

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 15 April 2021** as a Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software.

(6.30 pm - 8.20 pm)

Present:

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

Jason Baker	Mike Hewitson	Crispin Raikes
Mike Best	Ben Hodgson	David Recardo
Dave Bulmer	Charlie Hull	Paul Rowsell
Hayward Burt	Kaysar Hussain	Dean Ruddle
Tony Capozzoli	Val Keitch	Gina Seaton
Martin Carnell	Andy Kendall	Peter Seib
John Clark	Tim Kerley	Garry Shortland
Nicola Clark	Mike Lewis	Jeny Snell
Louise Clarke	Tony Lock	Andy Soughton
Nick Colbert	Kevin Messenger	Mike Stanton
Adam Dance	Tricia O'Brien	Rob Stickland
Sarah Dyke	Sue Osborne	Gerard Tucker
Karl Gill	Tiffany Osborne	Linda Vijeh
David Gubbins	Robin Pailthorpe	Martin Wale
Peter Gubbins	Oliver Patrick	William Wallace
Brian Hamilton	Clare Paul	Colin Winder

Officers:

Alex Parmley	Chief Executive
Clare Pestell	Director (Commercial Services & Income Generation)
Martin Woods	Director (Place)
Nicola Hix	Director (Strategy and Support Services)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Interim Section 151 Officer
Vicki Dawson	Lead Specialist (Environmental Health)
Katy Menday	Leisure & Recreation Manager
Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Luke Muir	PA Consulting
Clare Tew	PA Consulting
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
Lynda Pincombe	Specialist - Strategic Planning
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Michelle Mainwaring	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Jo Boucher	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

257. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robin Bastable, Neil Bloomfield, Malcolm Cavill, Henry Hobhouse, Mike Lock, Pauline Lock, Graham Oakes, Wes Read, Alan Smith and Lucy Trinnell.

258. Minutes (Agenda Item 2)

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 25th March 2021, copies of which had been previously circulated, were approved as a correct record of the meeting and would be signed by the Chairman.

259. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

260. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

A local resident addressed Council. He said the information from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) stated that their proposals for the reorganisation of local government in Somerset consultation would close on 19th April and he asked if Council had written to the Minister to extend the deadline to allow for the result of the proposed referendum to be properly considered as part of the decision making process. He asked what the response had been from the Minister? He also asked what the full cost of publicising and conducting the poll would be and what the Council hoped to achieve in conducting a poll after the current consultation had concluded?

The Leader of Council said she would provide a full written response to the resident. The Secretary of State had been informed of the possibility of a referendum and the delay was due to the limited list of consultees listed in the Government's consultation.

261. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman advised that following the death of HRH Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, the previous week, a joint statement had been released by the Leader of Council and himself and he would be representing the Council at a service of Thanksgiving for the Duke at Wells Cathedral the following day. A two minute silence would be observed to recognise his life, service and in memory and honour of the Duke.

A two minutes silence was observed by Council.

The Chairman also mentioned the sad passing of Ann Carroll, wife of Tim Carroll, who had been the Leader and Deputy Leader of South Somerset District Council for a number of years.

The Chairman then paid tribute to the Director for Place, Martin Woods, who would shortly be retiring from South Somerset District Council after over 40 years of service. He noted that he had started work in 1980 for Yeovil District Council as an Assistant Planning Officer and he continued with his career in various roles, concluding as Director for Place. He said that many Councillors would remember working with him and wished him the best in his future.

The Leader of Council, the Leader of the Conservative Group and the Leader of the Independent Group all joined the Chairman in thanking the Director for Place for his service and wishing him well in his retirement.

262. Verbal update on the Environment Strategy (Agenda Item 6)

Councillor Sarah Dyke, as Portfolio Holder for Environment, noted that it had been a number of months since Council had received an update on the work being undertaken as part of the Environment Strategy and she invited officers to make the presentation.

