

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Thursday 1 April 2021.**

(9.15 am - 9.54 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:

Tony Capozzoli
Brian Hamilton
Mike Lewis
Sue Osborne
Crispin Raikes

Linda Vijeh
Gina Seaton
Mike Stanton
Martin Wale

Officers:

Alex Parmley
Clare Pestell
Martin Woods
Nicola Hix
Jill Byron
Karen Watling
James Divall
Tessa Saunders
Stephanie Gold
Angela Cox
Michelle Mainwaring

Chief Executive
Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Director (Place)
Director (Strategy and Support Services)
Monitoring Officer
Interim Section 151 Officer
Income Opportunity Development Manager
Specialist, Strategic Planning
Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Specialist (Democratic Services)
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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

278. Minutes of Previous Meeting (Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 4th March 2021 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

279. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 2)

There were no apologies for absence.

280. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

281. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

282. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman welcomed Karen Watling as the Council's Section 151 Officer to her first District Executive meeting and said she looked forward to working with her.

The Chairman said officers were looking at how Councillors could return to in-person meetings following the Government's announcement not to extend the regulations which allowed virtual Council meetings to be held beyond 7th May. She confirmed at Councillors would be updated on this very soon.

283. South Somerset District Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman, as Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Housing, introduced the report which she said was well written and she invited the Director to outline the detail to Members.

The Director for Commercial Services and Income Generation said this was a large and complex document but the recovery touched every part of council business and the community and so was necessarily lengthy. It covered the whole of the South Somerset area and every Council objective, work stream, focus area and resource required. The strategy was also aligned with the work of the Council's partners including the County Council, other District Councils and the NHS so they would be working to achieve similar outcomes.

The Income and Opportunities Manager reminded Members that this was a refresh of an existing Strategy which learned lessons from the pandemic and aligned with the Council's Plan and internal economic, environment and digital strategies. Further engagement with community and business leaders was planned to help co-design and deliver some on the wider strategies in the plan. The Scrutiny Committee had considered the report earlier that week and had suggested an Executive Summary document to accompany the Strategy for easier public viewing.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee noted that several questions had been raised during consideration of the report and officers had responded to them. He

said they acknowledged the work which had gone into putting the Strategy together and said an Executive Summary would be useful.

The Chairman proposed the recommendations and they were seconded by Councillor Peter Seib and unanimously agreed by all Members.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman thanked the Director, Income and Opportunities Manager and officers involved in the compilation of the Strategy for their work.

RESOLVED: That District Executive:-

- a. approved the South Somerset District Council Recovery & Renewal Strategy with supporting documentation as outlined in the report.
- b. approved the transfer of £464,140 from the COVID Recovery Reserve to the revenue budget for 2021/22 within the Place & Recovery Directorate.

Reason: To approve the updated Recovery and Renewal Strategy and to proceed with implementation.

284. Annual review of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised that the powers allowed Council's to conduct surveillance linked to the Council's enforcement powers, including by covert and social media surveillance. The Policy and procedures were required to be reviewed and approved by the District Executive annually. He noted that the powers had not been used that year and he asked that Members note the report.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services confirmed that Members would be advised if the surveillance powers were used but only after the event in the annual report.

Members were content to note the report.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed to note the Council's use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) powers and amendments to the Policy and Procedures.

Reason: To review the policy and the use of RIPA to ensure it is being used consistently within the policy and that the policy remains fit for purpose.

285. Rural Designation of Areas in South Somerset (Agenda Item 8)

The Chairman, as Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Housing, advised that the report asked Members to agree that the Council submit an application to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for all rural parishes in South Somerset district with populations of under 3,000 to be designated as rural under section 157(1) of the Housing Act 1985. She said there was need for small numbers of affordable homes in rural communities.

The Specialist for Strategic Planning advised that the application to MHCLG was a procedural matter which would bring SSDC in line with other local authorities with similar designations. The designation was used by the Government to set national planning policy and guidance particularly to developments providing rural housing. It enabled local authorities to set a lower threshold of affordable housing in rural areas so they could be provided in smaller developments of less than 10 dwellings. This would ensure affordable housing delivery was not overridden by National Planning Policy.

In response to questions from Members, the Specialist for Strategic Planning advised:-

- The current threshold for providing affordable dwellings within a development was 10 houses or more so often planning applications were submitted for 9 or less to avoid providing them.
- The Council's approach to rural exception sites would be considered through the emerging Local Plan.
- A settlement role and function study was currently under way to underpin the settlement strategy approach including villages in the preferred options document of the Local Plan review. The rural designation would add to this where it was appropriate to have a lower threshold of affordable housing in those villages.
- The MHCLG had advised that the designation could take 6 months to be agreed by the Secretary of State and have a Statutory Instrument confirming the parishes included.
- Other Council areas around South Somerset who had recently applied the designation were introducing or had introduced a lower threshold for housing.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Rural exception sites should be included for affordable housing as often the Parish Council could nominate local people in need of housing.

- This designation would reflect the needs of the area as there was a great rural housing need and the report was welcomed.
- Families on the housing waiting list should not be penalised for refusing to accept a property in a rural village due to transport or access issues.
- This should allow people who have grown up in a village to be able to afford to stay living there if they wished.
- The rural designation must allow Parish Councils to be able to nominate local people to the houses.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they had sought clarification on community engagement to gather evidence for the designation, the effect which the designation would have on the supply of houses in rural areas and if the phosphate issue would have any effect upon this. He said the report had been welcomed by the Committee.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chairman proposed that the recommendation be agreed and this was unanimously supported by Members. She thanked the Specialist for Strategic Planning and her team for the work they had carried out in bringing the report forward.

RESOLVED: That District Executive agreed that the Council submit an application to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for all rural parishes in South Somerset district with populations of under 3,000 to be designated as rural under section 157(1) of the Housing Act 1985.

Reason: To agree the requirements to make an application to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to consider applying a rural designation status to parishes within South Somerset district under S.157 of the Housing Act 1985 to enable more affordable housing to be delivered in rural communities once new policies in the Local Plan Review have been prepared and are supported by viability evidence. This designation will also help to protect rural communities from potential future national policy changes that seek to accelerate housing delivery, but have the unintended consequence of reducing affordable housing delivery in rural communities.

286. District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 9)

The Chairman noted that there would be a Special District Executive meeting on 15 April to discuss the Council's response to the Government consultation on Local Government Reform for Somerset, followed by a Full Council meeting in the evening.

It was requested that the Leader write to Minister for Communities, Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) to express the Council's concerns at the cessation of on-line Council meetings and also that members of the public may also be reluctant to attend in person, whilst Parliament continued to allow hybrid meetings for themselves.

The Chairman agreed to do this.

RESOLVED: That the District Executive:-

1. approved the updated Executive Forward Plan for publication as attached at Appendix A, with the following amendments;
 - Leisure Procurement outcome – 15 April
2. noted the contents of the Consultation Database as shown at Appendix B with the following additional consultations:
 - Call for evidence: Improving broadband for Very Hard to Reach premises
 - Call for evidence: Local authority remote meetings

Reason: The Forward Plan is a statutory document.

287. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 10)

Members noted that a Special meeting of the District Executive would take place on Thursday 15th April 2021 as a virtual on-line meeting using Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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Chairman

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Date