

## South Somerset District Council

**Draft Minutes** of a meeting of the **District Executive** held at the **Virtual Meeting** using **Zoom meeting software** on **Thursday 7 January 2021**.

(9.30 am - 11.55 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:**

Robin Bastable  
Brian Hamilton  
Andy Kendall  
Sue Osborne  
Robin Pailthorpe

Gina Seaton  
Mike Stanton  
Linda Vijeh  
Martin Wale

### **Officers**

Alex Parmley  
Netta Meadows  
Clare Pestell  
Martin Woods  
Nicola Hix  
Kirsty Larkins  
Richard Ward  
Jo Nacey  
Chris Cooper  
Mickey Green  
Peter Paddon  
Brendan Downes  
Joe Walsh  
Helen Morris  
Adam Burgan  
David Clarke  
Gary Wright  
Michelle Mainwaring  
Jo Morris  
Jo Gale  
Jo Boucher  
Stephanie Gold

Chief Executive  
Director (Service Delivery)  
Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)  
Director (Place)  
Director (Support Services)  
Director (Strategy and Commissioning)  
Monitoring Officer  
Section 151 Officer  
Environment Services Manager  
Managing Director (Somerset Waste Partnership)  
Lead Specialist (Economy)  
Specialist (Procurement)  
Specialist (Economic Development)  
Specialist Revenues Team Manager  
Arts & Entertainment Manager  
DCA Consultants  
Charcoal Blue (Consultants)  
Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)  
Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)  
Specialist - Economic Development  
Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)  
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)

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

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**237. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

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**238. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)**

There were no apologies for absence.

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**239. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

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**240. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)**

It was agreed that the public attending would speak at the time the item was discussed (agenda item 11).

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**241. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)**

The Chairman wished all a Happy New Year and commented that although it had not been the happiest of starts to the year, it was hoped that with the roll out of the vaccination programme the current situation would begin to improve in time.

She also thanked Councillors and staff throughout the organisation for their work they were carrying out in the difficult circumstances. She was very grateful for the resilience of staff and their adaptability and flexibility in carrying out alternative tasks outside of their normal working practice.

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**242. Somerset Waste Partnership Annual Report and Business Plan Update (Agenda Item 6)**

The Portfolio Holder for Environment advised that members were required to annually approve a rolling five-year business plan and highlighted that the key element of the plan this year were the changes to how garden waste payments would be made and the delegation of powers required to underpin the Somerset Waste Partnership's advice, support and enforcement policy. She expressed her thanks to the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) and the Council's Environmental Services Team for their extraordinary effort in 2020 not only for dealing with Covid-19 and the implications that it had on waste including the closure of the waste and recycling centres but also the roll out of a new contractor which coincided with the first week of lockdown in March.

The Managing Director of the Somerset Waste Partnership provided Members with a detailed presentation on the work of the Partnership. He referred to the following:

- Key achievements of 2020
- Dealing with Covid-19 and its impact on services.

- Outcomes of the Draft Business Plan 2012-25 to cover delivering excellent services, changing behaviours and tackling climate change.
- A technical issue regarding the legal delegations had meant that SWP did not currently have the ability to issue Fixed Penalty Notices. A refreshed Enforcement Policy would be considered by the Board in the Spring. Members were therefore being asked to approve the renewal of the delegation of powers required to underpin the SWP's advice, support and enforcement policy.
- Roll out of Recycle More including:
  - key changes for residents
  - engaging with parishes, members and the public
  - digital engagement
  - engagement with schools
  - support for residents through the roll-out
  - responding to residents requests
  - maintain & improving service levels
  - learning for future phases
  - planned roll out timetable and likely South Somerset timescale

During discussion points raised by members included:-

- It was pleasing to see the way that Somerset Waste Partnership were decarbonising residual waste.
- As the new scheme was not expecting separation of waste in the same way as the previous scheme, it was crucial that the public were fully aware of the changes and provided with detailed instructions.