With the aid of a power point presentation, the Lead Specialist for Environment and the Leisure and Recreation Manager updated Members on some of their key achievements over the last 6 months. They thanked Members for their support, including from the Scrutiny task and finish group to deliver on the Council priority. Some of their key achievements over the last 6 months:

Carbon footprint -

We have previously reported that our baseline carbon footprint in 2018-19 was 1650.42 tonnes CO2 equivalent. Our annual target to get to carbon neutrality by 2030 is 105 each year. You will remember we met that last year and we are confident we will do so again for 2020-21. We do not yet have the figures available but we are now collating energy and fuel use data and would hope to be in position to report that at our next update at June Full Council

Energy retrofit and supply -

In order to continually drive down our carbon footprint we need to find ways to cut our energy use. In October we reported that we had received the energy audit report from Engie on some of our buildings. After that meeting an opportunity became available to apply for a grant under the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. The deadlines for pulling for application together were very short but with the work we had already with Engie we were able to partner with them to submit an application for energy improvement measures across our own estate. After some nail biting weeks were finally heard we were successful in securing £3,993,846. Work is now underway to complete the detailed design phase of that project. Work is due to be complete by end September this year. There is a whole project team working on delivering this right across the organisation. The

main works will involve decarbonising heating to ground or air source heat pumps, solar PV installation, LED lighting and some insulation work.

At the same time we have exploring how to switch our energy contract to a fully renewable supplier. This proved more complicated than was first anticipated and so we now have a Scrutiny Task and Finish group working on a project to assess the available options and make some recommendations. This is a crucial part of the work to meet our sustainability and carbon target as we move away from gas use.

Community Climate Activity -

Whilst much of our work has been around our own carbon footprint we are also looking at ways to support our community to become more carbon neutral as well. As part of that work we also submitted an application to the Local Authority Delivery Green Homes Grant. We were again successful in being awarded a grant of £803K to deliver retrofit insulation to hard to treat park homes across the district. This project is also now underway and we hope to start works on site over the next couple of months.

We are working on a checklist as part of the planning validation checklist to help ensure climate impacts are picked up at an early stage for any new developments.

Green Transport -

We are continuing to work with the Devon Low carbon Energy and Transport Technology Innovator (DELETTI) EV charging project to deliver the 25 charging sites for electric vehicles across our district. This work has unfortunately suffered delays due to covid but the tender process has now been completed and the main contractor has been appointed. Works are due to be complete by the end of the year and we are currently a more specific timeline for South Somerset

In association with Co-Cars we have issued a short online survey to gauge interest on establishing a community-led electric car club for South Somerset. Results will be analysed when the survey closes at the end of April and further work completed on viability and feasibility if there is sufficient interest in such a scheme.

In October we had just heard we had been successful in our application to take part in the DfT e-scooter trial. After a few teething issues the trial in Yeovil has been a great success with 330 users having taken 8,452 journeys across the town.

The trial has just been started its second phase and been expanded to Crewkerne and Chard. Whilst we have again seen some teething issues – mostly with inappropriate riding of the scooters, the team are working hard to resolve these and hope it will see the same success as in Yeovil. The trial is part of helping us to research and develop a broad portfolio of active and electric travel options for our residents as we seek to provide alternative non fossil fuel modes of transport.

Community Engagement & Communications -

Our communications plan continues to deliver a range of environmental messages on a weekly, seasonal and thematic basis. Since we last updated in October there have been a total of 31 social media posts across a range of subjects from Christmas tree recycling, e-scooter roll out, the Great Garden

Birdwatch, energy switch campaigns, the Solar Streets project and how to collect and grow trees from seed. Most popular have been the e-scooter trials, particularly the heat maps showing usage.

In addition to online media we also issued press releases across a range of subjects including car share schemes, Green Flag Awards and our own South Somerset community grants scheme.

After targeted communications the South Somerset community grants scheme has seen an increase in applications across a range of environmental themes including support for land purchases where it is of nature conservation importance, supporting work on threatened species and green energy, in the last year £29,434 has been awarded to help towards the realisation of 7 local community environment projects (total cost of projects £266,478).

The team continues to engage with the growing network of Environment Champions (57 at the last count) that we are fostering across the district. Zoom networking events have successfully run covering the topics of Nature Recovery and Community Energy, and next week we have a session programmed in about Recycle More with Somerset Waste Partnership. The team have been developing working relationships with the Champions to give the bespoke support that is required in each of our very different parishes, whether that be a focus on waterway management or EV charging points.

We created a spring resource pack that has been well received, with some basic principles of ecological management and a number of helpful links on how to start surveying and monitoring habitats and species in your area. The idea was it provide that first step for Champions that want to start understanding the ecology of their area so they can consider future management and how to influence it. In the pack we have set out information about verge management, explained the basics of managing for wildflowers and suggested routes in to influence the owners and managers of verges.

