

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Thursday 2 July 2020.**

(9.30 am - 11.20 am)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
John Clark
Adam Dance
Sarah Dyke

Peter Gubbins
Henry Hobhouse
Tony Lock
Peter Seib



Also Present:

Nicola Clark
Brian Hamilton
Mike Lewis
Sue Osborne
Crispin Raikes
Jeny Snell

Gina Seaton
Andy Kendall
Clare Paul
Lucy Trimnell
Linda Vijeh

Officers:

Alex Parmley
Netta Meadows
Clare Pestell
Martin Woods
Nicola Hix
Kirsty Larkins
Richard Ward
Jo Nacey
James Divall
Cara Naden
Jo Wilkins
Becky Sanders
Angela Cox

Chief Executive
Director (Service Delivery)
Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Director (Place)
Director (Support Services)
Director (Strategy and Commissioning)
Monitoring Officer
Section 151 Officer
Income Opportunity Development Manager
Environment Case Officer
Specialist (Strategic Planning)
Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Specialist (Democratic Services)

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

147. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of previous meeting held on 4 June 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

148. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

There were no apologies for absence.

149. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

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

150. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public present.

151. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman thanked officers and Councillors for their work towards the Council's response to Covid-19. She said she was proud of what had been achieved for the residents of South Somerset whilst working from home and managing their home life.

152. SSDC Covid-19 Recovery Strategy (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman said that a great deal of work had gone into putting the Recovery Strategy together and she thanked officers for doing this.

The Income and Opportunities Manager said it was important to recognise the response phase of the outbreak of Covid-19 where the Council had supported the communities, particularly in setting up The Hub which had provided 810 emergency food boxes to the shielding and vulnerable residents, and the support to home rough sleepers in emergency accommodation. He said this had shown the One Team approach to support the community. Staff had been redeployed to new roles and had worked long hours. He also recognised the community and Town and Parish Council support, working in partnership with the District Council to support residents.

The Income and Opportunities Manager said the recovery plan was aligned to the Avon & Somerset Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the SSDC Communities of Practice workstreams. A staff questionnaire had been completed, and its results would support the workstreams. Best practice from other Councils both locally and nationally was also helping to shape the recovery strategy and working with Portfolio Holders to develop Action Plans.

In response to questions from Members, the Income and Opportunities Manager and Director for Support Services advised there were currently 16 rough sleepers placed in emergency accommodation and 22 had been moved to permanent accommodation or family and friends. There had been were 6 or 7 people who had refused the offer of emergency accommodation through personal choice and alternative support had been given to them.

During discussion it was noted that:-

- Village halls, playgrounds and community centres needed to be re-opened with confidence to the public and some may remain closed for safety reasons. Risk assessments of the venues would be completed.

- Environmental measures would be part of the recovery process.
- To prioritise the economy, SSDC were working with a number of partners across Somerset to match people with jobs. They were working with Yeovil College, the Business Rates Retention Scheme, and the Redundancy Taskforce to help people who had lost their job due to the pandemic.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised that the Income and Opportunities Manager had answered the majority of their questions at their meeting and clarification on a number of points raised would be circulated to members shortly.

The recommendations were proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Members.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman and Councillors congratulated officers on the work they had undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED: That District Executive approved:-

- a. the SSDC Emergency Recovery Strategy (Summary) at Appendix 1
- b. the SSDC Recovery Strategy at Appendix 2 with supporting documentation in the manner outlined in this report, and
- c. delegated authority to the Director for Commercial Services and Income Generation, to proceed with the implementation, as proposed within the attached strategy document.

Reason: To approve the proposed strategy, rational and approach that South Somerset District Council (SSDC) will take in the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

153. SSDC Priority Project - Accelerating Housing Delivery Report (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman, as Portfolio Holder for Housing, said the Government were encouraging Authorities to build more housing and the proposals in the report would allow this in a considered and strategic manner.

