

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 18 July 2019** in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(7.30 pm - 9.05 pm)

### **Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Paul Maxwell (Chairman)  
Councillor Jenny Kenton (Vice-Chairman)

Robin Bastable  
Mike Best  
Neil Bloomfield  
Dave Bulmer  
Hayward Burt  
Tony Capozzoli  
Malcolm Cavill  
John Clark  
Nicola Clark  
Louise Clarke  
Adam Dance  
Sarah Dyke  
Karl Gill  
David Gubbins  
Peter Gubbins  
Brian Hamilton

Mike Hewitson  
Henry Hobhouse  
Kaysar Hussain  
Val Keitch  
Andy Kendall  
Tim Kerley  
Mike Lewis  
Mike Lock  
Pauline Lock  
Tony Lock  
Kevin Messenger  
Graham Oakes  
Tricia O'Brien  
Robin Pailthorpe  
Clare Paul  
Crispin Raikes

Wes Read  
David Recardo  
Paul Rowsell  
Dean Ruddle  
Gina Seaton  
Peter Seib  
Garry Shortland  
Alan Smith  
Jeny Snell  
Andy Soughton  
Rob Stickland  
Lucy Trimnell  
Gerard Tucker  
Anthony Vaughan  
Linda Vijeh  
William Wallace

### **Officers:**

Alex Parmley  
Netta Meadows  
Clare Pestell  
Angela Watson  
Caroline Moore  
Simon Shewry  
Nicola Hix  
Angela Cox

Chief Executive  
Director (Strategy & Support Services)  
Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)  
Monitoring Officer  
Managing Director, Yarlington Housing Group  
Head of Enterprise & Service Change, Yarlington Housing Group  
Lead Specialist (Finance)  
Democratic Services Specialist

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### **28. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jason Baker, Martin Carnell, Nick Colbert, Charlie Hull, Sue Osborne, Tiffany Osborne, Mike Stanton, Martin Wale and Colin Winder.

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### **29. Minutes (Agenda Item 2)**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2019, copies of which had been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

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

At the time the item was discussed, Councillor Peter Gubbins declared a personal interest in Agenda item 7: Presentation from the Yarlinton Housing Group as his daughter-in-law was employed by them.

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

The Council were addressed by three members of the Extinction Rebellion. Their comments included:-

- This is a climate emergency.
- Somerset is susceptible to raised sea levels and if the sea continues to rise much of Somerset will become a casualty.
- This is a global social and ecological emergency; the planet is going to change; people will suffer and people must act.
- A full independently run Citizens Assembly is demanded by Extinction Rebellion as the starting point.
- We must adapt the structure of our global society to the changes to our environment.
- The European Eel has recently been added to the endangered species list.
- We welcome your declaration in recognition of a 'Climate and Ecological Emergency' and hope your Environment Strategy will address these issues.
- We invite you to join us in London on 7<sup>th</sup> October for the International Rebellion.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment responded that the European Eel was a significant species for Somerset and taking into account its critically endangered status, its conservation should be considered by the relevant authorities. The eels complex lifecycle made it particularly vulnerable to habitat changes, this coupled with climate change and the operations across the Levels post flooding, must have had an impact on the populations that have been able to successfully use Somerset as part of their migratory & breeding routes. The eel had current and historic strong links to the River Parrett, of which a large proportion sat in the district of South Somerset. A combination of the Environment Agency, Wildlife Trust, County ecological team and Somerset Rivers Authority would be the key players in considering a conservation plan for the eel. She hoped that positive management works would be recommended as a follow on from the investigative work being carried out by the Steart Eels Project by the West Country Rivers Trust.

She concluded that it would be appropriate for South Somerset to recognise its role in liaising with human communities on the rivers and rhynes in relation to any conservation works that may play out, engaging with the smaller rivers groups (like the Rivers Trust) that may also have a role in supporting the larger organisations in surveying and voluntary works. She noted that SSDC had already started engaging with some of these groups through the Environment Strategy preparation work.

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

The Chairman congratulated the Chief Executive and his wife on the recent birth of their daughter.

The Chairman reported that he would be touring the Council, visiting all sites and departments during the following weeks to thank all staff on behalf of Members for their work during Transformation.

The Chairman advised that he had recently attended the Somerset Chairman's Awards for Community Service where awards were presented to charities and individuals from across Somerset. He said it had been remarkable to hear the stories of individuals who gave their time and skills and efforts to help others. He was also pleased to see many other SSDC Councillors supporting the event.

The Chairman concluded by reporting the tragic death of Jeb Farrah, Chard Regeneration Project Manager on 21 June. He said she had been a talented officer and had been a key player to deliver the Chard Regeneration Scheme. He led Members in a minutes silence in her memory.