In response to questions from Members, the Managing Director of the Somerset Waste Partnership advised:

- A report would be submitted to the Somerset Waste Partnership Board in June outlining various options for alternative fuelled fleet vehicles.
- Separation of card and paper would continue to be required due to the grading of the material.
- Additional Blue Bags could be ordered if households had a need for extra capacity.
- A national consultation was expected during the year on the Deposit Return Scheme and extended producer responsibility.
- SWP were looking to increase recycling for communal properties.
- The garden waste payments were being extended to May 2021 due to the service being suspended in March 2020.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked the Managing Director of the Somerset Waste Partnership and the Environmental Services Manager for attending the meeting and for all the work undertaken by their staff. Members were content to approve the Somerset Waste Partnership draft Business Plan 2020-2021, noted the changes to how garden waste payments would be made in 2021 and, approved the renewal of the delegation of powers required to underpin the SWP's advice, support and enforcement policy.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive-

- a. approved the Somerset Waste Partnership draft Business Plan 2020-2021;
- b. noted the changes to how garden waste payments would be made

in 2021, as agreed by the Somerset Waste Board;

- c. approved the renewal of the delegation of powers required to underpin the SWP's advice, support and enforcement policy.

**Reason:** To approve the annual Somerset Waste Board rolling five-year business plan and the draft business plan.

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## **243. Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 (Agenda Item 7)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and explained that each year the Council was required to review the Council Tax Support Scheme. He highlighted that there were a number of issues with the current scheme and that the report set out proposals for a new income/banded scheme which would not only mitigate the effects of Universal Credit, but also make it easier for customers to make a claim and to significantly reduce the costs of administration. He thanked the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and supporting officers for their work on the new scheme.

There was no debate and Members were content to propose the Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 to Council for approval.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive recommend to Council to approve the introduction of a new income banded / grid scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, to increase the overall level of support for the lowest income families which will give stability for applicants and to reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit.

**Reason:** To recommend that Full Council approve the implementation of an income banded Council Tax Support scheme with effect from 1 April 2021.

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## **244. 2021/22 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan Update (Agenda Item 8)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and drew members' attention to Table 1 in the report which outlined the proposed local government settlement. He referred to Table 3b – funding and budget gap estimates and explained that business grants were paid during the current financial year but the Council was required to account the transaction next financial year and therefore the shortfall carried forward from the current financial year payment was showing in the BRR Volatility Reserve. He also pointed out that the Council Tax taxbase had shown an unexpected growth bringing an additional £233k to the Council. He noted that a lot of investment including commercial investment had been underpinned by relatively short term borrowing and was a market that had worked well for the Council.

There was no debate and Members were content to confirm the recommendations of the report.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive-

- a. noted the current estimates and next steps in respect of the Draft Budget for 2021/22 and the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- b. noted the current the Capital bids in Appendix A to be finalised for the February District Executive report.
- c. noted the changes to the budget estimates in respect of the initial pressures and savings included within the report (para 17). These also be finalised in the February report.
- d. recommended that Full Council approve an increase in Council Tax by £5 in 2021/22 for a Band D property.

**Reason:** To note the 2021/22 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan estimates for the period 2021/22 to 2025/26, together with an update on the Capital Programme.

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## **245. Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan (Agenda Item 9)**

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development including Commercial Strategy introduced the report and advised that the Somerset Growth and Recovery Plan set out a vision of how Somerset would recover economically from Covid 19. The Plan was consistent with the Council Plan, the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy and Economy Recovery Plan and included emphasis on aerospace, innovation and enterprise, broadband and mobile, agri-tech, digital skills and rural productivity and transport.

