

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held in the **Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil on Thursday 4 August 2022.**

(9.30 - 11.22 am)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
John Clark

Nicola Clark
Sarah Dyke
Tony Lock
Adam Dance (virtual attendance)



Also Present:

Nick Colbert
Andy Kendall
Rob Stickland

Gerard Tucker
Martin Wale

Officers:

Jane Portman	Chief Executive
Jan Gamon	Director (Place, Recovery, Arts & Entertainment)
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Robert Orrett	Commercial Property Land & Development Manager
Katy Menday	Leisure & Recreation Manager
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Laurence Copleston	Climate Change Case Officer
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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

30. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 7th July 2022 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

31. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Peter Gubbins and Peter Seib. Councillor Adam Dance joined the meeting virtually via Zoom.

32. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Mike Best declared a personal interest in Agenda item 8: Millers Garage Car Park Project, East Street, Crewkerne - Request for Additional Funding from the Corporate Capital Contingency Budget, as a member of Crewkerne Town Council.

33. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

It was agreed that the representative of Yeovil Without Parish Council would speak when the agenda item relating to Yeovil Crematorium (Agenda item 7) was discussed

34. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman said she was pleased to be holding meetings in person in the Council Chamber again.

35. Natural Environment Presentation (Agenda Item 6)

The Leisure and Recreation Manager provided Members with a presentation on the work and projects achieved since the Council adopted its Environment Strategy in October 2019. Under that strategy there were delivery and service plans setting out the work plans as completed by the Environment, Countryside and Horticultural teams. There was also an Environment Community of Practice consisting of officers from across the Council who ensured the momentum and delivery of project progresses which included:

- Over 15,000 trees planted since 2019
- Part of a group working to deliver a new Somerset Tree Strategy
- Created wilder spaces in parks
- Ensured 5-year Land Management Plans at all SSDC owned or managed countryside sites and Grassland Management Plans for other parks.
- Green Flag and RHS Best Park Awards secured
- Twice weekly volunteering days in both country parks
- The Country Park and Local Nature Reserve deliver a busy & diverse public events programme include bat walks, nature trails and bushcraft events and others.
- Since 2019 the rangers have organised 162 events with over 10,000 participants
- On-line events were held during the pandemic including virtual tree planting with primary schools and a dog show.
- New website: www.visitsouthsomerset.com

- Working in partnership to support the Somerset Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and the Somerset-wide Tree Strategy with County and District partners
- Support river and natural flood management projects across the district.
- Network of 70+ parish environment champions covering 50 parishes providing events, training and knowledge share opportunities
- Managing (with funding support) South West in Bloom programme, plus two Community Resource Packs launched: a Spring Nature Pack and a Community Biodiversity Toolkit
- Publish the monthly on-line Environment newsletter “Get SuSSed”
- Since 2019 the countryside team had secured over £225,000 of additional funding to deliver habitat management works, provide additional temporary rangers, deliver community group sessions and provide free public events.
- A further £233K enabled the purchase of 74 acres of woodland at Ham Hill to preserve the hillfort.
- Some of this funding had enabled development of a £2.2 million application to the National Lottery’s Heritage Fund for heritage, wildlife & visitor improvements at Ham Hill.
- The SSDC Community Grants for Green Initiatives had provided £58,000 of grant funding across 21 green projects

In response to a question, the Leisure and Recreation Manager said the National Lottery’s Heritage Fund were very supportive of their bid for visitor improvements at Ham Hill and a balanced budget for the project had been submitted. She was very hopeful the bid would be successful.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment noted that Abri Housing had taken their land maintenance contract back in-house which had created land ownership and maintenance issues which were being worked through.

In response to questions from the Scrutiny Committee, the Leisure and Recreation Manager advised:

- The Green Flag Awards were run by Keep Britain Tidy and there were a number of schemes within the overarching title which may be of interest to community groups. A workshop could be held to explain the schemes.
- The Somerset Wildlife Trust ran a scheme: Wilder Churches, which interested groups could be referred to.
- The Local Government Review programme was helping officers to learn about best practice programmes available across the county and so were better informed to signpost residents and interested groups.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the Chairman and a number of Members thanked the Leisure and Recreation Manager and her team for the work they carried out across the district.

The presentation was NOTED.

