

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Thursday 4 November 2021.**

(9.30 am - 10.50 am)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
John Clark
Adam Dance

Sarah Dyke
Henry Hobhouse
Tony Lock
Peter Seib



Also Present:

Brian Hamilton
Sue Osborne

Gerard Tucker
Linda Vijeh

Officers:

Jane Portman	Chief Executive
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Brendan Downes	Lead Specialist - People, Performance & Change
Cath Temple	Specialist (Performance)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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

86. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7th October 2021 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

87. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Peter Gubbins.

88. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

89. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

90. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman advised that the draft Structural Change Order for the Unitary Authority had been received the previous evening and it had been circulated to all Members that morning. The first meeting of the Somerset Local Government Reorganisation Joint Committee would be held the following day (5th November) at Mendip District Council offices in Shepton Mallet.

91. Corporate Performance Report 2021-22: 2nd Quarter (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman introduced the report and advised that a number of questions had been raised by email by members of the Scrutiny Committee and some may require a written answer.

The Performance Specialist thanked her fellow officers for providing the data for the report which she said was an honest and robust picture of the Council's current performance. All areas which had red or amber outcomes were working very hard to improve their statistics.

In response to questions from Scrutiny Members, the Performance Specialist, the Lead Specialist and the Director for Service Delivery advised:-

- Planning enforcement data would be included in the Quarter 3 report.
- Removing duplicate planning applications on the same site and only looking at major applications, there were currently 3,966 dwellings and 224 bedrooms of care home accommodation delayed by the phosphate issue.
- Homeless enforcement action referred to action such as civil injunctions and community protection warnings/notices where individuals staying on the streets had other options but refused to engage. The enforcement was to encourage engagement with services to help individuals off the streets.
- PCS11 & PCS12 (percentage of planning applications determined within 8 weeks) were rated as green because both were above their Annual and Quarterly Targets.
- There was an extensive training & development service for staff together with a dedicated Learning & Development Officer who sourced internal and external training as required. There was also an extensive on-line learning management system available.
- There had been extensive leadership and management training at the beginning of the year and a number of management team officers were undertaking professional qualifications and personal development.

- Spending on local companies was measured by postcodes and also on a 30 mile radius and was currently running at 45% due to the Chard Regeneration scheme but it was usually around 60%.
- There had been an increase in the number of rough sleepers and additional funding for outreach work to help them look for long term housing solutions had been made available. The Housing First project should also help to reduce their numbers.
- Public data on FOI's was not currently produced but improvements including robotics and artificial intelligence to support the FOI process would allow more meaningful statistics to be produced in the future.
- Statistics on the time taken to answer telephone calls to the Council was not currently measured as the move to on-line services was intended to free up the telephone calls for those customers who required more assistance and these calls were generally longer.
- The length of telephone calls to the Council were recorded and the number resolved at first point of contact which was to the benefit of the customer, but they were not part of the corporate KPI's.
- The public were encouraged to use the SSDC on-line services where possible.
- The Housing Benefit Specialists had written a recovery plan to return to a good level of service and there had been very productive meetings with DWP. There had not been a high turn-over of staff but their workload had increased during the Covid pandemic due to increased applications for the Council Tax reduction scheme.
- There had been technical issues with the 'my account' registrations on the Councils website and a solution was currently being tested, When this was complete, "my account" would be made live and would be promoted in a campaign prior to annual Council Tax billing.
- The Discretionary Housing Payments scheme that was reduced due to an underspend was the Hardship scheme, which was for council tax top up payments. The Discretionary Housing Payment scheme was funded by central government not SSDC (unless it was overspent). The current predicted spend was an estimate based on trends. If the scheme was overspent at the end of the financial year, this would be met from reserve funds in the benefits budget.
- Generally the responses from SCC departments (highways, ecology & lead local flood authority) were slow. Highway officers were required to co-ordinate responses on larger schemes from a number of internal colleagues and were therefore reliant upon further input from separate teams to provide a response. The phosphates issues had affected the response time of ecologists and the Local Lead Flood Authority appeared to be currently under staffed.
- Staff turnover was covered in PCS 18. It had increased by 1.44% on the previous quarter but this was in part due to staff moving within SSDC.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee thanked officers for their detailed responses to the questions.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Officers were congratulated on the quality of the report particularly relating to land development and economy.
- Overall the trends were good and we should not always focus on the red reports.
- Information regarding the rough sleeper referral service should be publicised through the media.
- The measurement of spending with local companies only recorded those which SSDC directly contracted and it could be higher than 60% if sub-contracted workers were included.
- Many members of the public reported long waiting times to have their phone call answered by SSDC.
- Would it be possible for Town and Parish Clerks to have a dedicated telephone number for SSDC?

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked the officers for their report and for answering Members questions. Members were content to note Corporate Performance Report 2021-22: 2nd Quarter.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to note the Corporate Performance Report 2021-22: 2nd Quarter.

Reason: To note current position of the Council's agreed key performance indicators covering the period from July to September 2021 (Q2).

92. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman noted that there were a large number of reports due at the December District Executive meeting.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments;
 - Chard Shopfront Design Guide (Supplementary Planning Guidance) – December 2021
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B.

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

93. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 8)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 2nd December 2021 as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

94. Exclusion of Press and Public (Agenda Item 9)

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).

95. Briefing on Local Government Reorganisation (Confidential) (Agenda Item 10)

The Chief Executive provided members with a brief verbal update on the Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset.

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Chairman

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Date