

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a Special meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Tuesday 17 August 2021.**

(1.00 pm - 1.37 pm)

### **Present:**

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker  
Adam Dance  
Sarah Dyke

Tony Lock  
Peter Seib



### **Also Present:**

Brian Hamilton  
Charlie Hull  
Andy Kendall  
Mike Lewis  
Sue Osborne  
David Recardo

Gina Seaton  
Mike Stanton  
Gerard Tucker  
Linda Vijeh  
Colin Winder

### **Officers:**

Jane Portman  
Jan Gamon  
Nicola Hix  
Jill Byron  
Stephanie Gold  
Angela Cox  
Becky Sanders

Chief Executive  
Director (Place and Recovery)  
Director (Support Services & Strategy)  
Monitoring Officer  
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)  
Specialist (Democratic Services)  
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mike Best, John Clark, Peter Gubbins and Henry Hobhouse.

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#### **52. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)**

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

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#### **53. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 3)**

There were no questions from members of the public.

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**54. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 4)**

The Chairman welcomed Jane Portman, Chief Executive, to her first District Executive meeting and said she looked forward to working with her.

The Chief Executive thanked the Chairman for her welcome and said she looked forward to working with all Members.

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**55. Local Government Reorganisation - Structural Change Order (SCO) (Agenda Item 5)**

The Chairman introduced the report and noted that although recommendation C of the report was not required by MHCLG, she felt that it was right to establish a member working group to work with the Leader, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer in considering the Structural Change Order, and to include the Leader of Council, the Deputy Leader, the Leader of the SSDC Conservative Group and the Leader of the SSDC Independent Group. She said this would ensure the process was open and transparent. It would not be a decision making body so would not require governance arrangements.

In response to a question, the Chairman said that she would consult and inform the one member of the Green Party on the Council.

The Director for Place and Recovery advised that the pace of the process and timetable would be led by the MHCLG and it may not fit to bring any decision to District Executive each time, therefore the delegated authority for the Chief Executive was required to negotiate the Structural Change Order on behalf of SSDC. She outlined the need for the Structural Change Order as it would detail governance and transitional arrangements for the implementation of the new Unitary Authority. This would also include the number of Councillors to be elected to the new Unitary Authority. The MHCLG were currently drafting the Structural Change Order and SSDC may only have 3 or 4 weeks to negotiate it with the 5 councils of Somerset.

In response to questions, the Director for Place and Recovery and Chairman advised that:

- the MHCLG had indicated that they expected the number of Councillors elected in May 2022 to be less than 100. The election teams across Somerset were now looking at possible ward boundaries and Members would have the opportunity to contribute to this. Other Unitary Authorities who had been through a boundary review were now being asked to reduce the number of Councillors quite markedly and the MHCLG were asking the Somerset Councils to look at this early to avoid re-visiting the number of Councillors after the elections in May 2022. There would be an

informal briefing prior to the Full Council meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> August where further detail would be shared with Members.

- A legal challenge to the MHCLG decision for one Unitary Authority for Somerset had not been fully ruled out but the Leaders of each Council had all agreed to co-operate.
- The leaders of all the Somerset authorities would be meeting very regularly in the future and a regular briefing to Members on progress would be made.
- The member working group proposed at recommendation C was an informative group only.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- A late notification of the boundaries to be contested would not assist the political parties to connect with their electorate.

In response to the points raised in the Scrutiny Committee meeting the previous day, the Director for Place and Recovery advised:

- The term ‘twin hatters’ referred to Members who were elected to more than one authority. The number of votes which those Members would have would be part of the discussions and was not currently determined.
- The 5 Chief Executive Officers had met twice the previous week, (once with the MHCLG) and the 5 Council Leaders had also met once and all had agreed to collaborate on the setting up of the new Unitary Authority. This was the start of the process and the 5 councils would work together to deliver the best outcome for the people of Somerset.
- Scrutiny would be an important part of the process but it was too soon to say how it would operate. A report on the Scrutiny arrangements would be presented to Members in the Autumn.
- The terms of reference and reporting lines of the member working group would be finalised when more information was available.
- Deputies would be available if the Leader or CEO’s were unable to attend decision making meetings.
- SSDC would have equal influence on the Structural Change Order as the other Somerset Councils. But this process was led by MHCLG.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee noted that not all of the Members had been able to read the report prior to the meeting due to IT issues. He also suggested that the 4 District Councils arrange a joint scrutiny of the Unitary process

At the conclusion of the debate, the recommendations were proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Members.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive recommend that Full Council:-

- a. notes the next steps following the Secretary of State decision;

- b. delegates authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of Council and Monitoring Officer to submit any responses and undertake negotiations regarding the content of the Structural Change Order and associated matters;
- c. establishes a member working group to work with the Leader, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer in considering the Structural Change Order, the membership of that group to be the Leader of Council, the Deputy Leader, the Leader of the SSDC Conservative Group and the Leader of the SSDC Independent Group.

**Reason:** To formally to notify the Executive and Full Council of the decision of the Secretary of State on 21 July 2021 to implement the proposal for a single unitary council for the County of Somerset, to update members as to the next steps and to seek delegated authority for the Chief Executive to negotiate the terms of the Structural Change Order with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (“MHCLG”).

*(voting: unanimous in favour)*

**56. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 6)**

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of District Executive would be held on Thursday 02 September 2021, commencing at 9.30am. as a virtual consultative meeting via Zoom meeting software.

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Chairman

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Date