The Director for Place provided Members with a power point presentation on housing and house building in the area. He said SSDC had commissioned the Three Dragons report to understand the National context, the local housing delivery patterns and market in discussion with key local developers, land promoters, housing associations, Homes England, and council officers, and to explore other local authority approaches elsewhere in order to achieve South Somerset's housing outcomes. He noted that SSDC had not achieved its house building targets for a number of years but there was no clear trend why. The power point presentation will be attached to the minutes.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- There was a lack of recognition by the Government of the need for social housing and the Council should lobby the Government for more funding in this area.

- It took 2 years to fully train a bricklayer.
- The planning workshops would take forward the recommendations of the report.
- The failure to deliver housing in Yeovil, Chard and Crewkerne was putting pressure on other sites in the area.
- The renegotiation of Section 106 Agreements was time consuming and led to the loss of affordable housing elements within development sites.
- In Wincanton and Yeovil certain developers were limiting the land available for development and it may be possible to form a Joint Venture with them to allow SSDC some control of the land available for development.
- The local communities should be involved in developments within their area.
- The report mentioned stepping in when a large housing development was not commencing and perhaps a commitment from the developer when permission was granted to build within a timescale should be pursued.
- The CLR development in Crewkerne was very close to commencing building out the site.
- The training of Councillors to propose acceptable and applicable reasons to refuse applications was needed and special meetings of the Regulation Committee could be held to speed up the determination of applications.
- It would be helpful to know when the Priority Project Action Plan would be ready and the Area Committees would welcome the opportunity to debate the report.
- Building to a good environmental standard and having environmentally friendly builds were welcomed.
- Holding the Regulation Committee meetings within the Area of the application to be discussed would help towards the environment by reducing the need to travel.

In response to a question, the Director for Place said there were some good development sites allocated in the Local Plan which were not being built out by developers and there was a need to understand why this was. This was putting pressure on development in rural areas and there was a need to discuss with developers the reasons for this.

The Director for Strategy and Commissioning advised that the planning reimagined workshops being held with Councillors would be looking at a more streamlined process for determining planning applications without losing the democratic process.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they welcomed the report which assisted in housing delivery. He said that most of the questions raised at the Scrutiny Committee had been answered during the debate and the remaining could be answered by email. He said they had requested that recommendation 3 be amended for the Priority Project Action Plan to be discussed by the Area Committees. The Chairman said this would be considered if it did not slow the process.

It was proposed to amend recommendation 4 to remove the words 'in the market towns' to make the funding more widely available. It was also proposed to amend recommendation 3 to add the words 'to be approved by District Executive' at the end of the point. The two amendments were agreed by Members, and, on being put to the vote, were carried unanimously.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- i. considered and noted the 3 Dragons report 'Accelerating Housing' (Appendix A);

- ii. approved the use of £250,000 from the Business Rates Retention Fund – ‘Unlocking Growth’ to finance the Housing Delivery Programme Manager and budget for a period of 2 years;
- iii. noted that officers will prepare a Priority Project Action Plan based on recommendations in the report (table 8.3, pages 49-52 of the report and table 8.3, pages 54-58 of the report) to be approved by District Executive;
- iv. noted that progress on delivery would be monitored by the Strategic Development Board and District Executive as part of the quarterly monitoring arrangements for Priority projects;
- v. approved an allocation of a further £100,000 from general revenue reserve balances to supplement specific work to support housing delivery.

Reason: To agree a series of measures that will help South Somerset District Council provides for the housing needs of South Somerset.

