

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 22 September 2022** in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil.

(6.30 - 8.15 pm)

### **Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Paul Maxwell (Chairman)  
Councillor Wes Read (Vice-Chairman)

Barbara Appleby	Jenny Kenton	Peter Seib
Jason Baker	Tim Kerley	Garry Shortland
Ray Buckler	Mike Lock	Jeny Snell
Dave Bulmer	Pauline Lock	Andy Soughton
Tony Capozzoli	Tony Lock	Mike Stanton
Nicola Clark	Kevin Messenger	Rob Stickland
Adam Dance	Sue Osborne	Lucy Trimnell
Brian Hamilton	Oliver Patrick	Gerard Tucker
Mike Hewitson	Crispin Raikes	Martin Wale
Henry Hobhouse	Paul Rowsell	William Wallace
Kaysar Hussain	Gina Seaton	Colin Winder

### **Also Present on-line:**

**Error! No document variable supplied.** Andy Kendall  
Sarah Dyke Tricia O'Brien  
David Gubbins Tiffany Osborne  
Charlie Hull Clare Paul  
Val Keitch

### **Officers:**

Jane Portman	Chief Executive
Jan Gamon	Director (Place, Recovery, Arts & Entertainment)
Nicola Hix	Director (Strategy, Support & Environmental Services)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Barrie Morris	Key Audit Partner (Grant Thornton)
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Michelle James	Principal Licensing Specialist
John Hammond	Lead Specialist (Built Environment)
Peter Paddon	Acting Director (Place and Recovery)
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Jo Morris	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robin Bastable, Neil Bloomfield, Hayward Burt, Martin Carnell, Malcolm Cavill, John Clark, Louise Clarke, Nick Colbert, Karl Gill, Peter Gubbins, Ben Hodgson, Mike Lewis, Graham Oakes, Robin Pailthorpe, David Recardo and Dean Ruddle.

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

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 21 July 2022 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillor Pauline Lock noted that at Agenda item 13: Sale of Commercial Development Land at Lufton, Yeovil (Lufton 2000 Joint Venture) the plan of land listed on page 157 showed an area of land as owned by herself and Councillor Mike Lock. However, she said the area of land had been sold by them over a year ago.

At the time the item was discussed, Councillor Rob Stickland declared a personal interest in Agenda item 16: Report of Executive Decisions, as the Chairman of Yeovil Without Parish Council, who were funding partners of the Yeovil Crematorium Project.

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

A resident of Wincanton gave a brief tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II prior to asking his question. His questions related to Agenda item 12: Wincanton Regeneration Scope Change. He advised that since the District Executive meeting on 01 September a proposal had been made for the key vacant site mentioned in the report which was aligned to the short to medium term aims for the site as detailed in the Regeneration Strategy. He asked if the Council agreed to spend legal and consultancy costs in preparing for a compulsory purchase of the building by March 2023 required a key review and may no longer be warranted. He asked if the public interest be better served by re-focussing the shorter and longer term aims and budgets to assist with the development proposals. He concluded by asking if it would be proportionate to proceed with the re-scoping report to achieve the desired outcome?

The Portfolio Holder for the Wincanton Regeneration Scheme thanked the resident for his questions and confirmed that a written response would be provided very shortly.

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

The Chairman advised that following the death of HRH Queen Elizabeth II, he has represented the Council at a number of official events. He listed them as;-

- The laying of a wreath on behalf of SSDC at Ninesprings Country Park, Yeovil on Saturday 10 September.
- The reading of the local proclamation of HRH King Charles III at Ninesprings Country Park, Yeovil on Sunday 11 September.
- Attended a Thanksgiving Service for HRH Queen Elizabeth II at Wells Cathedral on 18 September.
- He signed the book of condolence for HRH Queen Elizabeth II at Brympton Way, Yeovil on 20 September.

He also said that following the local proclamation on 11 September, Councillor Val Keitch had thanked all the staff involved and said how proud she was of SSDC. He said he echoed these comments and thanked the Chief Executive, Senior Leadership Team and the Lead Specialist for Strategic Planning, for successfully co-ordinating Operation London Bridge. He also thanked the Lead Specialist for Communications and his team for keeping all informed during the period.

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### **63. Members Tributes to HM Queen Elizabeth II (1926 - 2022) (Agenda Item 6)**

At the beginning of this item, the Chairman asked that all Members stand and observe a minute silence in honour of HRH Queen Elizabeth II.

