

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a meeting of the **District Executive** held at the **Council Chamber, Brympton Way, YEOVIL, Somerset BA20 2HT** on **Thursday 2 March 2017**.

(9.30 am - 11.17 am)

### **Present:**

Councillor Ric Pallister (Chairman)

Clare Aparicio Paul  
Carol Goodall  
Peter Gubbins  
Henry Hobhouse

Jo Roundell Greene  
Sylvia Seal  
Peter Seib  
Nick Weeks

### **Also Present:**

Jason Baker  
Mike Beech  
Val Keitch

Tony Lock  
Sue Osborne  
Sue Steele

### **Officers**

Ian Clarke  
Donna Parham  
Clare Pestell  
Helen Rutter  
Steve Barnes  
Pauline Burr  
David Crisfield  
Ian Potter  
Sharon Jones  
Anna-Maria Lenz  
Angela Cox

Director (Support Services)  
Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services)  
Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)  
Assistant Director (Communities)  
Play and Youth Facilities Officer  
Arts Development Officer  
Third Sector & Partnerships Co-ordinator  
Revenues and Benefits Manager  
Revenues Team Leader  
Performance Officer  
Democratic Services Manager

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

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### **137. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)**

The minutes of the District Executive meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2017, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

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### **138. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Angie Singleton and Alex Parmley, Chief Executive.

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

There were no declarations of interest made.

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

The Chairman agreed that members of the public present could speak at the time their item of interest was discussed.

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

The Chairman paid tribute to Councillor Tim Inglefield (Blackmoor Vale Ward) who had passed away suddenly earlier that week. Members and officers joined him in standing for a moment of silence in his memory.

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#### **142. District-wide Voluntary Sector Grants 2017/18 (Agenda Item 6)**

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture said the Council could not serve the community without the support from the partnership agencies which it funded, particularly the CASS and SPARK. She also commended the funding to the Somerset Rural Youth Project and the Arts Organisations.

The Portfolio Holder for Equalities and Diversity said the Service Level Agreement which the Council had with Access for All represented excellent value for money as they provided advice for planning and building control applications as well as improving access to people with limited mobility to all areas of the community.

The Assistant Director (Communities) said the service level agreements defined SSDC's expectations from each organisation, which could evolve as the year progressed.

In response to questions from the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, officers confirmed:-

- The funding for Access for All was consistent with the previous year and £1,000 had been held back to commission specific project work.
- CASS may require further funding to deal with the impact of Universal Credit, however, they were adapting and training their staff within a finite budget.
- InspirED offered schools high quality arts projects and professional arts training for teachers. They were not dependent solely on Academies.
- The number of people participating in the Take Art projects varied each year depending upon funding and the programme of events.
- The public did not have to be members of the National Trust to attend Craft exhibitions at National Trust properties.
- The number of Youth days had increased over the years and the Somerset Rural Youth Project staff were happy to engage with Town and Parish Councils to work through issues with young people.

The Neighbourhood Development Officer and the Young Peoples Officer also spoke in support of the grant funding proposed for each organisation and outlined the work achieved by them.

During a brief discussion, Members voiced their support for the grant funding proposed and unanimously confirmed the recommendations of the report.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive agreed:

1. to approve the District-wide Voluntary Sector Grants funding for 2017/18 as follows:-

Access for All	9,000
Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS)	121,730
SPARK (previously SSVCA)	74,260
Somerset Rural Youth Project	8,000
Actiontrack Performance Company	2,000
Take Art	10,500
Somerset Art Works	3,500
Somerset Film	2,000
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Total	£230,990

2. to approve the proposal to conduct a review into the future funding relationship with SPARK and CASS to be reported to members in the autumn of 2017. This will inform the funding relationship from 2018/19 onwards.

**Reason:** To review and confirm the district-wide organisations seeking financial support from SSDC in 2017/18.

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### 143. Council Tax Penalties & Civil Penalties in Housing Benefit (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised that the Audit Commission had estimated as much as 5% of Council Tax reductions and exemptions claimed were incorrect or fraudulently claimed. The introduction of penalties should encourage the public to inform the Council of any change in their circumstances. Any penalties collected would be retained but would not form part of the collection fund. He proposed the recommendations be approved by Council.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager confirmed that the proposed penalties were £70 in the case of failure to notify a Council Tax change and £50 for failure to notify a Housing Benefit change of circumstance within one month. He also advised that he would present a report on Council Tax and Housing Benefit fraud later in the year.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they had sought clarification that the month of April would be an amnesty period before the introduction of the penalties.

There was no debate and Members were content to propose that the recommendations be confirmed by Full Council.

**RESOLVED:** That the District Executive agreed to recommend to Council that it approves the application of Council Tax and Housing Benefit Civil Penalties with effect from 1 April 2017 (as detailed in the report).

**Reason:** To request that the District Executive recommends Council to endorse the application of Council Tax Penalties and Civil Penalties in Housing Benefit with effect from 1 April 2017.

