

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 4 December 2014.**

(9.30 am - 12.45 pm)

Present:

Councillor Ric Pallister (Chairman)

Tim Carroll
Henry Hobhouse
Jo Roundell Greene

Peter Seib
Angie Singleton
Nick Weeks

Also Present:

Tony Lock
Nigel Mermagen
David Norris

Sue Osborne
Sue Steele
Martin Wale

Officers

Mark Williams	Chief Executive
Rina Singh	Strategic Director (Place & Performance)
Vega Sturgess	Strategic Director (Operations & Customer Focus)
Ian Clarke	Assistant Director (Legal and Corporate Services)
Donna Parham	Assistant Director (Finance & Corporate Services)
Steve Joel	Assistant Director (Health & Well-Being)
Kim Close	Assistant Director (Communities)
Andrew Gillespie	Performance Manager
Charlotte Jones	Area Development Manager (North)
Emily McGuinness	Scrutiny Manager
Helen Rutter	Assistant Director (Communities)
Angela Watson	Legal Services Manager
Laurence Willis	Assistant Director (Environment)
Angela Cox	Democratic Services Manager

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

87. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the District Executive meeting held on 6th November 2014, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and, having been approved as a correct record, were signed by the Chairman.

88. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Peter Gubbins, Shane Pledger and Sylvia Seal.

89. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made.

90. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public present.

91. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman reminded Members that the meeting would be audio recorded.

92. Presentation from the Environment Agency on Flooding trigger points (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman introduced Sam Dawe and Robbie Williams from the Environment Agency, who provided Members with a short presentation on flooding trigger points on the Somerset levels.

In response to questions, Mrs Dawe and Mr Williams replied:-

- The levels of water held on the Levels (called pens) were higher in the summer than in the winter, although some designated areas were kept higher for wildlife during the winter and landowners were compensated for this. These levels were being checked at the moment in preparation for any future flooding.
- The Scrutiny Committee at Sedgemoor DC recently challenged the Internal Drainage Boards to prove that the water levels were not having a negative effect upon flooding in their area and that report would be circulated to all Members.
- The water levels along the river Sowey were controlled by man and when the sluice gates were closed there would be a short term tidal effect on that river level.
- If the same volume of water fell again as in the previous winter, there would still be some flooding but the effect should be shorter due to the dredging and improved pumping.
- The Environment Agency now had 3 reliable suppliers of pumps which it could call upon at short notice when required.
- Due to improved drainage on farms, the speed in which water reached the rivers would have an impact, however, the pumping stations should cope with this.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members noted that the Levels were historically designed to flood to cope with the winter weather in the area. The Chairman thanked Mrs Dawe and Mr Williams for their comprehensive presentation and responses to Members questions.

RESOLVED: That District Executive noted the presentation.

93. The Somerset Levels & Moors 20 Year Flood Action Plan - Proposed Somerset Rivers Authority (Agenda Item 7)

The Chairman advised that the establishment of a Somerset Rivers Authority was moving at a very fast pace and he drew Member attention to the supplemental report and revised recommendations circulated at short notice. He said although the Government were offering funding, there was no future commitment from them and so it was proposed that he and the Chief Executive would make an urgent decision to contribute towards the 2015-16 funding of the Somerset Rivers Authority in order to draw down Government funding.

The Strategic Director (Operations and Customer Focus) explained that initially it had been anticipated that the Somerset Rivers Authority would be established in April 2016, however, there was now the opportunity to lever in £2.7m of Government funding for a common works programme of ongoing maintenance for one year so there was a need to establish it much sooner. Other Authorities in Somerset had agreed their part of the interim funding. She introduced Mr Martin Buckle of the Somerset Rivers Authority Project who answered questions of detail.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they were pleased to note the progress of the Somerset Rivers Authority and agreed with the proposals for its establishment, however, they expressed some concern of the title 'Authority' when there was as yet no legislation giving any such body any 'authority'.

During discussion, varying views were expressed. Some Members were in agreement to progress the establishment of the Somerset Rivers Authority whilst other expressed disquiet at the lack of detail of the responsibilities, set up costs and project work of the organisation. The Chairman confirmed these details were in place but were not currently published. It was proposed to amend recommendation 3 to note that an urgent decision may be taken by the Chief Executive and Leader and at the conclusion of the debate, Members were content to agree the amended recommendations of the supplemental report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed:-

1. to endorse progress to date in the development of the Somerset Rivers Authority, and note that a further report would follow in due course;
2. to nominate a member of the Executive to sit on the proposed new Somerset Rivers Authority from 31 January 2015;
3. to note that the Chief Executive and Leader may make an urgent decision to contribute up to £45,000 (likely to be £43,500) towards the interim funding required by the Somerset Rivers Authority, as identified in paragraph 3. This funding to come from the Flooding Reserve set up by District Executive in February 2014;
4. to note that longer term funding and operation of the Somerset Rivers Authority (beyond any interim funding period) will be subject to further development and agreement between local partners and Government, and a further report will follow in due course.

Reason: To note the progress made to date towards establishing a Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) and to endorse the proposals for the further development of the SRA.