The Chairman said it was with profound and deep sadness that he learned of the death of HRH Queen Elizabeth II. He said she had been an inspiration and example to all and she embodied all the best qualities of honesty, decency, integrity, humility and a tireless devotion to public service. He said she had touched the lives of millions of people across the world and was respected by world leaders of all political and religious persuasions and was able to bring people together by her compassion and understanding. In a changing world, she was stability, certainty and reassurance. He referred to her being a mother, grandmother and great grandmother and said all her family would miss her greatly. She would be remembered as one of the greatest leaders of her time. He hoped the future king would be able to guide the country, the Commonwealth and the global community in the respectful way the queen had.

The Deputy Leader of Council said the late queens name had been linked with key events of contemporary history in the United Kingdom. For many decades the queen had enjoyed the love and respect of her subjects as well as being held in high regard on the world stage – the words said by the Leader of Russia of our late queens 70 years of service and her achievements. He noted that she had been born in a house in London, not a palace, and had not expected to inherit the crown, but following the abdication of her uncle in 1936, greatness had been thrust upon her. On her fathers death, she became the queen of several realms; the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan and Ceylon at 25 years old. He said she was the worlds most experienced diplomat

as she strengthened the Commonwealth through royal tours and broadened the monarchy into the Royal Family. Her use of broadcast media to reach out to ordinary people all over the world through her Queen's message every Christmas. He noted the challenging events during her reign which as a leader she adapted and overcame. He said she was a constant in everyone's lives, always caring, calm and reassuring.

The Leader of the Conservative Group said he fully endorsed the comments already made in relation to the service and dedication of Her Majesty throughout her long life and reign. He noted she was still carrying out duties two days before her death in constitutionally meeting and changing Prime Ministers. He recalled watching her coronation ceremony on television in 1953 and hearing her making her solemn oath of service which she kept throughout her reign. He also referred to her courage during many public engagements with minimum protection from special officers. He said he had the honour to meet her at a charity reception in St James Palace some years ago where she had thanked him for his charity work and as a serving police officer. He concluded that all thoughts were with the Royal Family at the moment, particularly King Charles III and wished him a long reign.

The Leader of the Independent Group said that for over 70 years the late Queen Elizabeth II had given an incredible contribution to her nation, the UK, Commonwealth and the world. When she became queen in 1952 it had been 7 years since the end of World War II and the nation needed stability and a reason to look to the future. He said that Queen Elizabeth II gave this in abundance to the nation and the Commonwealth. She had always served with a sense of calm, particularly in difficult times and over the last two weeks many images of the queen had been shown on television of her smiling and happy and this was how she should be remembered. He said the country should be proud of the well-planned delivery of her funeral in a dignified manner which was truly deserved.

Councillor Tony Capozzoli remembered memories of Royal Garden Parties he had attended to represent SSDC where he had met the queen and he thanked her for the treasured garden party invites to all Councils across the UK.

Councillor Pauline Lock said the queen had been a remarkable lady who would never be forgotten. She noted that she and her husband had planted a purple beech tree the previous week in honour of the platinum jubilee and as part of the Queen's Green Canopy of trees, a scheme which had been extended. She encouraged others to also plant trees in the queen's memory.

The Chairman thanked all for their contributions.

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#### **64. Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005 (Agenda Item 7)**

The Portfolio Holder for Licensing introduced the report and advised that the Council was required to adopt a Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005, which was reviewed every 3 years. The Statement of Principles had been

subject to public consultation but no public comments had been received and the Licensing Committee proposed that Council agree to adopt the Gambling Act 2005, Statement of Principles for approval and implementation. He noted that the new Unitary Authority would review the Statement of Principles again and he invited questions from Members.

Councillor Martin Wale noted that he had chaired the Licensing Committee meeting earlier that week and the statement remained unchanged from when it had been last adopted by Council. He proposed that Council adopt the document and this was seconded by the Portfolio Holder and unanimously agreed by Council.

**RESOLVED:** That Council agree to adopt the Gambling Act 2005, Statement of Principles for approval and implementation.