Get Sussed continues to be created and issued monthly. It has evolved and grown as a publication to include case studies from our own parishes and feedback remains overwhelmingly positive. It even has international reach now! It is now sent to 773 recipients and has an average open rate (over last 6 months) of 34%. Across the months our most popular articles have been October; Zwings e-scooter launch, November; The big clean switch, energy saving advice from CSE, December; Entrade Somerset Catchment Market, January; the County Climate Emergency Carbon Reduction Grants, February; the CoCars Electric Car Sharing Scheme Survey and in March our Spring Resource Pack was most popular.

Finally on communications, a new South Somerset Environment website is well under way, construction is complete and the team are populating the pages with a range of local resources and information plus details and links to national schemes. This will become the home of the Green Directory and that content is gathered from our businesses across the district. We aim to launch the new pages by the end of June.

Trees and Woodland –

In line with the Strategy work continues to enable tree planting across SSDC land and out in our communities. We delivered the Great Parish Tree Giveaway (under more difficult circumstances for our communities this year) with 15

parishes taking part and 775 trees given out and now in the ground. A further 2,225 trees were handed out to community groups, local farmers and our own Environment Services team who using them across a range of projects to provide further woodland in Ilminster and for hedgerow enhancement.

At Yeovil Country Park 570 trees have been externally funded and planted at the bottom of Wyndham Hill and in Pit wood at Ham Hill 100 trees were planted as part of the Countryfile ambition to plant a tree for every reception child.

Three Urban Tree challenge sites in Martock and Chard received plantings in March totalling 900 trees.

This means that this year a total of 2,270 trees have been planted on SSDC land with a further 3,300 enabled on community land. This bring the totals, since the adoption of the Strategy, to 7,266 on SSDC land and 6,360 community plantings.

Open Spaces Strategy -

The Open Spaces Strategy is progressing but is delayed from our initial delivery estimates. We are currently awaiting data back on tree canopy cover for the district and for a play and youth facilities audit; all of which will feed into the strategy and make its recommendations truly data driven. The outputs of these audits will also feed into the Local Plan review. Discussions across the Environment CoP and other councils have shown us that we can integrate thinking around green infrastructure into this strategy; meaning we think more widely than our greenspace islands (parks) and more holistically, at the bigger connected picture which is vitally important for both plants, animal and humans!

In the coming weeks we will be launching a resident's survey to understand their current views of our greenspaces and what their aspirations may be for the future. Surveying at this time will also enable us to ensure our recovery work is informed and pertinent as a response to the huge increase in use of our green spaces during the pandemic.

Joint Working -

The work of the Local Nature Partnership continues with new work streams for Nature Recovery Networks and food and farming. We are actively engaged with this work and expect to see more detailed maps later this summer that identify high quality biodiverse areas of nature conservation priority versus spaces that could provide important links or extensions, thus creating the desired networks for nature. Once we have maps for the South Somerset area than we can work with our environment champions to explore and explain how to conserve, survey or extend the spaces in their areas.

We are leading on the coordination and submission of a grant application to the Green Recovery Fund in partnership with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. The project would seek £250,000 to install nature based solutions e.g. tree planting, to mitigate flooding and nutrient run off from higher ground in various areas of the district. Combining the data of FWAG, our community links and expert knowledge from both sides, has built a successful project that now needs project funding.

We continue to actively work with other local community groups like Reimagining the Levels and organisations like CSE to ensure we are presenting the best opportunities to our communities and securing grant funding wherever possible.

The Leader of Council asked that a copy of the presentation slides be made available to Members and asked that the environmental achievements and projects be publicised more widely.

In response to a question, the Lead Specialist for Environment confirmed that the grant received for energy improvement measures would be used on the main SSDC buildings which had been identified as the highest energy users, including the Jon O'Donnell building, the Ninesprings Café and the Ham Hill Rangers office.

At the conclusion of the debate, Portfolio Holder for Environment thanked the Lead Specialist for Environment and the Leisure and Recreation Manager and their teams for their work during the year and the grant funding they had been successfully gained for various projects. In response to a question, she confirmed that officers worked closely with all key stakeholders across the district, including the Blackdown Hills AONB.

The Chairman also thanked the officers and their team for the work they were doing and for their grant success and the number of trees planted.

Members were pleased to note the verbal update on the progress of the SSDC Environment Strategy.

