

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 3 December 2020** as a Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software.

(6.30 pm - 7.35 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Paul Maxwell (Chairman)
Councillor Jenny Kenton (Vice-Chairman)

Jason Baker	Mike Hewitson	Crispin Raikes
Robin Bastable	Henry Hobhouse	Wes Read
Mike Best	Charlie Hull	David Recardo
Neil Bloomfield	Val Keitch	Dean Ruddle
Dave Bulmer	Andy Kendall	Gina Seaton
Hayward Burt	Tim Kerley	Peter Seib
Tony Capozzoli	Mike Lewis	Garry Shortland
Martin Carnell	Mike Lock	Alan Smith
John Clark	Pauline Lock	Jeny Snell
Nicola Clark	Tony Lock	Andy Soughton
Louise Clarke	Kevin Messenger	Mike Stanton
Nick Colbert	Graham Oakes	Rob Stickland
Adam Dance	Tricia O'Brien	Lucy Trimnell
Sarah Dyke	Sue Osborne	Linda Vijeh
Karl Gill	Tiffany Osborne	Martin Wale
David Gubbins	Robin Pailthorpe	William Wallace
Peter Gubbins	Oliver Patrick	Colin Winder
Brian Hamilton	Clare Paul	

Officers:

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Richard Ward	Monitoring Officer
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Strategy and Commissioning)
Jo Nacey	Section 151 Officer
Jan Gamon	Programme Director, Stronger Somerset
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Michelle Mainwaring	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Commissioning)

202. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Malcolm Cavill (dispensation granted), Ben Hodgson, Kaysar Hussein, Paul Rowsell and Gerard Tucker.

203. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

204. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 3)

There were no members of the public present.

205. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 4)

The Chairman said it had been a difficult year for those people who had lost their lives to Coronavirus and those who had lost relatives and friends. He said it had been difficult for businesses and educational establishments and local authorities and he hoped that 2021 would be a better year for all.

He thanked staff and Councillors for their work in the wards during the pandemic and he paid tribute to the Council Leader, Cllr Val Keitch for her work in liaising with the Government and other local authorities and leading South Somerset District Council.

206. Stronger Somerset Business Case (Agenda Item 5)

The Leader of Council said the proposal was one of the most important decisions which the Council would take that year. The debate about the future of local government in Somerset had been ongoing for some time as change and reform in local government was needed. To provide for the people of Somerset, two unitary authorities with a combined authority above was proposed for Somerset. She said there had been some slippage in the timetable due to Covid-19 and the Government would undertake a public consultation on the two unitary proposals. The Stronger Somerset proposal would deliver value for money and efficiency with both short and longer term benefits for the people of Somerset. The Ipsos-Mori poll, commissioned by the 4 District Councils indicated that the people of Somerset were in favour of a 2 unitary authority solution. Subject to approval by Council, the proposal would be submitted to the Secretary of State by 9th December but consultation and engagement would continue with key partners, neighbouring authorities, businesses, staff, unions and local stakeholders.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- The recommendations should be voted upon separately.
- A letter from Adult Social Services and the Director of Public Health dated 27 November should be read in full as it was sent out late that day.
- Recommendation 6 should be voted upon separately.
- There was no comparison between independent research by a market leading company and a Facebook poll. The methodology would not hold up to public scrutiny.
- No issues had been raised regarding the Stronger Somerset business case.
- This was a fantastic business case and the vote should be taken.
- The business case would be passed to the Government Minister who would take into account all the evidence presented and seek an independent view of it to reflect the true views of the people of Somerset.
- There would always be negative responses as well as positive.
- SSDC always allowed a good debate on issues.

In response to questions from Members, the Leader and Chairman advised:-

- The letter from Adult Social Services and the Director of Public Health dated 27 November had been sent to all Councillors and to all Town and Parish Councils in Somerset.
- The recommendations would be voted upon separately as requested.
- The Councils had to demonstrate that public consultation had taken place on their two unitary proposal but not all sources of consultation would be used.

The Chairman said there would be little time to digest the content of the letter if it was read in full, therefore it would not be read out in full. If the authors of the letter felt strongly on the issue they could have made representations at public question time.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Leader commended the business case to Council. She said it was a robust business case, produced in collaboration with the other Somerset District Councils. The recommendations were proposed by the Leader and seconded by Councillor Adam Dance. When put to the vote, were carried by:
 recommendation (a): 41 in favour, 14 against, 0 abstentions.
 recommendations (b) to (e): 41 in favour, 13 against, 0 abstentions.
 recommendation (f): 49 in favour, 5 against, 0 abstentions.