**Reason:** To formally adopt the unamended Gambling Act 2005, Statement of Principles (Gambling Policy) 2022- 2025.

*(Voting: unanimous in favour)*

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## 65. 2020/21 Auditor's Annual Report (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised that the 2020/21 Auditor's Annual Report had made some statutory recommendations which would be discussed later in the agenda. He referred to the recommendation to note the report and endorse the management's proposed response and actions to the various recommendations and said that while a number of improvements were suggested to improve the economy, efficiency and effectiveness, no significant weaknesses had been identified. He said it was a worthy piece of work and the purpose of audit was to improve for the future. He proposed the recommendations to Council and they were seconded by the chairman of the Audit Committee.

The Chairman of the Audit Committee introduced the External Auditor from Grant Thornton and he stressed that the Audit Committee took the proposed recommendations within the report very seriously. He said the Finance Team had gone through a number of staff changes and the work of Local Government Review had stretched their resource. Additional support had now been provided and he apologised to the External Auditors for the behaviour of two ex-staff members. He outlined the changes in regulations for the External Auditors which required more information and greater scrutiny by them to support their audit opinions. He noted they had highlighted some areas of good practice around the governance arrangements of the Council's commercial investments and he said the financial statements were expected to receive an unqualified rating in due course.

The Chairman of the Audit Committee spoke regarding the statutory recommendations and the management's proposed response and actions. He

noted that the Audit Committee had proposed recommendations in the following agenda item which would help to prevent any reoccurrence. As part of the key recommendations, the resourcing of the finance team had been addressed so the 2021/22 Auditor's Annual report should be a smooth process. The Audit Committee would shortly be signing off the 2021 accounts which should be approved by Council in early 2023. He invited any questions from Members.

In response to questions from Members, the Chairman of the Audit Committee and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised:-

- He was now satisfied that the governance arrangements around the Council's investment portfolio were sound. The Council had ceased to make any further commercial investments for financial gain.
- The management response confirmed that the recommendations from the previous years audit had been reviewed and implemented.
- The Audit Committee had received a presentation from the SSDC Opium Power Joint Venture at their meeting that day and they were pleased to hear the business model explained.
- There would be an internal audit report on the work and governance of the SSDC Opium Power Joint Venture at the next meeting of the Audit Committee.

The Chairman of the Audit Committee recommended that Full Council receive a presentation from the Directors of SSDC Opium Power Joint Venture at a future meeting. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Sue Osborne and when put to the vote was agreed by 32 votes in favour, 0 against and 1 abstention.

**RESOLVED:** That Council:

- (a) Noted the Auditor's Annual Report and recommendations and endorsed management's proposed response and action to the various recommendations set out in the Auditor's Annual Report.
- (b) Agreed that an item be added to the Forward Plan for a presentation on Opium Power Joint Venture (similar to the presentation to Audit Committee on 22/09/2022).

**Reason:** To note the Auditor's Annual Report on whether all aspects of the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources are operating effectively, and, to note the summary of findings and recommendations to the Council which were accompanied by the Council's management response.

*(Voting: 32 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)*

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**66. Statutory Recommendation in Respect of Settlement Agreements (Agenda Item 9)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and drew Members attention to the recommendations which he said related to the previous Agenda item 8: the 2020/21 Auditor's Annual Report. He said the report clarified existing statutory guidance along with parts of the Constitution and he proposed the recommendations to Council. They were subsequently seconded by the Chairman of the Audit Committee.

In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that there was a distinction in the two reports between the recommendation to 'discuss' and the proposal to 'consider' but the report was open for discussion by Full Council.

During discussion, the following points were made by Members:-

- Despite having processes in place, the previous Chief Executive overrode them.
- The non-disclosure agreement must have been drawn up by someone at SSDC.
- Was the payment made lawfully, without an audit trail? It should be fully investigated and discussed and may be put to an independent enquiry.

The Leader of Council clarified that she had not been made aware of the arrangement by the previous Chief Executive until some months after the event.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the transaction had been reported in the revenue budget outturn for 2020/21 which had first been considered by Scrutiny Committee on 29 June 2021 and then by District Executive on 01 July 2021. The transaction related to a settlement agreement for an employee leaving the organisation. This was an efficiency of service decision and it was normal for the terms of the agreement to be kept confidential. The name of the employee would not be disclosed as this was a legal obligation.

The Auditor for Grant Thornton confirmed that having reviewed the management responses he was satisfied that they addressed the concerns raised during the audit process and the recommendations proposed.

The recommendations, having been proposed and seconded, were confirmed by 25 in favour, 0 against and 8 abstentions.