NOTED.

263. Consultation on Local Government Reform - Response to One Somerset Proposal (Agenda Item 7)

The Leader of Council, as Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Housing, introduced two representatives from PA Consulting who gave a short presentation on the response to the One Somerset proposal. She outlined the history of the unitary authority proposal and the submission by the District Councils which had been agreed by Council in December 2020. The Government were consulting on the two proposals and that would conclude on 19th April.

Mr Luke Muir and Clare Tew of PA Consulting made a short presentation on the response to the One Somerset proposal. They outlined the approach to writing the response, the methodology, the evidence and the analysis.

In response to questions,

- The basis for the decision by the Secretary of State was not yet known.
- Central Government Departments were likely to have an established process for scoring and reviewing the business cases and it was likely they would be looking at the tests sent to the District Councils and would measure the effectiveness of each in a structured and robust way. They would also be looking for evidence to support the claims made in the business cases.

- There would be a rationale given along with the decision made but the full analysis may not be published in full.
- The One Somerset business case at point 6.5 on page 78 proposed 100 councillors in their new unitary authority, but, this would be subject to the Boundary Commission for England review to determine.
- In the One Somerset business case, the intention was to base the Local Community Networks around the existing Primary Care Networks, but a localist approach would involve talking to local communities about the projects they wished to take on and base the Local Community Networks around those.
- There was an appendix to the One Somerset business case which detailed the methodology and findings but this was not available in relation to the public consultation survey conducted.

During discussion, the Leader of Council confirmed that:-

- the full report and appendix would be submitted as the response to the MHCLG.
- It was evident that there was no ambitious devolution deal in the One Somerset business case which was part of economic growth.
- Part of the Stronger Somerset business case was the two unitary authorities joining with others to form a combined authority to achieve a devolution deal.
- North Somerset and BANES may be interested in joining a combined authority.
- All the Somerset District Councils were considering the same report and some had already agreed it, therefore any changes proposed would need to be checked with the other authorities.

During discussion the following points were made:

- There were a number of errors in the report on the One Somerset proposal.
- The Conservative Group would be making their own representations to the Secretary of State on the consultation proposals.

The Leader of Council thanked the two representatives from PA Consulting for attending the Council meeting and for answering Members questions. She proposed the recommendations and they were seconded by Councillor Peter Seib. A named vote was taken and the recommendation was confirmed by 36 votes in favour, 11 against and 0 abstentions.

RESOLVED: That Full Council approved the response to the consultation on proposals for reform of local government in Somerset, specifically in respect of the One Somerset proposal. One Somerset is the alternative to the districts' Stronger Somerset proposal and recommends the creation of a new, single unitary to cover the administrative district of Somerset.

Reason: To endorse the SSDC formal response to the Secretary of State on the One Somerset proposal, which argues for a single unitary for the whole of the administrative county of Somerset.

(Voting: 36 in favour, 11 against, 0 abstentions)

264. Local Referendum on the Future of Local Government in Somerset (Agenda Item 8)

The Leader of Council, as Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Housing, advised that in light of the Secretary of State's letter received late on 12th April and the specific and detailed legal issues raised therein, it was necessary to obtain further legal advice by means of Leading Counsel's opinion to ensure Members had full and thorough legal advice when reaching their decision on such a significant issue. Therefore in relation to the proposed District Executive and Council decisions to hold a local referendum on the proposals for the future of Local Government in Somerset, the item would be deferred to a future date to consider the matter further with the benefit of legal advice. A separate meeting would be convened when the complete legal advice was available.

It was noted that the item was **deferred** to a later meeting of Council.

265. Appointed Leisure Facilities Provider (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised that the report was brought forward due to the significant difference to the Medium Term Financial plan from the expected financial position. Some provisions had been made in the budget but the market responses received were different and it would provide a stronger recovery after the initial investment to provide a better service. The additional finance was affordable, and the funding needed in the first two years could be funded from the MTFP Support Fund, which was a reserve set aside for pressures such as this.