154. Electric Vehicle (EV) Charger Network project (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Environment introduced the report which was a pre-tender business plan to commit to 25 Electric Vehicle (EV) charger locations across the district, the locations of which were not yet set. The business plan was to look at the strategic elements of the programme and the partnership with DELETTI – the Devon Low-carbon Energy & Transport Technology Innovator. She reminded Members that the Council had committed to be carbon-neutral by 2030 and ultra-low emission vehicles were key to delivering this. The ability to charge electric vehicles would be a major contributing factor towards this. The project was part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the majority of partners in the project were within Devon so the charging points would be around the economic corridor of the A303. The electricity supplied would be from a green energy supplier and the points could be adapted in the future to charge bicycles, taxis or buses. She thanked the Income and Opportunities Manager, the Procurement Specialist and the Environment Case Officer for bringing the project forward quickly to be part of the DELETTI programme.

The Income and Opportunities Manager advised that the opportunity to join the DELETTI programme had only occurred in April and so a great deal of work had been carried out by many teams to enable the business plan to come forward. The 25 locations were the minimum number over 10 years and SSDC would retain ownership of the car park and grid locations. He said it was an exciting project and to be able to use green energy met some of the objectives within the Environment Strategy. The Council were also working with SCC and other Somerset Councils on an EV Strategy to look at the potential for on-street electric vehicle charging points across the county.

During discussion, Members made the following points:-

- The air quality had increased during the lockdown period of Covid-19 and it was hoped that electric vehicles would make this permanent.
- Pleased to hear the locations of the charging points were fluid.

- Hope that charging points and on-street parking for small businesses could be included within town centres within the Somerset EV Strategy.
- Pleased to hear that there would be variable power outputs within car parks.

The recommendations of the report were proposed and seconded and on being put to the vote were unanimously agreed by Members.

The Chairman concluded that the proposals would fit well with the Council's Environment Strategy and she thanked all the officers involved in bringing the report forward at short notice.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- approved the establishment of an Electric Vehicle (EV) Charger Network (a minimum of 17 new EV Charger locations) for South Somerset in the manner outlined in the report with delegated authority to the Director for Commercial Services and Income Generation, and the Environment Community of Practice Lead Officers with the relevant Portfolio Holders to proceed with the implementation as proposed within the business plan.
- approved a budget of £250,000 from useable capital receipts for the purpose of investment into an EV Charger network for South Somerset.
- noted the estimated revenue income of £23,000 per annum will be added to the medium term financial plan for 2021/22 onwards.

Reason: To agree the business case and rationale for SSDC to set up an Electric Vehicle (EV) Charger Network across South Somerset.

155. Addendum to the Statement of Community Involvement in respect of Consulting on Neighbourhood Plans (Agenda Item 9)

The Director for Strategy and Commissioning said the proposed Addendum to the Council's Statement of Community Involvement was self explanatory and it was a formality to require its adoption.

The Specialist for Strategic Planning said that the addendum would currently apply to the Martock Neighbourhood Plan and that 5 other Neighbourhood Plans were in the process of being produced but had yet to reach the Submission stage. Liaison with the relevant parishes would take place on how the consultations would take place.

The recommendations of the report were proposed and seconded and on being put to the vote, were unanimously agreed by Members.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- agreed to the proposed Addendum to the Council's Statement of Community Involvement;
- delegated responsibility to the Lead Specialist - Strategic Planning in consultation with the Director of Strategy and Commissioning and

the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Housing to make further technical amendments to the Statement of Community Involvement to meet any requirements arising from changes in Government Legislation or Guidance.

Reason: To approve an Addendum to the 2018 Revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in order to comply with recently issued Government Guidance on consulting on Neighbourhood Plans during the current restrictions on movements as a result of Covid-19.

156. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 10)

The following additions and amendments to the Forward Plan were noted:

- Future of Local Government in Somerset – District Council submission – date to be confirmed

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments;
 - Future of Local Government in Somerset – District Council submission – date to be confirmed
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B.

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

157. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 11)

Members noted that a Special meeting of the District Executive would take place on **Thursday, 16th July 2020** as a virtual meeting via Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m. This would be to discuss the SSDC response to the Somerset County Council Business Case for their proposed future of Local Government in Somerset.

The next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on **Thursday, 6th August 2020** as a virtual meeting via Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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Chairman

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Date