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

- a. accept the statutory recommendation set out in the Auditor's Annual Report on South Somerset District Council for 2020-21;
- b. adopt the Procedure Note for Officers set out in the Appendix to the report with immediate effect;
- c. delegate authority to the Chief Executive to notify the auditor

of these decisions and publish a notice approved by the auditor that summarises them on its website;

d. delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to make any necessary amendments to the Council's Constitution to ensure the following specific provisions contained in the Statutory Guidance on Special Severance Payments are clearly stated:

- **payments below £20,000** will be approved in accordance with the Council's scheme of delegation
- **payments of £20,000 and above, but below £100,000** must be signed off by the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), with a clear record of the Leader's approval endorsed on the report
- **payments of £100,000 and above** must be approved by a vote of full council.

**Reason:** To inform Council of a statutory recommendation made by the auditor and to agree what action to take.

*(Voting: 25 in favour, 0 against, 8 abstentions)*

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## 67. Buildings at Risk - Approach for the Future (Agenda Item 10)

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services advised that the proposals in the report were in accord with the Planning Reimagined workshops.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report and noted that approximately 50% of the conservation areas and 40% of all listed buildings in the whole of Somerset were within the South Somerset area. He hoped to make a recommendation to the new Unitary Authority to continue to work with historic buildings and recognise their importance to the county and to reinstate the support to owners of historic buildings through a small grants programme and sources of further support and funding.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- It would be useful to see the outcomes of the funding allocated to buildings at risk at the end of the financial year.
- The new Unitary Authority had agreed £30,000 to support the introduction of a Cultural strategy and historic buildings at risk should be incorporated into that Strategy.
- Pleased to see a newly appointed Heritage Consultant.
- Look forward to more in-depth building at risk reports in the future.

The Lead Specialist for Built Environment confirmed that that the Heritage Consultant was not a direct SSDC employee and their objective had been to

carry out a review of the priorities on specific buildings at risk. Within the new Unitary Authority there was the opportunity to bring together the conservation resources across the 5 councils which may allow for more project work to be undertaken.

The recommendations, having being proposed and seconded, were unanimously agreed by Members.

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

- a. note the contents of the Buildings at Risk report.
- b. endorse the importance of continuing this work and request the new council is encouraged to afford appropriate priority to protect and enhance the heritage of Somersets historic buildings, and conservation areas.

**Reason:** To agree the Councils approach to dealing with Buildings at Risk and encourage the new Somerset Council to afford appropriate priority to enhance the heritage of Somersets historic buildings, and conservation areas.

*(Voting: unanimous in favour)*

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**68. New Somerset Council - Proposed Members Code of Conduct (Agenda Item 11)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised that the proposed code was based on the LGA model code and it had already been adopted by the other Somerset Councils so it would be Somerset wide. The Somerset Town and Parish Councils had also been encouraged to adopt it which would simplify dealing with Standards matters in the lead up to the new Unitary Council and afterwards and would help with training on the one code. He proposed that the new Members Code of Conduct be adopted and this was seconded and agreed by Council with only abstention.

**RESOLVED:** That Council agreed to adopt the Members Code of Conduct set out at Appendix 2 of the report with immediate effect.

**Reason:** To adopt the new Members Code of Conduct, as adopted by Somerset County Council in May 2022.

*(Voting: 31 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)*

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**69. Wincanton Regeneration Scope Change (Agenda Item 12)**

The Portfolio Holder for the Wincanton Regeneration Scheme advised that the report sought in-principle agreement to support a change in project scope within

the agreed budget and bring a key vacant building back into use. She said this would give better regeneration outcomes for the town and the planned events, activities and building repair grants would continue although they were closed to new applications. The highway safety works would continue and the new Somerset Council may progress the public realm works at some time in the future. This was a significant change of scope which reflected recent changes to the membership of the board who had worked constructively together. She also thanked the officers who had supported the Regeneration Board.

The recommendations were proposed and seconded.

One of the Ward Members, Councillor Colin Winder, noted that he had resigned from the Regeneration Board and advised that a planning application had been submitted for the key vacant building within the town. He asked that the recommendations of the report be held until that planning application had been determined.

The Director for Place and Recovery said they would be very happy to engage and work collaboratively with the owner of the building, however, it was necessary to take positive steps forward. The two County Councillors for the Wincanton area had agreed to advocate the proposal with the new Unitary Authority and their support was appreciated.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that a very recent planning application had been submitted and was awaiting verification. There was a willingness to pursue collaborative work with the owner of the building but the report proposals should be agreed.