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Well-Being introduced the report and advised that the process had started over 12 months ago, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic it had been delayed. He thanked the Specialist for Strategic Planning and her team for the work they had completed to bring the proposal forward. Under the previous contract, the maintenance liability of the leisure buildings had previously been the responsibility of SSDC but this was being passed to the new leisure provider which would result in efficiencies in officer time and savings to

the revenue budget. Support would be provided to the new operator through the COVID-19 process but this should result in income to SSDC in year 3. The capital investment at the sites would be necessary for the operator to achieve the revenue returns projected and would significantly improve the customer experience, with new exercise equipment, and improved group exercise facilities. The operator would deliver active programmes in target areas outside the centres and they would support the physical and mental health needs of the community as it recovered from the pandemic and years beyond.

The Specialist for Strategic Planning stressed this was a different contract to the previous one as it specified delivery of active programmes outside the centres. It would help to address some inequalities across the district. Investment was planned for the 3 centres of Wincanton, Goldenstones and at the Westland sport and fitness centre.

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

- The successful leisure provider had committed to hold their prices and would review this in line with inflation in January 2022.
- When centres were closed due to the pandemic in 2020, the previous operator had suspended customer's direct debit payments. Any membership credits would be carried forward and honoured by the new operator.

At the conclusion of the debate, the recommendations were proposed by Councillor Mike Best and seconded by Councillor Peter Seib and when put the vote, were unanimously confirmed by all Members.

RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed:-

- a. The appointment of Wealden Leisure (trading as Freedom Leisure) to manage the Council's leisure facilities;
- b. A total capital budget of £3.495m for 2021/22, being an increase of £2.46m on the existing budget, to be funded as detailed in Appendix B;
- c. An increase in the revenue budget for 2021/22 and 2022/23 (of £574k and £557k respectively) to be funded from the MTFP support reserve.
- d. To note the additional net income stream to the Council arising from this contract (from 2023/24), as described in Appendix B, and the review that will be undertaken on how this income will be utilised.

Reason: To agree the leisure provider for the operation of Council leisure facilities from 1st April 2021, and to request approval of the increased capital and revenue budgets needed to achieved the desired returns associated with the appointment.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

266. Remote Meetings after 7 May 2021 and the Delegation of Decision Making. Also Change of Date of Annual Council Meeting (Agenda Item 10)

The Leader of Council noted that a case was being presented to the High Court by Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Services Officers to preserve the right for local authorities to continue to be able to make decisions via remote meetings beyond 6th May 2021 when the current legislation (Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020) expired. She noted that the Council had previously agreed to allocate certain executive and non-executive matters to others, and it was important that these changes were made clear on the face of the Constitution. She proposed that the Council's Constitution be amended to allow remote meetings to function as consultative bodies and delegate decisions, including Executive and Quasi-Judicial decisions, that would have been taken by those meetings to the Chief Executive (or the relevant Director in the Chief Executive's absence). This delegated authority would expire on 31 July 2021 unless continued by a future decision of this Council.

She proposed the recommendations with the amendment that the Annual Meeting date be changed to be held on 5th May 2021. This was seconded by Councillor Adam Dance.

There were no questions from Members and a named vote was taken. The recommendations were confirmed by 44 in favour, 0 against and 1 abstention.

RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed to make the following changes to the Constitution:-

- a. To continue to enable members to hold remote, virtual meetings using available technology;
- b. To amend Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Council's Constitution to allow those remote meetings to function as consultative bodies and delegate decisions, including Executive and Quasi-Judicial decisions, that would have been taken by those meetings if the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)

(England and Wales) Regulations 2020 had continued in force to the Chief Executive (or the relevant Director in the Chief Executive's absence) in consultation with those meetings and those members to whom the decision would otherwise have been delegated under Part 3 of the Constitution;

- c. The delegated authority given under (b) will expire on 31 July 2021 unless continued by a future decision of this Council;
- d. To delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer and Chief Executive to amend the Constitution to reflect these changes.

That Council further agreed that its Annual meeting for 2021 would take place on 05 May 2021 commencing at 6.30pm.

Reason: To agree changes to the Constitution to allow SSDC meetings to continue to be held remotely with the appropriate use of delegated powers, to be reviewed on or before 31 July 2021 as circumstances evolve. Also to agree that the date of the 2021 Annual Meeting be changed to 29 April 2021 to enable it to be held remotely.

(Voting: 44 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention)

267. Motions (Agenda Item 11)

There were no Motions submitted by Members.

268. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 12)

There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.

269. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 13)

Members noted that the Annual meeting of the Full Council would take place on Wednesday 5th May 2021 commencing at 6.30pm as a virtual meeting via Zoom meeting software.

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Chairman

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Date