36. Yeovil Crematorium Project - Request for Additional Funding from the Corporate Capital Contingency Budget (Agenda Item 7)

The Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager introduced the report and advised that since the report to Full Council in February 2022 there had been a spike in inflation which had not expect to be so severe. The current costings from the contractor offered the most certain price for the project. The Project Board had requested the contingency for the projects was no less than 12%, which was generous. He noted that this was the third time additional funding had been requested for the project and he said the Scrutiny Committee had sought assurance this would be the final time, however, as inflation was still rising, officers believed that even a 20% increase would now be within the project contingency. The project was a phased refurbishment and if an unforeseen cost arose there was scope to reduce further phases.

The representative of Yeovil Without Parish Council advised that the debate by the parish council for the additional funding for the crematorium project had been robust and strong concerns had been expressed. He said it was crucial that the project board were provided with a QS report predicting labour, material and fee costs to have a benchmark. He noted the project had risen from £4.9m to £5.7m and he hoped the additional £185,000 would not be required as it was part of the contingency funding. He concluded that he was uncertain what the Parish Councils position would be if there were any further requests for funding.

During discussion it was requested that the funding remaining in the Corporate Capital Contingency Fund be reported to the Executive and it was agreed that this would be provided.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee noted that the majority of their questions were answered at the meeting, however he did ask two questions to which the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager responded that there had been a saving of £17,500 in not needing to replacing the base of the cremator and that would become part of the contingency budget. The original contingency budget remained but it would be reduced by the cost of the build so the request for additional funding would replace it.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked the representative of Yeovil Without Parish Council for attending the meeting to update them. She proposed the recommendations and they were seconded and unanimously agreed by the Executive.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- a. noted the updated position of the Yeovil Crematorium project and the support of the Project Board for the recommended approach.
- b. noted that the total budget be increased by £185,400, being

shared 89/11% between SSDC and YWPC in accordance with the ownership shares.

- c. agreed to fund £165,000 from the Corporate Capital Contingency Fund towards the Yeovil Crematorium project as an addition to the budget approved by Full Council in February 2022.

Reason: To support the revisions to the scope of the project supported by the Project Board to mitigate the impact of greater than anticipated inflation in construction costs and agree additional funds from the corporate capital contingency to enable a robust basis to enter into the construction contract for this project.

37. Millers Garage Car Park Project, East Street, Crewkerne - Request for Additional Funding from the Corporate Capital Contingency Budget (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development introduced the report and invited questions.

The Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager advised that the original budget for the project had not been updated for some time. Officers had reworked the project costs in detail in the face of increased inflation costs and the request was to increase the budget to £413,000, an additional £203,000 from the Corporate Capital Contingency Fund.

Councillor Mike Best, one of the Ward Members outlined the history of the loss of long-stay car parking in Crewkerne and the need to replace the lost spaces

In response to questions from the Scrutiny Committee, the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager advised that the car park project was a stand alone project and it was not connected to any other proposal. He confirmed that the land had been purchased a number of years ago to provide long-stay car parking and he had been asked to deliver that project.

Councillor Mike Best confirmed that any previously proposed land swap would only be affected if a planning application was submitted for adjacent land.

The Chairman proposed the recommendations and they were seconded and unanimously confirmed by the Executive members.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- a. noted the updated position with the Millers Garage Car Park project and the estimate of the project cost;

- b. noted the increase in the total budget for this project to £413,000;
- c. agreed to fund £203,000 from the Corporate Capital Contingency Fund towards the Millers Garage Car Park Project as an addition to the budget approved by Full Council in February 2022.

Reason: To note the impact of inflation in construction costs on the forecast cost of this project and agree the request for additional funds from the Corporate Capital Contingency Fund.

38. Yeovil Key Sites Change of Scope Request (Agenda Item 9)

The Director for Place and Recovery advised that the original Yeovil Refresh had contained very ambitious plans for 3 key sites within the town centre, none of which were now likely to be brought forward. The loss of commercial and residential space and private funding had a very detrimental impact on the benefit/cost ratio which the Future Hight Street Fund grant had been based. The Council had been granted £9.8m and had received £4.8m which was being held in reserve. There was a risk that £4.8m would need to be repaid. Officers were working creatively to increase the benefit/cost ratio on other projects to submit a formal scope change request to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

The Regeneration Programme Manager said they had a positive meeting with representatives of DLUHC around including stalled housing projects and active travel to increase the benefit/cost ratio prior to a formal change of scope request. They had said there would need to be a strong strategic benefits case to accompany the change request but it may be considered.

