

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Thursday 2 December 2021.**

(9.30 - 11.40 am)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
Adam Dance
Sarah Dyke

Peter Gubbins
Henry Hobhouse
Tony Lock
Peter Seib



Also Present:

Brian Hamilton
Charlie Hull
Sue Osborne

Gerard Tucker
Martin Wale

Officers:

Jane Portman	Chief Executive
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Robert Orrett	Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager
Jessica Power	Lead Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Anna Matthews	Chard High Street HAZ Project Manager
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
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.

96. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4th November 2021 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

97. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor John Clark.

98. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

99. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

100. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman advised that Councillor Paul Maxwell was now recovering following a period in hospital.

The Chairman also reported that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had confirmed that the elections for the new Unitary Authority for Somerset would take place on 5th May 2022 and it would be a continuing authority.

101. Corporate Health & Safety Policy (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman introduced the report and said it was important for staff, the public and Councillors to keep the Council's Health and Safety policy current.

The Lead Specialist for Strategic Planning advised that following consideration of the report at the Scrutiny Committee, she provided the following responses:-

- The asbestos register was in place and checks were made to properties prior to purchase.
- The RIDDOR acronym (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) would be fully explained in the policy.
- Checks to SSDC land holdings would be confirmed to the individual Councillor.
- The number of incidents and accidents for the last quarter would be circulated to Scrutiny Committee members and the full report would be presented to Audit Committee as planned.

In response to a question regarding contractors, the Lead Specialist for Strategic Planning advised that she would check and respond at Council.

The recommendations were unanimously proposed to Council.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend that Full Council agree to:-

- a. note the contents of the report;
- b. approve the adoption of the updated Health and Safety Policy

as detailed in Appendix A;

- c. delegate the power to make any minor amendments to the Health and Safety Policy to the Lead Specialist – Strategic Planning in consultation with the Director of Strategy and Support Services and the Portfolio Holder for Health and Safety.

Reason: To request that Council adopt the updated Health and Safety (H&S) Policy.

102. Chard Shop Front Design Guide (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder for the Chard Regeneration Scheme introduced the report to agree consultation on the draft Chard Shop Front Design Guide. He said this was the next step of the town's regeneration scheme.

The Chard High Street Heritage Action Zone Manager introduced Jo Hibbert, Conservation Architect, who had been commissioned to write the Shop Front Design Guide. She said the purpose of the design guide was to provide clear and consistent guidance for those replacing or installing a new shop fronts in the town centre.

In response to questions raised at the Scrutiny Committee meeting and from Members, the Chard High Street Heritage Action Zone Manager and the Conservation Architect advised:

- The design guide would be adopted as a supplementary planning document to provide additional guidance to the Local Plan and would not introduce new policies.
- It was hoped to launch the high street shopfront improvement grants scheme in January 2022.
- The project was funded by £1m from Historic England and £1m from SSDC and the total budget was £2.4m with some additional grant funding.
- Environmental measures were not particularly mentioned in the design guide but if they were affordable and achievable within the shop frames then they would be encouraged.

During discussion it was noted that a similar scheme had been very successful in Yeovil some years ago and also some shops in Bath had triple-glazed shop windows made by a local company.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members unanimously proposed that the Chief Executive approve the draft Chard Shop Front Design Guide (Appendix A) for formal consultation.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive approve the draft Chard Shop Front Design Guide (Appendix A) for formal consultation.

Reason: To seek approval for the draft Chard Shop Front Design Guide to be subject to formal consultation. The formal consultation will be in accordance with the council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement which supports the Local Plan.

103. COVID Recovery and Renewal Strategy: six months' progress report (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman said she was impressed with the progress made by officers in the delivery of the Recovery and Renewal Strategy as detailed in the report.

In response to points raised by Scrutiny Committee members, the Lead Specialist for Economy, Place and Recovery advised:-

- When the plan was approved by District Executive in April 2021, it had been noted that a long term view to work through issues and reach full recovery from COVID was part of the plan.
- There had been some challenges and staffing issues to the priority to improve the SSDC customer journey (step 4) and a full written response would be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.

