

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 16 September 2021** in the Council Chamber, Brympton Way, Yeovil and as a Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software.

(6.30 pm - 9.11 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Paul Maxwell (Chairman)
Councillor Wes Read (Vice-Chairman)

Jason Baker
Mike Best
Dave Bulmer
Hayward Burt
Nicola Clark

Sarah Dyke
Mike Hewitson
Val Keitch
Dean Ruddle
Peter Seib

Lucy Trimnell
Linda Vijeh
Martin Wale

Also Present on-line:

Robin Bastable
Neil Bloomfield
Tony Capozzoli
Martin Carnell
John Clark
Nick Colbert
Adam Dance
Karl Gill
David Gubbins
Henry Hobhouse
Ben Hodgson

Kaysar Hussain
Andy Kendall
Jenny Kenton
Tim Kerley
Mike Lewis
Tony Lock
Kevin Messenger
Graham Oakes
Tricia O'Brien
Sue Osborne
Robin Pailthorpe

Oliver Patrick
Crispin Raikes
David Recardo
Paul Rowsell
Gina Seaton
Garry Shortland
Jeny Snell
Andy Soughton
Mike Stanton
Rob Stickland
Colin Winder

Officers:

Jane Portman
Kirsty Larkins
Jill Byron
Karen Watling
Lynda Pincombe
Vicki Dawson
Katy Menday
Peter Paddon
Joe Walsh
Angela Cox
Becky Sanders

Chief Executive
Director (Service Delivery)
Monitoring Officer
Interim Section 151 Officer
Specialist - Strategic Planning
Lead Specialist (Environmental Health)
Leisure & Recreation Manager
Lead Specialist (Economy)
Specialist (Economic Development)
Specialist (Democratic Services)
Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

44. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Malcolm Cavill, Louise Clark, Peter Gubbins, Brian Hamilton, Charlie Hull, Mike Lock, Pauline Lock, Tiffany Osborne, Clare Paul, Alan Smith, Gerard Tucker and William Wallace.

45. Minutes (Agenda Item 2)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 19th August 2021 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

46. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

47. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

48. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman noted that the funeral had taken place that morning for Councillor Tim Carroll, who had been a District Councillor from 1995 to 2015 and had been the Leader of Council from 2001 to 2004 and from 2006 to 2011. He noted that he had also been a County Councillor and he said that he had been a distinguished Leader who had gained respect from all Members and officers at the District Council. He proposed that Council hold a minutes silence in memory of Tim.

The Leader of Council, Councillor Val Keitch, also paid tribute to Councillor Tim Carroll who she said had been very supportive and was a man of great intellect and wisdom and humour. She said that she would miss him very much.

Councillor Martin Wale said he had been Leader of the Opposition when Councillor Tim Carroll had been Leader and he had always been helpful, even-tempered and had great wisdom. He would be a great loss to the community.

The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Linda Vijeh, said that Councillor Carroll had been a great orator in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Tony Capozzoli, as an independent Councillor, said Councillor Carroll would be greatly missed by all.

The Chairman advised that he had attended the opening of the new pavilion facilities at Yeovil Recreation Centre on 25th August. He noted that the site was large and offered a varied number of sporting facilities, play areas and open space. He thanked all staff who helped to manage the site and noted how important the facility was for Yeovil.

49. Chairman's Engagements (Agenda Item 6)

The Chairman advised that he had attended the Somerset Medals Awards at Taunton Rugby Club the previous evening, at the invitation of the Chairman of the County Council. He said the community spirit and selflessness of the groups and individuals receiving awards, was inspiring.

The list of Chairman's engagements were NOTED.

50. New Leisure Operator Introduction and Presentation (Agenda Item 7)

The Specialist for Procurement introduced Jeremy Rowe, Regional Director and Mark Learnihan, Head of Business Development from Freedom Leisure. She said this was a large contract which SSDC had entered into and it was appropriate to introduce them to Members and explain any changes during the contract which had been confirmed by Council in April 2021.

The Regional Director for Freedom Leisure provided Member of Council with an overview of the services they provided at the leisure centres in Yeovil, Wincanton and soon in Chard. (Presentation slides published). He noted that:-

- All existing staff had been transferred to Freedom Leisure
- Swimming programmes and fitness memberships were increasing
- The Active Communities Manager would work in the community
- An active communities survey would shape future activities direction.
- A capital improvement programme would invest in the facilities at Goldenstones, Westlands and Wincanton including energy saving measures.
- They were looking forward to taking possession of the new Chard leisure centre.