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### **33. Chairman's Engagements (Agenda Item 6)**

The list of Chairman's engagements were noted.

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### **34. Presentation from the Yarlington Housing Group (Agenda Item 7)**

The Chairman welcomed Caroline Moore (Managing Director) and Simon Shewry (Head of Enterprise and Service Change) of the Yarlington Housing Group to present the work of their organisation in South Somerset.

The Managing Director's presentation included information on:-

- The group started in 1999 when it bought the SSDC housing stock for £70m. They spent the first 10 years updating the housing stock and the second ten years developing new housing stock.
- Their turnover was £60m with assets of £1.3bn and they were a not-for-profit organisation so profit was reinvested into new homes and the community.
- The group had gone through a programme of Transformation 18 months ago to bring customers onto a digital platform, they had their own Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) to carry out repairs, and, they ran their Inspired to Achieve programme to help and encourage residents into employment and training.
- They were currently discussing a partnership approach with a neighbouring Housing Association to enable more influence at a national and regional level and to deliver more new houses.
- There would be considerable savings in bringing the two organisations together in procurement and delivering 1,000 new homes per year and also to help local communities and address homelessness.
- Yarlington were actively building homes in the area and these were in part subsidised through market sales of houses as the rent paid did not cover the borrowing costs of building a property.
- 30 new homes had been completed in Yeovil and Somerton in Q1 and 135 more were in-contract to be built in South Somerset alone.
- Prefer now not to wholly rely on Section 106 development sites due to control of quality and delivery time of properties and prefer to develop our own land sites.

- They had 369 shared ownership properties in South Somerset which were usually more affordable than private rented and a national campaign was about to be launched to raise awareness of them nationally.
- SSDC and Yarlington had been working together on a land project to identify pockets of land owned by SSDC and Yarlington to develop for housing. Currently 4 sites had been identified which could provide a capital receipt for both parties.

The Head of Enterprise and Service Change's presentation included information on:-

- Yarlington also provided value added services to their residents, including Independent Living for older residents, Inspired to Achieve to provide employment and training support, and provided careers guidance to 5 local schools.
- Next Gen – their corporate strategy introduced the My Yarlington digital platform for residents to access services on-line.
- The Government's social housing green paper set out new expectations for housing providers to have a relationship with the people they housed. In response Yarlington developed the Voice of the Customer (VOC) for them to shape the services provided.
- A community forum was launched with 10 Community Ambassadors who work alongside staff and partners to co-ordinate new community plans for rural living, health and well-being and youth.
- The Financial Responsibility team provide budgeting and welfare benefit advice to residents and new tenants and support customers moving to Universal Credit. They ran weekly surgeries in Chard and Yeovil.
- The SCC cuts to services announced the previous year had an adverse effect on certain Yarlington residents. A reduction in early interventions to prevent families reaching a point of crisis and investment in childrens services, family support and adult social care has been drastically cut. Yarlington had strengthened its support to the Citizens Advice Service and in partnership with SSDC, funded the Yeovil for Families scheme provided support for troubled families.
- The decommissioning of the SCC Extra Care scheme has impacted on half of the schemes across Somerset and 7 of the Yarlington schemes were affected. Yarlington had supported the residents to ensure care reassessments were carried out. The sheltered housing schemes helped them to continue living independently in their own home and hospital discharge accommodation was provided in co-ordination with Yeovil District Hospital.

In response to questions from Members, the Managing Director and Head of Enterprise and Service Change advised:-

- Yarlington took reports of anti-social behaviour by tenants very seriously but encouraged residents to provide evidence of the behaviour and this would be closely followed up with the police and other agencies but it was a very small percentage of tenants who did cause ASB.
- Residents were now encouraged to contact Yarlington by live-chat online and although it was recognised that some residents were not able to access services digitally there were less officers manning telephones which was difficult for some customers but this was constantly under review.
- Climate change and fuel poverty were a key ambition of the new organisation which was coming together and all homes were being brought up to the Government energy efficiency standard by 2025 which included removal of solid fuel heating, solar heating and additional insulation.

- Radian had an employment training support team which had lottery funding and this would provide a comprehensive service to customers when the two organisations joined.
- Although Radian were twice the size of Yarlington, there would be a new board and executive team who would ensure housing was delivered where it was needed. South Somerset currently had the greater concentration of housing stock and Yarlington were committed to the area.
- Yarlington were retrofitting their properties with fuel saving measures.
- SCC were an important partner of Yarlington but noted that some of their decisions were creating difficulties for tenants. For the Independent Living service the relationship with Adult Social Care was critical and discussions were ongoing to access capital funding for larger extra care schemes in the future and different options were being explored with SCC.
- Although rent arrears could accrue in the early days of a tenancy as a Universal Credit claim was processed, the Finance Responsibility team worked closely with tenants to minimize this. Tenants were expected to pay one week of rent in advance of a tenancy.
- Yarlington were always working with other community groups to support care leavers and other vulnerable people.