He concluded that good progress had been made on 10 of the 11 key step objectives within the plan which were all on track to deliver. He noted that it was no longer felt necessary to set up another Recovery Board as staff were working well in partnership with other bodies as listed in Appendix 2.

Members thanked the officers for their work in the progress of delivering the recovery and renewal strategy and they unanimously proposed that the Chief Executive agree the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive:-

- a. notes the good delivery progress made within the first six months' (Appendix 1)
- b. agree that rather than establishing a new Recovery Board that Members and Officers continue to have representation on the groups identified (in Appendix 2) and co-ordinate to ensure alignment with SSDC's Recovery and Renewal Strategy delivery.

Reason: To provide District Executive with a six months' progress report regarding delivery of the Recovery and Renewal Strategy.

104. 2021/22 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30 September 2021 (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services thanked officers for providing a detailed report of the Councils budgets at the first half of the year. He noted there were a number of small changes within budgets and there was an allowance for the Local Government Review. There were also some changes to the earmarked reserves and changes to the revenue provision of the Council's the two solar projects. The virement proposed would allow the retention of key staff on fixed term contracts until the vesting day of the new Unitary Authority. It was proposed to delegate the decision on Business Rates Pooling to the Chief Finance Officer until further information on the benefits of the scheme were available. A small underspend was predicted overall and he concluded by proposing the recommendations to Members.

The Scrutiny Specialist confirmed that questions raised at their meeting were answered by officers.

There was no debate and Members unanimously recommended that the Chief Executive confirm the recommendations.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend that the Chief Executive:-

- a. notes the variances being forecast from the 2021/22 revenue budget agreed by Council in February 2021 as set out in Table One.
- b. approves the virement of £28k from the insurance budget to fund the extension of key fixed term posts across the Council until the end of this financial year, as described in paragraphs 39 to 42.
- c. notes the budget virements made under delegated authority as detailed in Appendix A.
- d. notes the transfers made to date to and from reserves outlined in Table Four.
- e. delegates the formal decision to remain in the Somerset Business Rates Pool to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Finance & Legal Services Executive Portfolio Holder (see paragraphs 48 to 49).

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommend Council to:-

- f. approve Revised Estimates for the 2021/22 revenue budget as shown in Table One and as described in paragraphs 11 to 35 in this report.
- g. approve the deletion and the consequential movement of reserve balances as set out in Table Five.
- h. note the forecast year end reserves position shown in Appendix B and described in paragraphs 58 and 59.

Reason: To seek Council's approval for Revised Estimates for the 2021/22 revenue budget based on quarter two actuals and forecasts of the year end position.

105. 2021/22 Capital Budget Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 30 September 2021 (Agenda Item 10)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services noted that since the last quarterly monitoring report, the Senior Leadership Team had reviewed the capital programme and the capital reserves had been rationalised for transparency. It was also planned to use existing reserves to fund the existing capital budget within that year which would reduce the need for external borrowing which would save on borrowing costs in the revenue budget of over £284,000. There were also a number of assumptions including the decarbonisation budget of £2.8m which was assumed to be delivered within the grant period but this may be extended and SSDC may fund elements which fell outside the criteria. The projects proposed to be removed from the capital programme were unlikely to be delivered for either external reasons, capacity issues or were no longer a priority for the Council in the Council Plan. He concluded that the Council had a large and active capital programme which had provided revenue income but due to changes to the CIPFA code it was proposed to cease borrowing to invest for revenue gain. He proposed that the recommendations be agreed by Council.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder and Chief Finance Officer advised:

- The projects proposed to be removed from the capital programme were either unlikely to complete, due to a lack of officer capacity, or were not now a priority due to Local Government Reorganisation.
- The mortgage rescue contingency had not been used for a number of years and the gypsy and traveller acquisition fund was an officer capacity issue in the remaining 16 months of the Council, but it was likely to be picked up by the new Unitary Authority.
- The new car parks proposed to be removed from the capital programme would be clarified in the report to Council.

During discussion Members expressed their dismay at the proposed projects to be removed from the Capital programme and it was suggested that contractors could be brought in to deliver the projects. It was noted that the PV panels and LED bulbs proposed to be removed from the capital programme could be included as part of the decarbonisation grant scheme.