In response to questions from Members, the Regional Director of Freedom Leisure advised:-

- Staff were qualified to assist customers who were recovering from injuries or operations.
- A ranged of membership packages were being developed for the new Chard leisure centre.
- The new Development plan would be completed in February 2022.
- The Active Communities Manager would link in with the SSDC play days.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Portfolio Holder for Health and Well-Being thanked the Regional Director and the Head of Business Development from Freedom Leisure for their presentation. He also thanked the Specialist for Procurement for her work in finalising the leisure contract. He said the new

Chard leisure centre was a magnificent addition to the leisure centres in the district.

The presentation was NOTED.

51. Verbal update on the SSSC Environment Strategy (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Environment noted that it was almost two years since the Environment Strategy had been adopted by Council and a great deal had been achieved in that time. She introduced the Lead Specialist for Environment and the Leisure and Recreation Manager who provided Council with a presentation of the projects within the strategy. (Presentation slides published)

- The Carbon calculator which tracked the Council's carbon reduction each year showed that the 10% target had been exceeded for 2020 – 21. Note: Since the Full Council meeting officers have found an inaccuracy in the carbon calculator figures presented. These will be re-issued as soon as they have re-worked the calculations. In the meantime please could we ask that you do not pass on the figures.
- The Council's energy had been switched to a green energy tariff with assistance from a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.
- A number of energy grants had been successfully applied for.
- The installation of electric vehicle charging points, the trial of electric scooters and an electric car sharing scheme were all being progressed.
- A survey of local businesses would help to target advice and support.
- Rainwater harvesting from building roofs was being investigated.
- Trials of no-mow of grass verges to encourage wild flowers and pollinators.
- There would be a Wild Flowers Giveaway to parishes later in the year.
- Subject to funding, further trees would be planted on Ham Hill.
- There was a new Environment Website: www.southsomersetenvironment.co.uk
- The Get SuSSed newsletter was sent to over 674 recipients and it was hoped to increase this circulation.
- There were now 68 Parish Champions and advice packs for Parishes and Schools on nature conservation would be published soon.
- The Community Grants programme had funded an electric street sweeper in Chard, an air quality monitor in Crewkerne and an electric vehicle charging point in Somerton.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder, Lead Specialist for Environment and the Leisure and Recreation Manager advised:

- There was a petition calling on the Government to have mandatory printing of car registration numbers on all Drive Thru packaging to help reduce littering.

- The Yeovil Recreation Centre Sustainable Land Management Case Study would be circulated to Members.
- Customers using the EV charging points in SSDC car parks would pay through a mobile phone app or debit/credit card.
- SCC were responsible for on-street charging for electric vehicles and that will be picked up through the County wide Environment Strategy.
- Parish Champions did not need to be Parish Councillors and the list of Parish Champions would be circulated.
- The use of electric scooters was being monitored and a report would be produced at the end of the trial.
- Information on the criteria for energy grants would be circulated.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Portfolio Holder for Environment thanked the Environment team and staff at the Lufton Depot for their work in delivering the Environment Strategy.

The presentation was NOTED.

52. Additional Restrictions Grant - Discretionary Business Support Scheme (Agenda Item 9)

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development advised that the Government had introduced a number of grants to businesses as a result of the COVID pandemic which SSDC had dispersed. He said there were non-discretionary grants which SSDC passed on to businesses and also discretionary grants where judgement was applied and it was necessary to have clear governance of the process.

The Specialist for Economic Development advised that the additional restrictions grant commenced in November 2020 and did not cover the grant funding awarded in the first COVID lockdown period or the grants for businesses required to close in November 2020. SSDC had provided the grant funding to businesses as quickly as possible throughout the pandemic and the report requested the delegated authority allocate the remaining Additional Restrictions Grant funding to ensure the funding was allocated appropriately to allow businesses to recover and grow. There were a number of example schemes listed in the report and the split of grant funding and business support initiatives was likely to be around 75% / 25%. The grant funding had not been underspent as final top-up funding could not be claimed until the Additional Restrictions Grant was fully spent. There was approximately £1m left in the allocation to be spent before March 2022.

In response to questions, the Specialist for Economy advised:

- The grant funding had to be allocated by the end of March 2022.
- The grants would be publicised through the Council's website.
- The scheme would be open to business who had already received grant funding.