The recommendations, having been proposed and seconded, were confirmed by 31 in favour, 0 against and 1 abstention.

**RESOLVED:** That Council approved a significant change in project scope, for the Wincanton Regeneration Scheme within the existing agreed project budget of £2.392m, to accommodate the revised over-riding priority of bringing key vacant premises back into use (detail provided in Confidential Appendix).

Whilst noting that:

- The events and activities, plus building repair grants work will also continue but applications closed for both at the end of August to enable completion in March 2023.
- Whilst public realm construction will not commence, the Highways Safety Audit 2 works will be completed to allow Somerset Council the option to progress public realm works in future.
- Agreement will be sought from Somerset County Council for any land acquisition or Compulsory Purchase Order

under the s24 Direction that is over the value of £100k.

**Reason:** To agree to significantly alter the scope within the approved budget of the Wincanton Regeneration Project from that agreed by District Executive in February 2022. To provide a focused workstream on the re-use of key vacant properties until the end of March 2023 and provide better regeneration outcomes for Wincanton.

*(Voting: 31 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)*

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**70. Sale of commercial development land at Lufton, Yeovil (Lufton 2000 joint venture) (Agenda Item 13)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised that SSDC currently owned a 50% share in a joint venture at Lufton trading estate. It was proposed to dispose of the share to the partner for the sum in the confidential appendix. He proposed that the recommendations be accepted by Council and they were seconded by Councillor Tony Capozzoli.

There were no questions and Members unanimously agreed to the sale of the asset named Lufton 2000.

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

- a. note the contents of the report.
- b. approve the proposal to sell the Councils share in the Joint Venture in the asset named Lufton 2000 on the terms outlined in the confidential appendix to the report.
- c. authorise the Chief Financial Officer to seek the approval of the Somerset County Council to the sale under the Section 24 direction.
- d. delegate the power to the Council's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to approve the detail of the sale.

**Reason:** To agree the sale of the Council's 50% share in the Lufton 2000 Joint Venture to its joint venture partner Abbey Manor Developments Limited.

*(Voting: unanimous in favour)*

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**71. Appointment of Members to Council Committees - change to Scrutiny Committee membership (Agenda Item 14)**

The recommendation of the report was proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Council.

**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 confirm that:-

- a. Councillor Lucy Trimnell be appointed to the Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Mike Lewis.

**Reason:** To confirm a change to the Scrutiny Committee membership as requested by the Conservative group

*(Voting: unanimous in favour)*

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**72. Proposed increase to the Disabled Facilities Grant capital budget - referral from District Executive (Agenda Item 15)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and advised that based upon the outstanding works from the previous year, the budget for Disabled Facilities Grants needed to be increased. This would be reimbursed by the government through the Better Care Fund. He proposed the recommendations and they were seconded by Councillor Nicola Clark.

There were no questions and Members unanimously agreed to the increase in the Disabled Facilities Grant as proposed.

**RESOLVED:** That Council agree to increase the Disabled Facilities Grant capital budget by £1.405m.

**REASON:** To agree to increase the Disabled Facilities Grant capital budget due to high demand.

*(Voting: unanimous in favour)*

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**73. Report of Executive Decisions (Agenda Item 16)**

The Leader introduced the report and invited questions.

There were no questions and the report of executive decisions was NOTED.

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**74. Audit Committee (Agenda Item 17)**

The report of the Audit Committee was NOTED.

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**75. Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 18)**

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee welcomed Councillor Lucy Trimnell as the new member of the Committee and he thanked Councillor Mike Lewis for his service to the Committee over a number of years. He noted that the Scrutiny Committee had held two informal discussions on the Section 19 flooding reports in Ilminster and Chard and had made some recommendations to the County Council and Environment Agency. He asked if it was possible to bring forward a report on Section 106 agreements before the Council ended in March 2023. He concluded by thanking the Portfolio Holders for attending their Scrutiny Committee meetings.

The report of the Scrutiny Committee was NOTED.

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#### **76. Motions (Agenda Item 19)**

There were no Motions submitted by Members.

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#### **77. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 20)**

Councillor Nick Colbert had submitted the following questions under Procedure Rule 10:-

Given the recent revelations regarding corruption in SSDC and the accusations of a cover-up please answer the following questions:

Q1: The Auditors uncovered a “mysterious” payment of £109,000 to an unnamed officer for reasons that seem to have been kept secret, who was that officer, why was so much public money given to them and was there a confidentiality clause imposed on that officer?