The Director for Service Delivery advised that more staff were being drawn into the Local Government Review work and did not have the capacity to deliver all of the proposed schemes.

The Deputy Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee confirmed that most of their questions were answered at the meeting or they had now been raised by the Executive.

The Chief Executive suggested that officers review the proposed schemes for removal from the capital programme at table two of the report and provide further clarity to Portfolio Holders prior to the Full Council meeting.

It was proposed to amend recommendation B to ask officers to review the projects proposed to be removed from the capital programme as listed in Table Two prior to Full Council, and this was seconded. A named vote was taken and the recommendations were unanimously agreed by Members to be proposed to Council.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommends that Full Council agree to:-

- a. the revised Capital Estimates for the financial year 2021/22 of £41.703m (as described in paragraphs 13 to 18 and as shown in detail in Appendix A).
- b. ask officers to review the projects proposed to be removed from the capital programme as listed in Table Two prior to Full Council
- c. the removal of the unspent Commercial Investment budget from the capital programme (of £8.643m) and the cessation of investment purely for yield capital expenditure from December 2021 (as described in paragraphs 32 to 41).
- d. increase the capital programme by £482k to fund capital works on the Council's Commercial Property Portfolio as described in paragraph 16.
- e. revised capital funding plans as described in paragraphs 24 to 30 including the approval to use £20.2m of corporate Council earmarked reserves to fund expenditure in this financial year as follows:

- i. The allocation of £2m of the Useable Capital Receipts earmarked reserve to the Octagon Theatre Project to fund estimated expenditure for this and next financial year.
- ii. The use of the remaining amount currently in the Useable Capital Receipts earmarked reserve, of £16m, to fund the revised 2021/22 capital programme.
- iii. The use of the Capital Fund earmarked reserve of £1.167m to fund the revised 2021/22 capital programme.
- iv. The use of the Commercial Investment Risk Reserve of £482k to fund capital works required on the Council's commercial property portfolio in 2021/22.
- v. The use of the Cremator Replacement Capital Reserve of £549k to part fund the Yeovil Crematorium Project in 2021/22.

Reason: To inform Members of the forecast capital spend for the year 2021/22 and to seek approval from Council for Revised Capital Estimates for 2021/22 along with revised capital funding plans including the approval to use Council earmarked reserves to fund expenditure in this financial year.

106. Yeovil Refresh - Implementation (Agenda Item 11)

The Portfolio Holder for the Yeovil Refresh said the proposed purchase of the property was key to the re-development of the whole box factory site in Yeovil.

The Commercial Property Land and Development Manager suggested that the report be discussed in confidence if any further detail was required by Members.

The Vice Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised that they had discussed the item in a confidential session and had raised a number of questions.

The Chairman proposed that the remainder of the report be discussed 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). This was agreed by Members.

The remainder of this report was discussed in closed session at the conclusion of which, Members agreed the following recommendations and two confidential recommendations relating to financing the potential property purchase.

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommends that the Chief Executive:-

- a. approves engagement with the owners' of the property identified in the confidential appendix to this report with the aim of agreeing terms for purchase by the council.
- b. approves allocation of the amount of capital identified in the confidential appendix to this report which may be applied to property purchase as identified, subject to a Full Council decision to approve the revised estimates to the Capital budget for 2021/22.
- c. authorises the Director, Place and Recovery, in consultation with Yeovil Refresh Portfolio Holder, Portfolio Holder - Economic Development including Commercial Strategy, S151 Officer, and Monitoring Officer, to conclude contracts for purchase of property identified in the confidential appendix to this report.

Reason: To delegate to officers authority to proceed with the purchase of property interests in the town centre for regeneration purposes and to approve capital to be used for that.

107. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)

There were no changes proposed to the Executive Forward Plan.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A.

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

108. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 6th January 2022 as a virtual consultative meeting via Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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

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).

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

The Chief Executive and the Director of Place and Recovery provided members with a brief verbal update on the progress of Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset.

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Chairman

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Date