

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of an informal meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Thursday 3 June 2021.**

(9.30 am - 10.12 am)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
John Clark
Sarah Dyke

Henry Hobhouse
Tony Lock
Peter Seib



Also Present:

Brian Hamilton
Gerard Tucker
Linda Vijeh

Gina Seaton
Andy Kendall

Officers:

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Leigh Rampton	Lead Specialist (Communities)
Alice Knight	Specialist (Housing)
Robert Orrett	Commercial Property. Land & Development Manager
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Jo Wilkins	Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Michelle Mainwaring	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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

10. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Adam Dance, Peter Gubbins and Clare Pestell, Director for Commercial Services and Income Generation.

11. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

12. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 3)

There were no questions from members of the public.

13. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 4)

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive on behalf of the District Executive Members for his work for the authority over almost 5 years. She wished him and his family well in their new life in New Zealand.

The Chief Executive responded that it had been a pleasure to work with Councillors and all staff at SSDC who had been a great team to work with.

14. Relocation of Emergency Accommodation (Agenda Item 5)

The Director for Service Delivery said there was a need to re-locate the emergency accommodation for homeless people within the district and SSDC proposed to support Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) to provide more suitable accommodation and a holistic approach to working with people who are homeless or rough sleeping.

The Lead Specialist for Communities advised that the current homeless accommodation was no longer fit for purpose and the proposal would be a better offer for homeless clients.

In response to a question, the Lead Specialist for Communities advised that there were potentially up to 2,000 households at risk of eviction following the Government's lifting of the ban on evictions during the Covid pandemic but this was a worst case scenario estimation.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they were broadly supportive of the proposal and had raised questions regarding the grant sought from Homes England.

The Director for Support Services said that BCHA were very hopeful that the Homes England grant would be confirmed the following week. She noted that Scrutiny Members had also asked for clarification that the accommodation would accept female homeless clients, which it would, and they were working towards a solution to accept pets without impacting upon other clients.

During discussion, it was also noted that whilst providing better accommodation for homeless clients, the move would help the town centre regeneration.

At the conclusion of the debate, a named vote was taken and Members unanimously recommended that the proposal be approved by the Chief Executive.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive approve the use of £390,000 from the Affordable Housing Capital Programme Reserve to award a grant to Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) as a contribution towards the costs of the purchase and refurbishment of a property in Yeovil, to provide emergency accommodation and improved support for people who are homeless, rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping in South Somerset.

Reason: To agree a grant to Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) to contribute towards the purchase and refurbishment of a property, for the Council to use as emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness in South Somerset.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

15. Dealing with Planning Applications: Our Approach to Negotiation (Agenda Item 6)

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services advised that the policy was being introduced to help the planning service achieve uniformity and improve performance and it was a result of the Planning Reimagined workshops. He said the service was not currently working as well as it should be but the recent appointment of a new Lead Specialist would help this. The policy would ensure uniformity for both officers and Councillors to work together. He invited questions on the proposed policy.

In response to a question, the Director for Service Delivery advised that if there were substantial amendments to a planning application then an extension of time to determine the application would be invoked as it often required re-consultation. Minor amendments or typos would not be included in this.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said that they had sought clarification on charges for very small applications i.e. aerals on listed buildings. Some frustration had been expressed at the planning service however, in defence, it was acknowledged that the service was improving. It was also noted that officers should be candid regarding information provided by applicants during the pre-application process so they were not given any false expectations. They also noted that reports on CIL funding were due to be presented to the Area Committees shortly. He concluded that they endorse the adoption of the policy as an improvement to the service.

At the conclusion of the debate, a named vote was taken. Councillor Sarah Dyke abstained from voting as she had missed part of the debate due to technical issues. Therefore the vote was 7 in favour, 0 against and 1 abstention that the

“Dealing with Planning Applications - Our Approach to Negotiation” document be approved by the Chief Executive.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive approve the use of “Dealing with Planning Applications - Our Approach to Negotiation” document as guidance for all involved in the planning process.

Reason: To approve the use of “Dealing with Planning Applications - Our Approach to Negotiation” document as guidance for all involved in the planning process to add clarity to this particular element of the planning process with a view to improving the overall service provided.

(Voting: 7 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)

16. The 'Making' of the Queen Camel Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda Item 7)

The Specialist for Strategic Planning advised that the referendum had been held on 6th May and the successful result meant that SSDC now agreed to ‘make’ the plan. It would become part of the development plan and would be used in the consideration of planning applications. She congratulated the Neighbourhood Plan group for their hard work in bringing the plan to a successful conclusion.