Q 2: Following the uncovering of corruption in SSDC an officer in Lufton, Chris Cooper, left the employ of the Council, was a confidentiality clause imposed on this officer and if so why?

Q 3: The Auditors went on to state: “the council failed to produce a complete and accurate set of financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2021. There was insufficient urgency given to responding to audit queries with other activities being prioritised. This was compounded by a lack of finance team capacity and poor quality working papers to support the figures in the financial statements in a number of areas. Management had not implemented several recommendation made as a result of the 19/20 audit which were aimed at addressing weaknesses in processes....”

Given that the Portfolio Holder for that brief was Councillor Peter Seib and the audit costs alone to the South Somerset ratepayer has already increased by £100,000 and rising, why has Councillor Seib been left in position as Portfolio Holder given the damning report from the Auditors?

The Chairman advised that as Councillor Colbert was not present to ask his questions then a detailed written response would be provided.

Subsequent to the meeting, the following written response was provided:-

**Q 1: The Auditors uncovered a “mysterious” payment of £109,000 to an unnamed officer for reasons that seem to have been kept secret, who was that officer, why was so much public money given to them and was there a confidentiality clause imposed on that officer?**

Response from Cllr Seib - The transaction is a matter of public record and is set out in the council's Statement of Accounts. It is reported in the public report relating to the Revenue Budget Outturn for 2020/2021 which was considered by Scrutiny Committee in their meeting on 29th June 2021 and District Executive at their meeting on 1st July 2021.

Reports and minutes of these meetings are on our public website.

The transaction was in relation to a Settlement Agreement which was in the interests of efficiency of service. The employer and employee agreed that they would keep the terms of the agreement confidential, as is normal in this type of agreement.

**Q 2: Following the uncovering of corruption in SSDC an officer in Lufton, Chris Cooper, left the employ of the Council, was a confidentiality clause imposed on this officer and if so why?**

Response from Cllr Seib - Mr Cooper resigned his position in November 2021. There was no confidentiality agreement.

Although the Council uncovered areas where there had been serious misconduct following an independent investigation, there is no evidence to support a suggestion that the Council as a whole is corrupt.

**Q 3: The Auditors went on to state:**

***“the council failed to produce a complete and accurate set of financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2021. There was insufficient urgency given to responding to audit queries with other activities being prioritised. This was compounded by a lack of finance team capacity and poor quality working papers to support the figures in the financial statements in a number of areas. Management had not implemented several recommendations made as a result of the 19/20 audit which were aimed at addressing weaknesses in processes....”***

**Given that the portfolio holder for that brief was Councillor Peter Seib and the audit costs alone to the South Somerset ratepayer, has already**

**increased by £100,000 and rising why has Councillor Seib been left in position as portfolio holder given the damning report from the Auditors?**

Response from Cllr Keitch – Whilst draft statements were produced by the statutory deadline (of July 31st, 2021), an error was found which was highlighted to the external auditors after they were published. Full draft statements were published for 2021/22 by the statutory annual deadline of end of July 2022.

Management agreed with Grant Thornton that the latter could start the 2020/21 audit in mid-June 2021 on the basis that we would have prepared the draft statements by the end of May 2021, before the statutory deadline of end of July 2021.

That decision at the time was a robust and valid one. The Finance Team was almost fully staffed, relatively experienced, and stable. In addition, the prior year’s deadline agreed with the external auditors had been achieved, and therefore there was no reason to suppose the deadline would not be met.

An unexpected and significant amount of change then occurred in the finance team due to resignation/retirement, internal promotions, and new members of staff. This, together with significant work required for Local Government Reorganisation, resulted in delays to the audit process.

Cllr Seib has been fully engaged throughout the audit process and has ensured all improvements required have been actioned. In addition, our response to these issues has been scrutinised in detail by the Audit Committee and both they and Cllr Seib will continue to monitor progress against Auditor’s recommendations for the remainder of the financial year.

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**78. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 21)**

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of Full Council (Thursday 20 October) was a reserve date and would only be called if there was business to discuss.

Therefore, the next meeting of Full Council would be Thursday 17 November 2022 in the Council Chamber, SSDC Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil commencing at 7.30 p.m.

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Chairman

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Date