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#### 144. Proposed Changes to Business Rates Relief Policy (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services confirmed that as a result of changes to Rural Rate Relief announced in the Government's Autumn Statement the recommendations updated the current Business Rates Relief Policy. Two of the recommendations proposed removing reference to schemes for which applications had now passed and one resolved an anomaly relating to the interaction between Small Business Rate Relief and Charity Relief rules.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee commended the officers who had supported the Task & Finish group and confirmed that the Committee supported the recommendations of the report.

In response to a question, the Revenues and Benefits Manager confirmed the qualifications to be classed as a local newspaper, and, Members asked that there be some publicity of the scheme.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members unanimously confirmed the recommendations of the report.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive agreed to:

- a. approve the use of the Council's local discount powers to grant 100% Rural Rate Relief to eligible ratepayers from 1 April 2017;
- b. approve the use of the Council's local discount powers to introduce a local discount of £1,500 a year for Local Newspapers which would come in to effect on 1 April 2017;
- c. note that the Retail Relief which was in place for 2014/15 and 2015/16 has been removed from the policy as the deadline for applications has now passed;
- d. note that the Flood Relief which related to premises flooded between 1/12/13 and 31/03/14 has been removed from the policy as the deadline for applications had now passed;
- e. note that the temporary Transitional Relief scheme has been removed from the policy as it comes to an end on 31 March 2017. A new national Transitional Relief Scheme was being introduced

alongside the new 2017 Rating List;

- f. recommend to Council a change to the DRR Policy on Discretionary 'Top up' Charity Relief to 100% where the rate payer would, apart from entitlement to Mandatory Charity, otherwise qualify for 100% Small Business Rate Relief;
- g. note the DRR Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group have considered and support the proposed amendments.

**Reason:** To approve the proposed amendments to the Council's Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy (DRR Policy) and recommend their adoption by Full Council.

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#### 145. Review of Discretionary Housing Payments Policy (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised that the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy allowed the Council to provide additional support towards the housing costs of individuals and families in exceptional circumstances. He thanked the Scrutiny Task & Finish group members for their assistance in reviewing the policy.

The Revenues and Benefits Manager advised that the DWP had now confirmed that funding in this area had increased by 23% across England which would increase the SSDC grant to £287,000 for 2017/18. Part of this funding was to mitigate the effect of the Benefit Cap which was introduced in November 2016. He confirmed that the Scrutiny Task & Finish group members and officers had considered the existing policy and had taken advice from the voluntary groups: Mind and Shelter. They had looked at the health and well-being aspect of the policy and sought consistency on the reasonableness test.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee commended the officers who had supported the Task & Finish group with case note information and said the Committee supported the recommendations of the report.

In response to questions from Members, the Revenues and Benefits Manager confirmed that each application was individually assessed, particularly with regard to health and wellbeing issues.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to approve the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy to come in to effect on 1 April 2017.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive agreed to:

- a. approve the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy to come in to effect on 1 April 2017;
- b. note the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group findings and recommendations for the policy revision attached at Appendix A

**Reason:** To approve the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy.

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#### **146. Quarterly Corporate Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report - 3rd Quarter 2016/17 (Agenda Item 10)**

The Chairman advised that the performance reporting format would alter when the Council Plan was revised.

The Performance Officer introduced the report and noted that 9 of the Performance Indicators were on target and only two were not. Some data had now been included retrospectively for PI031 - % of calls to contact centre resolved in the contact centre. The Performance Officer also highlighted the increase in the percentage of Council Tax collected (PI035). She said the collection rate was 2% higher than that of the same period in the previous year.

During discussion, Members commented on the increase in the number of incidences of fly-tipped waste, which, could be due to the introduction of permits for vans and trailers at HWRC sites. It was noted that the effectiveness of the permit scheme was due to be reviewed shortly by the Waste Partnership.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee commended the Housing team for the low number of households placed in B&B accommodation during the quarter.

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

**RESOLVED:** That the District Executive noted the report.

**Reason:** To note the Corporate Performance and Complaints data presented for the period 01 October – 31 December 2016 (Q3).

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#### **147. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 11)**

Members noted the following amendments and additions to the Executive Forward Plan and Consultation Database:-

- Revised Local Development Scheme 2017-2020 – April 2017
- Proposal to establish a Commercial Income Generation Fund – April 2017
- Loan for Winsham Community Pub, Shop & PO – April 2017
- Proposed Redevelopment of Yeovil Crematorium – moved to June 2017
- Charging for Mobile Home sites – removed from Plan
- Update on the Intelligent Enforcement Proposal for Council car parks – removed from Plan
- 100% Business Rate Retention – further consultation on the design of the reformed system - response due by 03 May 2017

**RESOLVED:** That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments;
  - Revised Local Development Scheme 2017-2020 – April 2017
  - Proposal to establish a Commercial Income Generation Fund – April 2017
  - Loan for Winsham Community Pub, Shop & PO – April 2017
  - Proposed Redevelopment of Yeovil Crematorium – moved to June 2017
  - Charging for Mobile Home sites – removed from Plan
  - Update on the Intelligent Enforcement Proposal for Council car parks – removed from Plan
  
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B with the following additional consultation:-
  - 100% Business Rate Retention – further consultation on the design of the reformed system - response due by 03 May 2017

**Reason:** The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

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**148. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 12)**

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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Chairman

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Date