In response to questions, the Regeneration Programme Manager advised:-

- Yeovil was not alone in re-negotiating their regeneration programme works with DLUHC as other towns across the country were in a similar situation following the Covid pandemic.
- Businesses were not expanding at the current time.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development said it was important the funding was not lost and he proposed that the recommendation be amended to include approval of the formal scope change request by the Portfolio Holder for the Yeovil Refresh, the Director for Place and Recovery and the Section 151 Officer prior to being submitted to DLUHC. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Tony Lock.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee thanked officers for attending their meeting to answer questions. He suggested that the Scrutiny Committee could

undertake a review of the Yeovil Key Site projects to understand how they had developed and learn from them in the future.

The Scrutiny Committee offer was appreciated but it was felt that officers were already fully engaged in the Local Government Review process and this would be an additional burden.

The recommendations (as amended) having being proposed and seconded were put to the vote and unanimously agreed by Members.

RESOLVED: That District Executive endorsed the proposal that officers will submit a formal scope change request to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in relation to the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) in Yeovil, subject to approval by the Portfolio Holder for the Yeovil Refresh, the Director for Place and Recovery and the Section 151 Officer.

Reason: To advise District Executive of a potential change of scope to the delivery of the development aspects of the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) and to agree the request to submit a proposal to DLUHC which aims to secure existing allocations of FHSF and access further funds to unlock a portfolio of residential developments in Yeovil Town Centre.

39. Yeovil Refresh Wyndham Street Public Realm Funding (Agenda Item 10)

The Regeneration Programme Manager introduced the report and explained the area covered by the proposed public realm works. She noted there were potential highway changes at the junction with Reckleford and significant live planning applications which could change the use of the area. She concluded that the tender document had been received and the contract for the works was ready to sign if Members were supportive.

During discussion, Members voiced their support for the proposed works.

In response to a question the Regeneration Programme Manager confirmed that all new paving was proposed for the area and the narrowing of a junction should help to improve road safety. The details of the proposed works were still commercially sensitive as contracts had not been signed but they would be shared with members of the Scrutiny Committee when possible.

The recommendations were proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Members of the Executive.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed:-

- a. to allocate up to £0.891m from the Corporate Capital Contingency Fund to the delivery of public realm improvements in the Wyndham Street Area, Yeovil.
- b. a budget increase of £0.891m making the revised Yeovil Refresh budget £22.729m.

Reason: To agree the allocation of funding from the Corporate Capital Contingency Fund to enable the delivery of regenerative improvements in the Wyndham Street Area of Yeovil. The section of street has been identified by the Yeovil Refresh public realm workstream as an area in need of regeneration.

40. Placeholder Report - Potential request from Scrutiny Committee for re-consideration of an Executive Decision as a result of the Scrutiny Call-in procedure (Agenda Item 11)

This item was withdrawn from the Agenda

41. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

The Director for Service Delivery advised that the Phosphates Update Report would be delayed until October to conclude negotiations on phosphate mitigation measures with Entrade. Planning applicants and agents had been updated at a forum meeting the previous week and an information update would be circulated to all Members shortly to keep them informed. The solution proposed was for the South Somerset area and the other Somerset District Councils were working on their own solutions. Planning applications could be determined if they had presented the relevant phosphate mitigation measures which were acceptable to Natural England.

The following additions and amendments to the Forward Plan were noted:

- Change of Scope for Wincanton Regeneration Scheme – District Executive – September 2022
- Overview of historic buildings at risk – Full Council - September 2022
- Phosphates Update – moved to October 2022

RESOLVED: That the District Executive agreed to:-

1. approve the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication

as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments;

- Change of Scope for Wincanton Regeneration Scheme – District Executive – September 2022
- Overview of historic buildings at risk – Full Council - September 2022
- Phosphates Update – moved to October 2022

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

42. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 1st September 2022 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil commencing at 9.30 a.m.

43. Exclusion of Press and Public (Agenda Item 14)

The Chairman asked Members to agree that the press and public be excluded from the following item and this was agreed without dissent.

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).

44. Briefing on Local Government Reorganisation (Confidential) (Agenda Item 15)

The Chief Executive provided members with a brief verbal update on the progress of Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset and answered their questions on points of clarification.

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Chairman

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Date