Councillor Peter Seib noted that Queen Camel was one of the first parishes in the pilot study to make a Neighbourhood Plan area and as a result of their evidence gathering SSDC were able to deliver their first priority. With a lot of hard work they had managed to bring the Plan to conclusion and the support at the referendum was conclusive.

The Chairman also congratulated the Neighbourhood Plan team on the amount of work they had achieved to bring the plan to fruition.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members recommended that the Chief Executive approve the making of the Queen Camel Neighbourhood Plan.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive approve the making of the Queen Camel Neighbourhood Plan.

Reason: To note the result of the Referendum in relation to the Queen Camel Neighbourhood Plan and to confirm that the Plan be ‘made’ (adopted).

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

17. The 'Making' of the Martock Neighbourhood Plan (Agenda Item 8)

The Specialist for Strategic Planning congratulated the Neighbourhood Plan team on their work in bringing the plan forward and for the successful referendum result.

There was no debate and Members unanimously recommended that the Chief Executive approve the making of the Martock Neighbourhood Plan.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive approve the making of the Martock Neighbourhood Plan.

Reason: To note the result of the Referendum in relation to the Martock Neighbourhood Plan and to confirm that the Plan be 'made' (adopted).

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

18. Investment Assets Update Report (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Commercial Services and Income Generation reminded Members that the Council's commercial investments provided the finance to maintain vital front-line services. He noted that a performance chart previously in the confidential appendix had been moved to point 39 in the report. The 3 points of the strategy – the amount invested, the gross return on the investment and the net return were all either on target or very close to target which was a credit to the investment team particularly during the challenging previous 12 months.

The Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager advised that the net revenue contribution was just short of target (chart at point 29) by £7,000 on £1.8m which was a very small difference. In updating Members, he said:

- The Covid situation had made rent collection more important but it was almost at 100% collection.
- Empty office/unit space was an issue as a tenant had been lost from one unit.
- Investment had paused but it had now resumed with 3 purchases of a Fitness First property in Poole, an NHS food production unit in Redruth and an office building in Birmingham as a data centre.
- The Fareham battery storage scheme was now committed and on track for construction.
- The second house at Marlborough was on the market as were 15 flats and they were in a location where the market was strong.

The Chairman congratulated the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager and his investment team for their work in a very difficult investment period.

In response to a question, the Commercial Property, Land and Development Manager advised that it was not yet known if the Marlborough development would make a profit yet. If so, it was likely to be low.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised that the following points were made during their meeting:-

- Members acknowledged an update from the Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager that the graph '20/21 Performance Against Budget' would be moved from the confidential appendix into the public report.
- Para 9 on confidential report – Referring to the coloured table, he observed that there are a number investments that seem to be showing as a nil or negative return in the future, he asked for some further explanation on the reasons for these assumptions.
- Some members suggested a briefing or workshop for members to help understand in more detail the approach for our investments (what and where) would be useful
- Members sought clarification about delivery of commercial investments going forward as the current director would be Chief Executive in a few days. Members sought reassurance that there would be no conflicts of interest – especially regarding our directorship in some of the companies.
- Members requested an update regarding the Marks & Spencer (M&S) store as it was believed the company were reviewing their land holdings.
- Members also requested an update regarding Yeovil Town Football Club and what the current status was.
- Members congratulated the team on their work, especially during current circumstances.
- It was noted there was some budget remaining for investment – some members queried if this would be impacted by the unitary decision in a few months time?

He concluded that the report had been positively received with few questions which officers had provided answers to during the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their positive comments on the report and for their report at the Area Committees to explain the role of Scrutiny to all Members.

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

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to:-

- a. Note the resilience of the property investment portfolio throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b. Note progress made to date in acquiring new commercial property investments and the asset management following acquisition.
- c. Note the return being achieved across the portfolio which is

slightly below the Council's target of 7%.

- d. Note progress being made in securing income from our existing assets and the contribution to the revenue budget towards the revised £3.35m target.
- e. Note 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 December 2020.

19. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 10)

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

- Review of Commercial Strategy – change of lead officer name
- Update on the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy and funding delivery – TBC
- Decision from Secretary of State on Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset - TBC
- Funding for Yeovil Refresh – July 2021

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments;
 - Update on the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy and funding delivery – TBC
 - Decision from Secretary of State on Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset - TBC
 - Funding for Yeovil Refresh – July 2021
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B.

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

20. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the informal District Executive would take place on Thursday 1st July 2021 as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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Chairman

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Date