

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 20 January 2022** at the Westlands Entertainment Venue, Westbourne Close, Yeovil.

(6.30 pm - 7.09 pm)

Present:

Members: Councillor Paul Maxwell (Chairman)

Jason Baker	Henry Hobhouse	Sue Osborne
Robin Bastable	Kaysar Hussain	Robin Pailthorpe
Mike Best	Val Keitch	Oliver Patrick
Dave Bulmer	Andy Kendall	Crispin Raikes
Tony Capozzoli	Jenny Kenton	David Recardo
Nicola Clark	Tim Kerley	Peter Seib
Adam Dance	Mike Lewis	Garry Shortland
Sarah Dyke	Mike Lock	Rob Stickland
Brian Hamilton	Tony Lock	Gerard Tucker
Mike Hewitson	Graham Oakes	Martin Wale

Also Present on-line:

Neil Bloomfield	Peter Gubbins	Clare Paul
Hayward Burt	Ben Hodgson	Paul Rowsell
Martin Carnell	Charlie Hull	Gina Seaton
John Clark	Pauline Lock	Jeny Snell
Louise Clark	Kevin Messenger	Andy Soughton
Nick Colbert	Tricia O'Brien	Mike Stanton
David Gubbins	Tiffany Osborne	William Wallace
		Colin Winder

Officers:

Jane Portman	Chief Executive
Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Nicola Hix	Director (Support Services & Strategy)
Kirsty Larkins	Director (Service Delivery)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Vicki Dawson	Lead Specialist (Environmental Health)
Natalie Fortt	Regeneration Programme Manager
Rachel Lloyd	Specialist (Licensing)
Catherine Thompson	Specialist (Benefits)
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

98. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Malcolm Cavill (dispensation granted), Karl Gill, Wes Read, Dean Ruddle, Alan Smith and Lucy Trimnell.

99. Minutes (Agenda Item 2)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 16th December 2021 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

100. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

101. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

102. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and reminded Members that only those present in the room would be able to vote although participation in the debate was welcome by all present on-line.

He also advised that in the absence of the Vice Chairman he had invited Councillor Mike Best to act as Vice Chairman for the evening.

The Chairman wished all Members a Happy New Year and noted that this would be the last full year as South Somerset District Council as the Council moved towards being a Unitary Authority in April 2023. He said that it had been a privilege to have served and represent the people of South Somerset. He asked Members to continue to do their best to help residents and be proud of their achievements.

The Chairman advised that on 6th February he would be attending a service at Wells Cathedral to mark the Queen's Accession Day, 70 years ago.

103. Adoption of the South Somerset District Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy (Agenda Item 6)

The Portfolio Holder for Licensing thanked the officers for their work in compiling and reviewing the policy due to changes in statutory guidelines. He highlighted the important changes within the policy to Members and the public consultation

which had taken place. He concluded that he fully supported the policy and he proposed the policy to Council.

In response to questions from Members, the Lead Specialist for Environment advised:-

- The percentage of registered disabled people within the district would be provided.
- The percentage of taxis which were wheelchair accessible vehicles had been set in line with guidance from the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee which was a national recommended standard.
- Disability was often hidden in different guises including hearing and sight impairment.
- Currently 33% of the licensed taxis were wheelchair accessible vehicles.

(Subsequent to the meeting from the 2011 Census just under 100,000 people in Somerset (18.8% of the population) said they had a long-term condition or disability which limited their day-to-day activities a lot or a little).

The Portfolio Holder noted that many people requiring taxis across the district were unable to drive.

At the conclusion of the debate, the recommendations were proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Members.

RESOLVED: That Council agreed to the adoption of the proposed South Somerset District Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and that it takes effect from 04 April 2022.

Reason: To adopt the proposed South Somerset District Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy which has been updated to include statutory guidance, an update to the criminal convictions policy, wheelchair access vehicle requirements and environmental standards for new applications for licensed vehicles.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

104. Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23 (Agenda Item 7)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and advised that following presentation to the District Executive Committee, Council was recommended to agree the unchanged scheme for 2022/23. He noted the scheme had been changed the previous year and it had only been in operation for a few months and indications were that it was working well. The recent changes to the Universal Credit payments would be affecting some households and the Council Tax collection rates had dipped due to the pandemic and so it

was not possible to reliably report that the new scheme had affected collection rates. His recommendation was to continue with the present scheme.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder advised that

- The Council's approach to recovery action for Council Tax arrears was constantly under review by officers and was in line with the other Somerset Councils.
- There would be a discussion between all the Councils when any change to the current approach to recovery action was felt necessary.
- The Council would react sensitively to any hardship claims as food prices and living expenses, including utility bills were increasing and people were facing hardship.
- The hardship scheme budget had not been exceeded yet.

