

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Thursday 1 October 2020.**

(9.30 am - 10.30 am)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
John Clark
Adam Dance

Peter Gubbins
Henry Hobhouse
Tony Lock
Peter Seib



Also Present:

Robin Bastable
Mike Lewis
Robin Pailthorpe
Crispin Raikes

Andy Kendall
Clare Paul
Linda Vijeh

Officers:

Alex Parmley
Netta Meadows
Clare Pestell
Martin Woods
Nicola Hix
Kirsty Larkins
Richard Ward
Jo Nacey
Brendan Downes
Cath Temple
Barry James
Stephanie Gold
Angela Cox
Becky Sanders
Michelle Mainwaring
Jo Morris

Chief Executive
Director (Service Delivery)
Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Director (Place)
Director (Support Services)
Director (Strategy and Commissioning)
Monitoring Officer
Section 151 Officer
Specialist (Procurement)
Specialist (Performance)
Interim Planning Lead Specialist
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Specialist (Democratic Services)
Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)

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

200. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 3rd September 2020 and 10th September 2020 were approved as correct records and would be signed by the Chairman.

201. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Sarah Dyke.

202. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

203. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

The Committee were addressed by a local resident regarding the road closures in Yeovil town centre. She said that in 2019 the Council had adopted the Somerset Equality and Diversity Policy which committed the council to working within the Equality Act 2010. She said it was understandable when the social distancing policy was introduced to Yeovil town centre and she felt the road closures were done with the best of intentions. However, she noted that other towns had revised and removed their road closures whilst Yeovil had not, which had left no disabled parking within the recommended distance to the Post Office and shops at the top of town. The alternative provision for disabled parking in Princes Street was in excess of the 50m and obtaining parking in Peter Street was difficult. She also noted that social distancing was difficult as the pedestrian area of Middle Street had been littered with A-boards, tables and chairs and various market stalls. She asked if any equality impact assessment had been undertaken regarding the decision to extend the road closure period and who had favourably commented on the closures, as detailed in the report. She also noted that no complaints were listed in the report. She felt it was time the measures were removed so that all residents could access the town centre.

The Chairman confirmed that a full written response would be provided to the resident and thanked her for bringing the matter to their attention. It was agreed that a copy of the response would be circulated to all Councillors, including addressing the issue of A-Boards in Middle Street.

Subsequent to the meeting, the following response was provided to the local resident:-

Dear Mrs

Re: Queries raised at District Executive Meeting - Thursday 1st October

Thank you for taking the time to raise a number of queries relating to the temporary road closures in Yeovil Town Centre.

The temporary road closure measures in Yeovil town centre were introduced in response to the Government's Re-opening the High Streets Guidance and emergency powers granted in response to the Covid crisis. They are considered by us and the Somerset County Council as critical in continuing to enable social distancing and for the confidence of the general public. We have liaised with the County Council on this response to you.

Confirmed cases of Covid-19 are now on the rise nationally, as well as locally, and we take our role in keeping the public as safe as possible very seriously, especially where the footfall is highest. This is why we have decided, along with our County Highways colleagues, to keep these emergency temporary closure measures in place.

An Equality Impact Assessment was done when the measures were first implemented. However, this has been revised and updated and I will ensure that the revised EIA is made available on the SSDC website as soon as possible.

As these were emergency measures there was no time or requirement for consultation. Whilst we are doing everything we possibly can to mitigate the loss of disabled parking

spaces in Yeovil, it is worth saying that the emergency powers override many established policies. We do not purposefully wish to disadvantage anyone, but public safety and guidance needs to be upheld.

The space created on the High Street and upper Middle Street have allowed everyone using those streets to abide to social distancing requirements.

Unfortunately the measures have some impact and we have accordingly introduced, with the County Council, some mitigation measures to create some temporary parking within our town centre.

You mention a policy for access to the Post Office. This is something we are not aware of. If you have a copy, I would be happy to look at this.

A-boards, tables and chairs and market stalls can be an obstruction to the highway and will continue to be reviewed by the County Council and ourselves with action taken where necessary

Whilst some towns have decided to remove the temporary closure measures, others have kept them. Yeovil, as our sub-regional town, is considered to have a high enough footfall to warrant the continuation of the measures. We have received feedback from a number of sources, including the marshals, the Quedam and the Yeovil Town Council that these measures are valued, and important.

We will review these measures regularly and recognise there is a balance. However, with the rising rate of infection and Christmas around the corner, we need to ensure the best opportunity for public safety going forwards whilst Covid remains a serious issue.

I hope this goes some way to explain the actions that have been taken.

Yours sincerely

Martin Woods

Director of Place

204. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman thanked all Councillors and staff for the work they were doing during Covid-19. She noted that it was now 6 months since the Council had an in-person meeting and there was currently no proposal to resume them.

She said there had been some speculation regarding the Devolution White Paper during the last week and the Council would have to wait to hear any further news. But work on the Stronger Somerset Business Case would continue.