Councillor John Clark thanked the Yarlington group for their support to the new Westfield Community Centre in Yeovil.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked the officers from the Yarlington Housing Group for their comprehensive and interesting presentation.

### **Presentation Noted**

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#### **35. Presentation from the Fire Brigade Union on the Safer Together Consultation (Agenda Item 8)**

It was noted that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

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#### **36. 2018/9 Treasury Management Activity Report (Agenda Item 9)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Legal and Democratic Services introduced the report and advised the Council's pooled funds had performed particularly well and he drew Members attention to the summary of investments on page 14. He also noted that the Council had 11 Prudential Indicators and had operated within all of them during 2018/19. He concluded that there had been some commercial acquisitions as the treasury management period was concluding which were not contained within the report. He thanked officers for their work

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Legal and Democratic Services said the financial risks mentioned in paragraph 4 of the report were a statement of fact but the Council had not in fact suffered any losses although the risks remained. The Council's Treasury Strategy and Annual Investment Policy sought to mitigate any risks and it was regularly monitored by the Audit Committee.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to note the Treasury Management Activity for the 2018/19 financial year and individual prudential indicators.

**RESOLVED:** That Full Council agreed to:-

- a. note the Treasury Management Activity for the 2018/19 financial year;
- b. note the position of the individual prudential indicators for the 2018/19 financial year;
- c. note the outlook for the investment performance in 2018/19;
- d. note the council operated within all of the Prudential Indicators during 2018/19.

**Reason:** To review the treasury management activity and the performance against the Prudential Indicators for the 2018/19 financial year as prescribed by the CIPFA Code of Practice and in accordance with the Council's Treasury Strategy, Annual Investment Policy and Treasury Management Practices

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**37. Appointment of an Independent Person to the Audit Committee (Agenda Item 10)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Legal and Democratic Services advised that the report had arisen from a suggestion at Council in May that an independent person could bring specialist knowledge and insight to the Audit Committee.

In response to a question the Democratic Services Specialist confirmed that the appointment did not currently attract an allowance but reasonable travel expenses would be paid. Any change to this would only be with the agreement of Council.

There was no debate and Members were content to approve the appointment of an independent person to sit on Audit Committee for a period of two years and approve the advert, role description, skills and competencies and person specification at Appendix A.

**RESOLVED:** That Full Council:-

- a. approved the appointment of an independent person to sit on Audit Committee for a period of two years;
- b. approved the advert, role description, skills and competencies and person specification at Appendix A.

**Reason:** To approve the appointment an independent person to the Audit Committee.

*(Voting: unanimous in favour)*

**38. Membership of Committees - Appointment of New Councillor to Audit Committee (Agenda Item 11)**

Members were content to confirm the appointment of Councillor Robin Bastable to the Audit Committee.

**RESOLVED:** In accordance with Section 16 (1) Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the duty therein to give effect to the wishes of the political group to which seats on any committee are allocated, the Council confirmed that:-

- a) Councillor Robin Bastable be appointed to the Audit Committee

**Reason:** To confirm an amendment to the Audit Committee membership following the appointment of Councillors to various committees and working groups at Council on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2019 and 20<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

*(Voting: unanimous in favour)*

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**39. Report of Executive Decisions (Agenda Item 12)**

The Leader of Council advised that the Allowenshay Private Water Supply report had been deferred by the District Executive for clarification on the use of the Wessex Home Improvement Loan Scheme and an assessment of other private water supplies in the district and possible costs required to bring them up to an acceptable standard. She confirmed that every application for funding was considered on its individual merits.

The Leader of the Conservative group, Councillor Linda Vijeh, expressed her concern at the development management service, the length of time it took to validate planning applications and the difficulty in which residents had in contacting the service.

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services, including Transformation, Councillor Tony Lock, advised that staff reductions had been completed on time but the infrastructure had not been in place to allow the new ways of working so there was an extended transition period. The Scrutiny Committee would be monitoring this on a quarterly basis.

The Chief Executive clarified that the anticipated savings of £2.5m in staff costs had been achieved when the Council's budget had been set but because of delays in infrastructure, staff costs were being put back into some services to deliver a better service but this was a one-off solution and it only delayed £0.5m saving.

The report of executive decisions was noted.

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**40. Motions (Agenda Item 13)**

There were no Motions submitted by Members.

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**41. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 14)**

There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.

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**42. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 15)**

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Full Council was a reserve date of 15<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

Unless there was any urgent business to progress on this date, the next scheduled meeting of the Full Council would take place on **Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2019** in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil **commencing at 7.30 p.m.**

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Chairman

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Date