

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a special meeting of the **District Executive** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Thursday 8 July 2021.**

(9.30 am - 10.00 am)

Present:

Councillor Val Keitch (Chairman)

Jason Baker
Adam Dance
Sarah Dyke

Peter Gubbins
Tony Lock
Peter Seib



Also Present:

Andy Kendall
Gerard Tucker

Linda Vijeh
Martin Wale

Officers:

Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Interim Section 151 Officer
Dan Bennett	Property and Development Project Manager
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Anna Matthews	Chard High Street HAZ Project Manager
Stephanie Gold	Specialist (Scrutiny & Member Development)
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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

32. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mike Best, John Clark, Henry Hobhouse, Alex Parmley (Chief Executive) and Nicola Hix (Director).

33. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

34. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 3)

There were no members of the public present.

35. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 4)

The Chairman noted that the first in-person Full Council meeting was being held that evening and she reminded Members to keep to social distancing rules.

36. Financing the Chard Public Realm Scheme (Agenda Item 5)

The Portfolio Holder for the Chard Regeneration Programme said their aim was to boost the economy and make Chard a more attractive and engaging place and also providing a leisure centre, swimming pool and soft play area. He noted that the new leisure centre was nearing completion and the next focus was on the town centre improvements to the public realm and pedestrian areas. The areas to be improved were Fore Street Guildhall area, Holyrood Street, Boden Street, the eastern gateway and Marketfield car park entrance. The scheme had attracted £1m funding from Historic England as a High Street Heritage Action Zone and it was intended that the improvement works for Boden Street and Marketfield car parks would be completed by 31 October to allow the opening of the leisure centre. Despite the best efforts of officers, construction industry costs had risen and so he asked Members to support the increased budget for the project.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services, addressing points raised by Scrutiny Committee members, said that some of the Council's reserves were identified for projects and some were for general use. It was intended to use the general reserves which would reduce funding available for income generation and other contingencies but it would not impact on any other project. Nor would the loss of anticipated profit on the Marlborough development affect the project. He said this was an unavoidable situation and the commitment was needed to complete the regeneration project.

During discussion, the following points were made:

- The project was affordable and SSDC were committed to regenerating Chard, Yeovil & Wincanton.
- Whilst the Scrutiny Members questions were in depth, it was a worthy project.

In response to questions from Scrutiny Committee Members, officers responded:-

- None of the additional costs were attributed to access issue problems with the Marketfield car park.
- The two car park junction improvements required for the leisure centre to open had been included in the wider public realm project because they were geographically connected and it made business sense to undertake all the improvements at the same time.

- The urgency in bringing the report forward was to complete the works in time for the opening of the leisure centre, and also, some of the grant money spending was time limited.
- Alternative approaches were considered and negotiation with the contractor to reduce costs did take place.
- The additional funding was specifically for the town centre work.
- Once the contract was signed then the costs would be fixed and there was also a small but appropriate contingency included in the requested additional budget, to be held back by SSDC.
- The Heritage Action Zone Board reported to the Chard Regeneration Board.
- The amount required for future maintenance was being sought from SCC.

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

RESOLVED: That District Executive recommends that the Chief Executive approves:

- a. an increase to the Chard Regeneration Programme's Net Budget of £412,500, to enable officers to issue a construction contract and deliver works that facilitate the opening of the Leisure Centre with no delay.
- b. that given this increase in expenditure is urgent and is required to deliver the agreed policy framework, and that the increased budget sought is less than 5% of useable reserves (totalling £22.8m as at 31 March 2021), District Executive funds this increase to the Net Budget by utilising the Medium Term Financial Support Fund earmarked reserve under its delegated authority (Part 3 of the Constitution, section 4:1).

That District Executive noted that:

- d. the use of this reserve to fund the Chard Regeneration Programme will be reported to full Council in the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan report and to Audit Committee in the Annual Outturn report as required in the Constitution (Part 3, section 4:1).
- e. the Director of Place and Recovery and the Interim S151 Officer are currently undertaking a deep dive review of the Chard Regeneration financial position and the outcomes of this review, and any potential implications for the Council's revenue and/or capital budgets, will be reported to District Executive as soon as practically possible.

Reason: To note the current position relating to delivery of the Chard Regeneration Public Realm Scheme and to agree to increase the approved net budget for the overall Chard Regeneration programme, to enable delivery of the Chard Public Realm Scheme.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

37. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 6)

Members noted that the next meeting of the District Executive would take place on **Thursday, 5th August 2021** as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting software commencing at 9.30 a.m.

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Chairman

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Date