- Businesses who did not pay business rates would be eligible for the additional restrictions grant.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members unanimously agreed the recommendations for approval.

RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed to:-

- a. delegate authority to the Director of Place and Recovery, in consultation with the Director for Service Delivery, Section 151 Officer and the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, to allocate the remaining Additional Restrictions Grant funding. It is anticipated that this may include relevant grant schemes and business support initiatives consistent with the stated aims of the Recovery and Renewal Strategy, Council Plan and the Economic Development Strategy.

Reason: To note the Additional Restrictions Grant – Discretionary Business Support Scheme and to seek approval on its future spend.

(voting: unanimous in favour)

53. Chard Regeneration Programme Finance Update (Agenda Item 10)

The Portfolio Holder for the Chard Regeneration Programme advised that the regeneration programme was paused and the Regeneration Board were looking for future partners and investors. The project was only paused and the new leisure centre was due to open soon.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised the increased costs would come from the revenue budget which was affordable. The use of capital receipts would change the overall level of borrowing for the project which was the recommendation of the Section 151 Officer.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- Concern was expressed for the future of the Boden Mill which was a listed building immediately adjacent to the new leisure centre. The mill's refurbishment was important otherwise it could fall into disrepair.
- The brownfields contamination fund grant application to help restore the Boden Mill had not been successful.
- Work was still on-going on the regeneration project.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members unanimously confirmed the recommendations of the report.

RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed to:-

- a. an increase to the Council's revenue budget for the additional

financing and public realm costs as given in Table Three of this report;

- b. the use of an additional £2m of the capital receipts earmarked reserve to fund the Programme as proposed by the interim Section 151 Officer and described in paragraph 14;
- c. confirm that SSDC are keen to pursue Phase 2 but recognise that it is not feasible to enter into a Phase 2 programme of work at the current time, until significant external funding opportunities become available;
- d. the inclusion of the gross capital budgets, instead of only the net capital budgets, in the council's over capital programme for the Regeneration Programme (including the Chard Regeneration Programme), as proposed by the interim S151 Officer in paragraph 20.

Reason: To consider the financial performance of the overall Chard Regeneration Programme, with particular reference to the changes which have shaped the evolution of the programme.

(voting: unanimous in favour)

54. Request for a General Dispensation for Councillors Attending Remote Meetings (Agenda Item 11)

The Leader of Council advised that Members were asked to approve a general dispensation under section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972. This would allow any Member who had not attended an in person meeting to continue to be a District Councillor. She asked that Members agree to attend at least 75% of the meetings they would normally be expected to attend in person on-line

In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer advised that the proposed 75% on-line attendance was a reasonable expectation and compromise when Members could attend 100% of their meetings.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- Any Councillor dropping below the 75% attendance could request a dispensation in the normal manner.
- The proposed 75% on-line attendance was not in the spirit of the 1972 Act.
- Councillors were only required to attend one meeting in person every six months so why not the same for on-line attendance?
- Further work was required on a remote or hybrid meeting protocol.
- The majority of Members regularly attended their council meetings.
- Group Leaders should seek to address low attendance by their Members.
- The list of qualifying meetings were listed at point 5 of the report.

- It was unusual to change the terms of a Councillors attendance part way through their term of office.
- It would be simpler to apply the Local Government Act 1972.
- All public council meetings would qualify as attendance.

At the conclusion of the debate, the recommendations were proposed and seconded and when put to the vote, the majority of Members were in favour.

RESOLVED: That Full Council approved a general dispensation under section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 for any member of Council who, although not physically attending any in-person meetings over any six-month period, attends at least 75% of the meetings they would normally be expected to attend in person on-line; this dispensation to last until 31 January 2022 and be reviewed as part of any review of the Council's remote consultative meeting and delegation arrangements.

Reason: To ensure the Council's decision to continue with remote consultative meetings does not cause any member attending meetings remotely to automatically cease to be a member under section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

(voting: 13 in favour, 2 against, 0 abstentions)

55. Report of Executive Decisions (Agenda Item 12)

The Leader of Council noted the report and invited any questions.

There were no questions raised and the report was NOTED.

56. Audit Committee (Agenda Item 13)

The Chairman of the Audit Committee introduced the report and noted that their last meeting had allowed them to focus on the cyber security update which had been most informative. The next meeting of the Audit Committee would be held on 30th September 2021 at 10.00am.

