the conclusion of the debate, members were content to approve the Public Realm Design Guide for formal consultation to commence after the General Election.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

- a. approved the attached Public Realm Design guide for formal public consultation, such consultation to commence after the 12th December 2019. (Appendix A)
- b. approved the attached Shopfront guide for Formal Consultation (Appendix B).

Reason: To confirm the Yeovil Public Realm Design guide to be subject to formal consultation. This formal consultation is in accordance with the council’s adopted Statement of Community Involvement which supports the Local Plan.

73. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted some updates to the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments:
 - Framework to guide our approach to developing a Climate Emergency Strategy – January 2020
 - Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants/Loans and other Financial Assistance – January 2020
 - Commercial Asset Update Report – January 2020
 - Draft 2020/21 Budget Update – January 2020
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B with the following new consultation:-
 - South West Rail - Proposed amendments to some late night & early morning services from December 2020

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

74. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 5th December 2019 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil commencing at 9.30 a.m.

75. Exclusion of Press and Public (Agenda Item 15)

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).

76. Budget for Chard Regeneration Programme - Ringfenced Assets Update Report (Confidential) (Agenda Item 16)

The Chair of Chard Regeneration Board introduced the report and reminded members that the Chard Regeneration Scheme was a priority project for SSDC as set out in the Council Plan.

During the discussion, the Property and Land Development Manager answered Members questions on points of detail, and, at the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to approve the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

- a. noted the content of the report;
- b. approved the ringfencing of the additional assets identified in the report to be utilised in the Chard Regeneration Scheme.

Reason: To update Members on the Chard Regeneration Programme and to include an overview of the existing ringfenced assets and seek approval to extend the asset ringfence to include additional SSDC assets.

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Chairman

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Date