At the conclusion of the debate, the recommendations were proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Members.

RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed that:-

- a. The Banded Council Tax Support Scheme introduced from 1st April 2021 remain unchanged;
- b. The income bands are maintained at their current thresholds;
- c. The hardship scheme budget be maintained at £30,000 for the 2022/23 financial year.

Reason: Each year the Council is required to review its Council Tax Support Scheme in accordance with the requirements of schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1991 and to either maintain the scheme or replace it.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

105. Project Closure Report - Chard Leisure Centre (Agenda Item 8)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report and advised that its purpose was to learn from the project, improve the process and learn from any mistakes made. He encouraged Members to visit the new leisure centre which had been well received in the community and had increased visitors to the town. He noted there was still some elements of the project to be completed but the majority had been completed whilst coping with increased construction costs, materials and staff shortages, and Covid. He concluded that local Members knowledge was key to any project and as a result of this project, End of Stage Assessments were proposed for all capital projects over £1,000,000 and all capital projects over £250,000 that also had a risk impact score of moderate or above in one or more risk categories.

The Portfolio Holder for the Chard Regeneration Scheme said the site had been challenging but the new leisure centre had increased the footfall in the town. He noted that some of the regeneration phases were now paused but he was confident they would come forward in future to complete the overall project.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services advised:

- The original budget for the leisure centre had been based upon Sport England's assessment of cost per square foot of site and had not included any element for adverse conditions as voiced by local Ward Members.

During discussion the following points were made:

- local knowledge was key to local development projects.
- each project was a learning process.
- SSDC had provided a new leisure centre as requested by local residents following the closure of the local swimming pool.
- The contractors had delivered the leisure centre on a very tight town centre site
- Local residents welcomed the leisure centre.

At the conclusion of the debate, the recommendations were proposed and seconded and unanimously agreed by Members.

RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed to:-

- a. Implement End of Stage Assessments for all capital projects over £1,000,000
- b. Implement End of Stage Assessments for all capital projects over £250,000 that also have a risk impact score of moderate or above in one or more risk categories

Reason: To note the completion report for the Chard Leisure Centre Project and to seek agreement to implement End of Stage Assessments to capital projects with a value exceeding £1,000,000 or those over £250,000 that have a risk impact score of moderate or above.

(Voting: unanimous in favour)

106. Report of Executive Decisions (Agenda Item 9)

The Leader of Council introduced the report and invited questions. She said she was pleased that SSDC had been able to financially support the South Somerset Citizens Advice Service during 2022/23.

In response to a question, the Leader advised that future funding for voluntary organisations would be for the new Unitary Authority to decide.

The Council NOTED the report.

107. Audit Committee (Agenda Item 10)

It was noted that the Audit Committee had not met since the last meeting of Council but they were due to meet on 9th February 2022.

108. Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 11)

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee said they continued to be the critical friend of the authority and he noted that there were two meetings of the Scrutiny Committee and District Executive during February due to the number of reports coming forward. He said they had recently undertaken a Corporate Plan review which had been a useful discussion.

The report was NOTED.

109. Motions (Agenda Item 12)

There were no Motions submitted by Members.

110. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 13)

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

“At the December meeting of District Council we were informed by the Chief Executive that serious criminal allegations had been reported to the Police.

For clarity I would request the date that this report was made and by whom and whether the two independent investigation reports undertaken by SSDC were given to the Police to assist in their enquiries?”

The Chief Executive responded that she had reported the matter to the Police on Thursday 16 December and both independent investigation reports were included in a larger bundle of documents handed to the Police to assist them in their enquiries.

There was no supplementary question.

111. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 14)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of Full Council would take place on Monday 28th February 2022 at the Westland Entertainment Venue, Yeovil commencing at 6.30 p.m.

The Chairman noted that the date of the next meeting had changed due to the availability of the Westland Entertainment Venue.

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Chairman

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Date