205. Corporate Performance Report 2020-21: 1st Quarter (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman introduced the report and said that although the report highlighted some areas of concern in performance against target, that was to be expected in the current situation. Staff were to be commended for those areas which were performing well in the circumstances. She was pleased the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy and the County-wide Environment Strategy were both progressing well.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they had congratulated the planning team on their performance targets. It was requested that reporting on the amount tree works carried out could be done in future and it was noted that the Council were well below the 10% threshold on planning appeals. In view of this, could consideration be given to the removal of two starring referral to Regulation Committee for major developments? It was also noted that no waste was sent to landfill sites from Somerset so should target EN5: Residual waste sent to landfill be revised?

The Chairman said that in the circumstances all staff should be congratulated. There was no debate and Members were content to note the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive noted and commented on the report.

Reason: To note the current position of the Council's agreed key performance indicators for the period from April to June 2020 (Q1).

206. Update Report on the Impact of Covid-19 on the Council (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services said that some of the emergency measures put in place during Covid-19 were now being relaxed or transferred into longer term arrangements such as support for the vulnerable. He noted that the MHCLG were putting together support for the loss of income which Councils had suffered, particularly car parking income. It was hoped to recover 75% of the lost income and the Government were expecting Councils to minimise those losses. He also noted that the income generation team had reduced the losses on investments. He said the finances overall were a slightly improving picture and an improved estimate on the previous report in July 2020.

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services advised that the Government had given local authorities powers to encourage the safe opening of high streets following Covid-19, including closing roads to make people feel safe and ensure space for social distancing. He said that sections of the main shopping streets of Yeovil had narrow pavements which meant people stepped into the road. The road closures were implemented in agreement with the County Highway Authority and although he sympathised with the concerns raised by residents requiring disabled parking close to shops, the Council had tried to do the best for all residents. He also congratulated the County Highway Authority staff for handling the consultation and implementation of the road closures in a very short time scale.

Councillor John Clarke congratulated the finance team and Portfolio Holder for their work in structuring the Councils finances during the Covid-19 pandemic. He also advised that the bid put forward by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for the Bunford Innovation Park was a reserve scheme should any of the selected projects prove unviable.

The Chairman noted that some SSDC staff had been put on the Government's furlough scheme but they were few and mainly limited to the Octagon Theatre and Westlands venue staff.

The Director for Strategy and Commissioning noted that the bid to fund the lease and support at a new 8 bed house of multiple occupation in Yeovil had been successful and further information on this would be provided in the next update report.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee welcomed the news of the successful funding bid for the house of multiple occupation in Yeovil. He noted that the Committee would have preferred the report to list numbers or percentages rather than refer to 'a large number' and also the explanation of some acronyms was absent.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked all staff, including those who had been re-deployed into different roles for some weeks and also the finance and economic development staff. Members were content to note the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to:-

- a. note the impact of Covid-19 on Council Services and Finances.
- b. note the additional services and work the Council is having to provide in response to the pandemic.

Reason: To update Members on the continued impact Covid-19 is having on the Council including finances, demand, and organisational performance across the Council. The report sets out the impact on council finances, and its services.

207. Planning Appeal Performance (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services introduced the report and said there were two further Planning Reimagined Member Workshops to be held and they would report their recommendations to improve the planning service to the Executive in due time. He noted that the report was for information and officers were in attendance to answer questions.

In response to questions from Members, the Lead Planning Officer advised:

- The planning service had received in excess of 3,000 planning applications to determine set against the 57 appeals as detailed in the report during the 14 month period.
- Officer caseloads varied between 30 to 40 applications up to 100 in some cases which was an unsustainable number. This was currently being addressed.
- Over the previous weekend 25 planning applications were submitted to the Council which gave an indication of the numbers submitted out of working hours.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee noted that the Lead Planning Officer had circulated detail relating to the 57 planning appeals which was now published as an appendix to the report. He also noted that the Director had clarified that it had always been the case that an Area Committee could be asked to contribute towards appeal costs of applications within their area.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Because of the Area Committee system and local Members knowledge, relatively few planning applications result in an appeal.
- Assurance had been given to Councillors that they were representing their communities when determining planning applications.
- Councillors were reminded to be consistent in their decision making but the Planning Inspectorate did not appear to have the same consistency in their determination of planning appeals.

The Chairman agreed there was a lack of consistency in planning appeal decisions and she would consider writing to the Planning Inspectorate to bring this to their attention.

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

RESOLVED: That District Executive noted the content of the report.

Reason: To note the Council's performance at planning appeals including the number of appeals submitted and the Council's success rate when the different types of appeals have been considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

208. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman said officers from across the County were to be congratulated on bringing forward the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy in November.

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services confirmed there would be an all Member Workshop to discuss the Government consultation Planning for the Future White Paper and notification would follow of the date. Subsequent to the meeting, this was confirmed as Monday 19th October at 5.00pm.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments;
 - Devolution in Somerset – TBC
 - Proposals from the Planning Reimagined Workshops - TBC
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B.

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

209. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 10)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 5th November 2020 as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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Chairman

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Date