The Specialist Economic Development advised that the Plan had been developed by the five Councils in Somerset. He presented the data within the report and said that it showed that Somerset had not fared any better than the rest of the UK and due to the sectoral make-up of the county may have been harder hit particularly in terms of the economic output and impact on jobs and unemployment. He explained that it was critical to have a Plan that outlined the project interventions and to also enable Somerset to make a case for additional funding within the area. The Plan had four key themes which reflected the five foundations listed with the Government's National Industrial Strategy of ideas to people, infrastructure, business environment and place. The Specialist Economic Development gave examples of some of the projects outlined in Appendix B which included the Bundford Innovation Centre, the creation of employment hubs across the district, Somerset Catalyst Programme and improving digital and physical connectivity.

The Specialist Economic Development updated that in response to comments raised at the Scrutiny Committee, agriculture would be included as a bedrock sector and included more prominently in the Plan. He acknowledged that the impact that agriculture had on the environmental sustainability objectives was critical to South Somerset's Environment Strategy and highlighted that there were a number of projects such as developing the circular economy that recognised this.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Service Delivery, and the Specialist Economic Development advised:

- The vaccination programme was a national programme that was being rolled out through the Health Service. The Council was playing a role by helping to support health colleagues through co-ordination with Somerset County Council by providing staff to support the vaccination roll outs so there were no delays due to a lack of resources.
- Work was being undertaken to actively pursue a digital demand response to transport which would enable transport providers to go to areas that don't have existing routes. Officers were also working closely with Somerset County Council and a funding application had been submitted to the Department of Transport to pilot a digital demand responsive trial within Somerset including providing links to employment and education.
- The Government had indicated that any European funding that was committed prior to leaving the European Union would be secured but this would need to be confirmed.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to approve the Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan and delegate authority to the Economy Lead Specialist to make any necessary final amendments to the Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan in association with the appropriate Director(s) and the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development including Commercial Strategy.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive-

- a. approved the Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan;
- b. delegated authority to the Economy Lead Specialist to make any necessary final amendments to the Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan in association with the appropriate Director(s) and the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development including Commercial Strategy.

**Reason:** To approve the Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan.

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## 246. Transformation Programme Assessment and Final Report (Agenda Item 10)

The Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services including Transformation introduced the report and advised that the Transformation Programme Assessment and Closedown report primarily focused on two areas which were efficiency and smarter ways of working and the financial savings that have benefited the organisation. He commented that although it had not been easy for staff they had worked hard and diligently through the process and efficiencies would continue to be made moving forward to ensure that the Council continued to function as an efficient authority. He acknowledged that there were still some issues with the sharing of information digitally and requested that a further report be provided to address these issues.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Strategy and Commissioning, Director of Service Delivery and the Lead Specialist People Performance and Change advised:

- The summarised version of the transformation progress internal audit report as referred to under 3.2 of the report would be presented to the Audit Committee.
- Additional capacity had been put in place to support the planning service. Staff had been re-tasked and a project team created which was starting to make a positive difference to the service. These resources would be kept in place until

satisfactory changes had taken place and had previously been agreed until the end of the current financial year.

- Figures relating to the number of people that have been furloughed throughout the organisation would be provided as part of the next update report on the impact of Covid-19 on the Council.
- An update on the latest position with regard to the phosphates issue would shortly be sent out to all members.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to note the content of the SSDC Transformation Programme Assessment and Final Report.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive noted the content of the SSDC Transformation Programme Assessment and Final Report.

**Reason:** To communicate the SSDC Transformation Programme Assessment and Final Report to members.

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## 247. Octagon Theatre Development (Agenda Item 11)

The District Executive was addressed by three members of the public (representatives from Yeovil Community Arts Association and Yeovil Literary Festival, Helen Laxton School of Dance and Somerset Independents). Points raised included the following:

- This necessary enhancement of a much envied theatre with the prospect of offering additional excellent, versatile facilities was admirable and had been much requested in the past.
- Many more local groups would benefit and the café development would become the place to meet.
- The theatre created an atmosphere of belonging and would be the place for likeminded people to come together.
- Enhancing facilities would bring more interest and visitors.
- The project would deliver health and wellbeing benefits to residents.
- A bigger and better theatre in Yeovil would be a boost to the local economy.
- Already many of the big shows, comedians etc. that perform sell out extremely quickly. Extra capacity would mean more audiences resulting in increased income.
- A larger theatre with better facilities and rehearsal spaces would attract bigger artists and companies to the area.
- A cinema within the theatre would be well used.
- The theatre had an incredible following and the programme included events for all ages.
- Concerns expressed over the funding of the project and the spending of public money that could be spent on other areas.