There were no questions raised and the report was NOTED.

57. Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 14)

The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee introduced the report and thanked the Environment team for their appreciation of the Scrutiny Task and Finish report on the Council's energy provider. She also thanked the Scrutiny Specialist for her work on her first Task and Finish report. She said they also looked forward to participating in the governance process for the new Unitary Authority.

There were no questions raised and the report was NOTED.

58. Motions (Agenda Item 15)

End Misogyny and Male Violence against Women and Girls

Councillor Sarah Dyke proposed her Motion to Council. She said that violence against women and girls in all forms must be prevented but it was prevalent in society today. Reports of rape and violence were rising but convictions for sexual violence were at an all-time low. Reports of crimes motivated by misogyny were not recorded as such by the police and so women were unprotected as misogyny was not a hate crime. Society needed to change. She highlighted a number of statistics listed in her report relating to harassment at work and sexual assaults. She also noted that 4% of men had also experienced some type of sexual harassment and they also required support. But her Motion related to violence against women and girls. Domestic abuse crimes had increased since 2016 by 63% and the Government had pledged funding towards this, but more was needed. She listed the requests in her Motion and said that in 2021 misogyny and male violence against women and girls should not happen. She asked that Council support her Motion.

During discussion, the following points were made:-

- We need to focus on assaults and violence against all people, not just women.
- Within Avon & Somerset Police there was Operation Bluestone to combat violence and decrease vulnerability crime and a new strategy was being developed.
- The Avon & Somerset Police had a rape and sexual offences lead officer with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable.
- The Motion should be supported and also any future Motion on misandry (the hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against men or boys in general).
- Abuse in all forms should be ended.
- Pleased to see the proposals to work with partners.
- Do not wish to see young men given criminal records for misguided comments therefore the definition of harassment needed clarifying.
- 'Ask for Annie' scheme operated in Community Pharmacies to provide safe shelter and access to support from domestic violence.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Nicola Clark. She read out a quote from the organisation End Violence against Women which described the impact of violence. Spoke about the effects of abusive relationships on women and children and the long term effects on their mental health. She acknowledged that men and boys were also victims to abuse and it was important that support was available for them. She said it was important that SSDC continued to work with Avon & Somerset police to reduce serious violence in all forms. She said incidences of domestic violence and sexual abuse continued to be under-

reported although reports had increased during the COVID pandemic. She concluded with the comments from HM Inspector of the Constabulary and said it was important for all agencies to work together to prevent and tackle violence against women and girls.

At the conclusion of the debate, Members unanimously supported the Motion.

RESOLVED: That Council agreed:

- a. To ensure that SSDC continues to do everything in its power to build a district free from misogyny and violence against women and girls. This includes continuing to invest in vital services, listening and responding to women and girls about the action needed, and calling out misogyny and sexism wherever we see or hear it.
- b. That it is vital that women's and girl's voices are heard; and that the Council will bring forward a process that proactively encourages and listens to women's voices across the district. This task force will seek to involve all women Councillors.
- c. To promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment a crime, and encourage all elected members, and residents to sign their petition.
- d. Call on the government to ratify the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting Violence Against Women and Girls, to ratify the International Labour Organisation's No.190, recognising the right of everyone to work free from gender based violence and harassment and to make street harassment a criminal offence.
- e. To call on the Government to provide the resource and funding for police forces across the UK to effectively tackle harassment, misogyny and domestic abuse.
- f. To call on Avon and Somerset Police to record harassment of women and girls as a hate crime as soon as possible, not wait until they are required to do so.
- g. To call on Avon and Somerset Police to prioritise investigating crimes against women and girls and ask them to ensure that women and girls are treated with the required sensitivity.
- h. To work with Avon and Somerset Police on improving women's safety in South Somerset.
- i. To continue to work with local and national networks working to end violence against women and girls
- j. To call on the County Council to work with schools and families to tackle toxic masculinity culture, and to educate men through campaigns and bringing in male "allies".

- k. To become a White Ribbon Accredited Organisation.
<https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/organisations>.

Reason: To support the end of misogyny and male violence against women and girls.

(voting: unanimous in favour)

59. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 16)

There were no questions submitted under Procedure Rule 10.

60. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 17)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Full Council would take place as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting technology on **Thursday, 21st October commencing at 6.30 p.m**

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Chairman

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Date