RESOLVED: That Council agreed:

- a. to endorse the Stronger Somerset proposal for the reform of local government including the creation of two unitary Councils within Somerset. and agree its submission to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

(Voting on (a): 41 in favour, 14 against, 0 abstentions)

- b. to note that the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, in consultation with the other Somerset District Leaders and Chief Executives, have been given delegated authority by District Executive to make minor amendments to the Proposal as necessary and / or appropriate, ahead of its submission to the Secretary of State.
- c. to support the continuing consultation and engagement with key partners, neighbouring authorities, business, staff, unions and local stakeholders, above and beyond any programme of consultation that may be required by the Government in due course.
- d. to this Council, with the other Somerset councils, advancing the delivery of aspects of the proposals for reform ahead of the Secretary of State's approval where so doing will support the Stronger Somerset Proposal and lead to early delivery of efficiencies, community outcomes and greater collaboration and integration.
- e. to pay due regard to the Equalities Impact Assessment, attached as

Appendix B, in considering the proposal for a Stronger Somerset.

(Voting on (b) to (e): 41 in favour, 13 against, 0 abstentions)

- f. to note that, in the best interests of the communities and residents of South Somerset, the Council will continue to work with colleagues across all tiers of local government and public service in Somerset including ensuring our residents, communities and businesses are supported through the pandemic.

(Voting on (f): 49 in favour, 5 against, 0 abstentions)

Reason: To confirm the submission of the Stronger Somerset proposal for the reform of local government including the creation of two unitary Councils within Somerset to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government by 9th December 2020.

207. Motions (Agenda Item 6)

There were no Motions submitted by Members.

208. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor Martin Wale submitted the following questions under Procedure Rule 10:

Whilst I'm sure all members were delighted to learn that SSDC now has a six year supply of housing to satisfy the needs of the Local Plan could an explanation be given for the following questions-

1. When was the new supply of housing found to be at its current level?
2. During the recent Members Planning Workshops, and as late as mid October, members were being informed that the calculation was between 4.2 and 4.5 years of supply. Can the Council explain how the new 6 year became available in less than two months?
3. If the 6 year supply is now correct how many applications have been allowed, mainly on the lack of 5 year housing supply, which could have been refused as not being acceptable under the Current Local Plan.
4. Would the fact that we didn't have a 5 year housing supply have weakened our bid for a 'Stronger Somerset'?

Councillor Tony Lock, as Portfolio Holder for Protecting Core Services responded:

1. The new housing supply was not finalised and calculated until the beginning of November. Members were informed via the November Planning Briefing and the report published on 5th November. A further briefing was held at the Housing Portfolio Holder Meeting on 13th November.

2. The planning policy team have been busy undertaking the large sites survey and following up with developers and agents to ensure the trajectories for housing delivery relating to permitted housing schemes are as realistic as possible.

It is important for us to be able to demonstrate that our information is as robust as possible to avoid challenge at appeal. We are aware that once we have a five year supply, the information within our report will be scrutinised in detail. Therefore we only released this information once we were sure of the data. Furthermore, a more cautious approach was taken for those applications that only have outline permission, due to the fact that the phosphates issue will mean that any with Reserved Matters will need to undertake an Appropriate Assessment.

The supply could not be accurately calculated and confirmed until all the necessary details had been verified and this is when it was released.

3. One of the key reasons that we can now demonstrate a five year land supply, is that the adopted Local Plan is now over five years old (March 2020) and therefore we now use the Government's 'standard method' to calculate the five year supply. The Strategic Planning team worked hard to deliver the report by the beginning of November, and it was published at a similar time to last year's report.

Due to the COVID crisis some staff were redeployed to support urgent front line work earlier in the year. It has therefore been challenging to progress with this work, alongside other critical issues such as responding to the Planning White Paper. There have been many reasons why planning applications have been refused (and of course many approved) and without going through each application manually it is not possible to give you an exact number that were refused solely due to a lack of a 5 year housing land supply.

4. No. This is totally unrelated to Stronger Somerset – we undertake the 5 year Housing Land Supply Assessment once a year and it is unlikely that the 5 year housing supply would have any bearing on the Secretary of State's decision on the future of local government in Somerset. However, clearly in terms of the aims of Stronger Somerset it is a positive that we now have a 6 year housing land supply.

Councillor Martin Wale responded to ask if there had been a new form of calculation applied in the last year which had resulted in the 6 year housing land supply or had the calculation been made under the old method? He felt the Council may have been aware they had a 5 year housing land supply earlier in the year.

Councillor Tony Lock advised that he felt there was a new method of calculating but he would ask officers to confirm this.

Subsequent to the meeting the Specialist for Strategic Planning confirmed the main reason the Council had gone from 4.5 years supply to 6 years supply was because when calculating the supply this year, the Local Plan was more than 5 years old, so that meant that SSDC had to use the standard method as the basis of the calculation. The standard method approach takes account of past under delivery (though an affordability ratio) which meant that the backlog from the beginning of the Local Plan period in 2006 did not

have to be carried forward in the calculation when previously it had to be. Also like last year because of the Housing Delivery Test result, SSDC were able to apply a 5% buffer.

The report was updated once a year and it could not be completed until the Council had all the relevant monitoring data.

209. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman wished Members a happy and healthy Christmas and hoped for a better 2021 for all.

Members noted that the next meeting of the Full Council would be held on **Thursday, 21st January 2021** as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting software **commencing at 6.30 p.m.**

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Chairman

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Date