94. Quarterly Performance and Complaints Monitoring Report - 2nd Quarter 2014/15 (Agenda Item 8)

The Performance Officer advised that there had only been one performance exception during the quarter period relating to the percentage of planning appeal decisions allowed against the authorities decision to refuse, to which the Development Manager had responded.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they had received a presentation and explanation of the planning appeals process from the Development Manager and were satisfied with his explanation of the performance exception. The Committee had also been pleased to note the low number of complaints received by the Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Regulatory and Democratic Services advised that 98% of planning applications were determined without issue and he had requested that an update of planning appeals performance was reported to each Area Committee.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were pleased to note the quarterly corporate performance monitoring report.

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

Reason: To review the corporate performance monitoring report covering the second quarter of the financial year from 1st July – 30th September 2014 (Q2).

95. Non Domestic (Business) Rate Pooling (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Spatial Planning reminded Members that SSDC had investigated business rate pooling the previous year but at that time the risks had outweighed the benefits. He drew their attention to recommendation B and the possibility to make an urgent decision to withdraw from the pooling arrangement once the Government's rate support grant figure was known and, if the risks could not be mitigated.

The Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) confirmed that all local authorities were investigating their options regarding business rate pooling and it was important that the Council chose the right partners. Although the Government had to agree to the pooling proposal, at the current time it appeared that approximately £1m funding would be retained within Somerset.

There was no debate and Members were content to recommend the report to Full Council.

- RESOLVED:** That District Executive recommend to Full Council to:-
- a. endorse the urgent decision to pool that the Council participate in the pooling arrangement with other Somerset authorities (Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane District Council, Mendip District Council, and Sedgemoor District Council, under the Business Rate Retention Scheme, for 2015/16; and,
 - b. approve delegated authority is given to the Assistant Director – Finance and Corporate Services in consultation with the Finance and Spatial Planning Portfolio Holder, to decide whether to remain in the pool once the government’s settlement figures are announced in December 2014.

Reason: To seek endorsement of the urgent decision made to enter into a business rates pooling arrangement with other Somerset authorities under the Business Rates Retention scheme.

96. Additional Revenues Team Resources (Agenda Item 10)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Spatial Planning advised that there had been significant legislative change within the Revenues and Benefits service which had created additional work. He confirmed that the Audit Committee supported the recommendations and he drew Members attention to the significant increase in the amount of Council Tax to be collected

Scrutiny Committee commented that they were happy to support the recommendations to ensure the effective delivery of this statutory service.

In response to questions from Members, the Assistant Director (Finance and Corporate Services) advised that:-

- SSDC Council Tax arrears figure was £2.4m at the end of March 2014.
- Bailiff fees were changed to the customer, not SSDC.
- SSDC did have a call down contract with Capita to cope with peaks in workloads but this was more than a peak.
- It took approximately 6 to 9 month to train a Revenues Officer.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members were pleased to confirm the four additional officers to the establishment.

- RESOLVED:** That District Executive agreed:-
1. the addition of four additional Grade 3 Revenues Officers to the establishment;
 2. that the cost in 2014/15 of £24,050 be funded from Unallocated Balances in 2014/15 and the full year cost of £96,220 be added to the MTFP for 2015/16.

Reason: To agree additional resources for the Revenues Team which forms part of the Revenues and Benefits Service.

97. Community Right to Bid - Assets of Community Value (Agenda Item 11)

There was no debate and Members were pleased to note the report of the register of Assets of Community Value.

- RESOLVED:** That the District Executive noted the report.
Reason: To inform members of the current status of the register of Assets of Community Value, brought about by nominations received from community groups in South Somerset using the Community Right to Bid.

98. Monthly Performance Snapshot (Agenda Item 12)

Members were pleased to note the monthly performance snapshot data.

- RESOLVED:** That the District Executive noted the monthly performance snapshot data.
Reason: The report is provided for Members information.

99. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 13)

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

- Review of Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants, Loans and other assistance – February 2015
- LED Contract Price (Confidential) – February 2015
- Bellwin scheme of emergency financial assistance to local authorities
- Consultation from Somerset County Council to cease Housing Related Support

- RESOLVED:** That the District Executive:-
1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A with the following additions:-
 - Review of Policy for Awarding Private Sector Housing Grants, Loans and other assistance – February 2015
 - LED Contract Price (Confidential) – February 2015
 2. Noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B, with the following additions:-
 - Bellwin scheme of emergency financial assistance to local authorities

- Consultation from Somerset County Council to cease Housing Related Support

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

100. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 8th January 2015 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil commencing at 9.30 a.m.

101. Exclusion of Press and Public (Agenda Item 15)

RESOLVED: that the following item be considered in Closed Session by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A under Paragraph 3: "Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)."

102. Delivery of the Car Parking Strategy (Confidential) (Agenda Item 16)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Spatial Planning advised that the Car Parking Strategy identified a shortfall of car parking and the proposal would allow an extension to the existing car park.

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

RESOLVED: That District Executive approved the recommendations of the report.

Reason: To agree the purchase of a site for additional car parking.

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Chairman

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Date