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing advised that the main purpose of the report was to seek member's approval in principle to progress the project and a further report would be brought back to the District Executive once financial implications were confirmed. He noted that the Octagon Theatre continued to grow in reputation, drawing audiences from throughout the region as well as locally delivering a varied quality programme. The project looked to address the current challenges of the building, which

did not meet the environmental or accessibility standards required and improve the user experience.

The Arts & Entertainment Venues Manager provided members with an overview of the Project, which included the following:

- The aspiration to transform the Octagon Theatre;
- The theatre had a strong catchment in place bringing visitors into the district;
- There was a desire to bring more national funding into the area;
- Inadequacies of the current facilities including lack of access throughout the building particularly backstage;
- The proposals would see the transformation of the Octagon to a Centre of Excellence for Culture, Entertainment and the Arts;
- The proposal included a link between the Yeovil Country Park and the town centre.
- The Octagon would become a much improved facility for the arts and would assist in improving the lives of local residents.
- The programme would evolve and include bigger and better shows.
- The project would provide facilities to meet the ambitions of amateur and community groups and attract businesses.
- The project would support the local economy.
- With the use of the ticket levy the project could be delivered and paid for largely by the users of the facility.

The Director of Commercial Services and Income Regeneration commented that the project was ambitious and evidence suggested that it would also assist with the regeneration of the town. Whilst the Octagon Theatre was based in Yeovil, the project could attract other grant monies, which could filter out across the district and also benefit other small organisations. She advised that members were being asked to consider an agreement in principle to progress with the project further and that a detailed business case would be brought back to the District Executive and Full Council if necessary. She confirmed that although members were being asked to approve funding in advance, the project would look to pay itself back.

During discussion, points made by members included:-

- A member fully endorsed the proposal and the effect the project would have on the local economy and regeneration of the town centre.
- There were significant benefits in delivering the project including social, financial, the wider economy as well as the performing arts sector both regionally and locally.
- It was hoped that the project could bring several environmental benefits including carbon reduction initiatives and it was questioned whether the installation of solar panels could be investigated to provide electricity for use in the evening.
- The work undertaken by officers to date had supported the need for the project to be progressed.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members agreed in principle to progress the development of the project and approved the recommendations of the report.

**RESOLVED:** That District Executive-

- a. agreed in principle to progress the development of the project and the underwriting of the total project costs by SSDC, of up to £23.01m, with a further report brought to Executive once full



financial implications including VAT were confirmed.

- b. noted the intention to partially offset the project costs with future grant funding applications, which can be progressed if the project is approved in principle to proceed.
- c. noted the confidential appendices, namely the Executive Summary by Charcoal Blue, and the initial financial assessment of the business case to refurbish the existing site and facilities; and to extend the site with both additional educational and commercial income earning facilities; which will assist in repaying the proposed project costs.
- d. noted the current financial forecast in the business plan, which is awaiting VAT advice. (This is to be presented in a final report for approval in due course).

**Reason:** To approve in principle to refurbish and develop The Octagon Theatre and underwrite the full value of the project, up to £23.01 million (excluding VAT), subject to the successful application for various forms of grant funding which would partially offset the overall project costs. Confirmation of VAT implications for the Council are being sought by a specialist tax advisor.

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## **248. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 12)**

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

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendment;
  - the Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategies 2021/22 to 2023/24 – February 2021
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B.

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

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## **249. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)**

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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Chairman