

## South Somerset District Council

**Minutes** of a Special meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee (Informal)** held as a **Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software on Tuesday 15 February 2022.**

(2.00 pm - 4.20 pm)

**Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Gerard Tucker (Chairman)

Robin Bastable	Paul Maxwell
Karl Gill	Sue Osborne
Brian Hamilton	Oliver Patrick
Andy Kendall	



**Also Present:**

Mike Best	John Clark
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**Officers**

Jane Portman	Chief Executive
Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Karen Watling	Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer)
Robert Orrett	Commercial Property, Land & Development Manager
Dan Bennett	Property and Development Project Manager
Peter Paddon	Lead Specialist (Economy)
Paul Matravers	Lead Specialist (Finance)
Anthony Morris	Specialist (Finance)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Michelle Mainwaring	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

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**114. Apologies for absence (Agenda Item 1)**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mike Lewis.

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**115. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 2)**

There were no declarations of interest.

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**116. Public question time (Agenda Item 3)**

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

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**117. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 4)**

There were no announcements from the Chairman.

**118. Verbal update on reports considered by District Executive on 10 February 2022 (Agenda Item 5)**

There were no updates provided on the reports considered by the District Executive on 10 February.

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**119. Reports to be considered by District Executive on 17 February 2022 (Agenda Item 6)**

Members considered the reports within the District Executive agenda for 17 February 2022 (Informal Consultative Meeting) and raised comments as detailed below. Responses to most questions and comments were provided at Scrutiny Committee (Informal Meeting) by the relevant officers or Portfolio Holder – except those marked by an asterisk:

**Annual Action Plan 2022/23 (Agenda item 5)**

- Members noted that Scrutiny had been involved in a workshop in January, and many points that had been raised or challenged then had been addressed within this report.
- \*Page 16, bottom right corner – South Somerset Heritage collection to deliver outreach opportunities – a member sought some clarity about what this was/is please.
- A member sought reassurance that there were adequate resources and capacity to deliver the projects.

**Decarbonisation Programme Phase 2 Proposals (Agenda item 6)**

- Regarding solar panels – some members queried what these would feed into? E.g. National Grid or battery storage?
- A member queried how the proposed spending related to the voluntary finance protocol that all the Somerset Councils were shortly being asked to agree to?
- Some members expressed concern about the proposed borrowing (Rec B), and whether it was the right thing to be doing as we go into unitary when there was an option available that doesn't involve borrowing? As proposing to borrow a large amount should this be deferred to the new authority rather than making a commitment at the current time?
- Some concerns were raised about the proposals when it was unknown if the new authority may keep the assets.
- A member queried what the risk was that government could appeal our financial decisions through a Section 24?
- Para 12 – the text refers to 'several buildings' – a member queried which buildings where?
- Para 13, table 1 – reference to solar PV at the JOD Pavilion – some members queried the proposal as it was thought solar PV for the building had been previously agreed with a prior project.
- \*Para 17 – the amount (£'s) is missing from the text.
- Para 18 – refers to savings in energy costs – a member queried if this would still be the case given the current situation with energy costs rising? It was also queried if the proposal for heat pumps was being done solely to reduce carbon or also to get a better product?

- It was queried if the value of the building would increase with these proposed works done?
- Regarding air source heat pumps – a member queried if more works/retrofitting may be required in the buildings to minimise heat loss as it's understood the heat pumps won't necessarily put as much heat into the building?
- \*Para 18 - A member queried if the solar panels could potentially feed into battery storage in order to run the air source heat pumps off grid / be self-sufficient, and so reduce running costs? Is the proposal the most technological way forward?
- Members sought reassurance that the projects are deliverable within the next 14 months of this authority.
- In summary, members have expressed concerns about the amount of funding and timescales.

### **Options to Refurbish Yeovil Crematorium (Agenda item 7)**

- Para 4 – members sought clarity about whether we are in negotiations with Yeovil Without Parish Council as we are asking them for a significant contribution. What happens if Yeovil Without PC are unable to provide the requested finance? Would SSDC cover all the costs?
- A member queried why there seemed to be less concern about emissions for the cremator already installed?
- Para 9 - Is the containerised second cremator (C2) now in full ownership of SSDC?
- A member queried how much money had been spent or lost regarding the existing ATI cremator? Was there any opportunity for some sort of compensation or come back?
- Another member queried if we had been ill-advised, or there had been poor due diligence, or had we just been unfortunate regarding the situation with the ATI cremator? There appears to be a need for a lessons learned exercise to ensure we don't experience a similar scenario with any other procured projects.
- A member asked how it could be ensured that work on the project starts and finishes on time, within budget, and with least disruption to existing services and facilities?

### **Octagon Theatre Finance Report (Agenda item 8)**

- Some members reiterated their concerns about the proposed funding through borrowing (as raised at previous items on the agenda).
- It is a substantial amount of borrowing being proposed – with other projects have looked at ways to trim back on elements to stay within budget – has anything else been done with this project to see what else could be done to reduce costs?
- A member sought reassurance that a town the size of Yeovil could justify two locations with capacities of around a 1000, enough to justify the expenditure proposed? Likewise with the proposal for cinema screenings when there is a cinema already in the town?
- Expressions of support were also raised and acknowledgement that it's important to have a cultural asset of this quality, as it's some distance to similar sized venues.
- Para 23 – a member sought clarification about the £6m being requested (at recommendation 5a) – is the £6m partly to cover increased costs referred to in para 23, or is there a risk that when we get to the next gateway decision point that we may be asked to agree further funding?

- On assumption the project goes ahead and is delivered - a member queried when it was anticipated that work might start, and when would the theatre return to full operation?
- Members were pleased to hear there were checkpoints in place throughout the programme following lessons learned from the Chard Pool project.

### **Financing the Yeovil Refresh (Agenda item 9)**

- Para 4 – a member queried what the ‘Lump Sum Payments to County budget’ was and what the lump sums were for?
- Paras 13 and 20 – the tables – members noted there was inconsistency within the tables regarding the use of brackets and minus symbols. Members sought clarity about the meanings of the brackets and minuses.
- A member noted the references to the Future High Streets Fund and asked what the risks were of having to return some of the funding to central government if projects don’t progress? It was also asked what the risk is to SSDC of Midas (contractor) going into liquidation?

### **Wincanton Regeneration Finance Report (Agenda item 10)**

- table 2 at para 12 – a member sought clarification about what the £1m public realm construction was for, and also queried what table 2 related to?
- A member noted that local feedback suggested there was a lack of understanding about why car parking was being reduced when more is needed. Some local people feel elements of the public realm project is a retrospective step,
- Will there be a more detailed public realm report in the future?
- A member sought reassurance that the ward members were involved with discussions about Wincanton Regeneration, as it seemed unclear if they are members of the Regeneration Board.

### **Ensuring Sufficient Staffing Capacity During 2022/23 (Agenda item 11)**

- It was noted staff are our biggest asset. Members acknowledged the uncertain times for staff with the move to a new authority, and noted that communication with staff was very important and they should be kept informed at every stage. Members asked if there was a communications policy in place and if it was up and running with our staff?
- \*Para 11 – A member queried how much of the £1.026m is likely to be spent on consultants? Regarding the £1.439m – how much dialogue has there been with the transition authority on how this will be spent?
- \*Page 104 – indirectly relating to this item, a member queried which officer was now responsible for CCTV in Yeovil as he wished to raise some concerns.
- A member noted that some staff would feel insecure with the changes ahead. What incentives might be offered to try to retain staff going forwards as we don’t want to lose staff at key points?

### **2022/23 Budget Report (Agenda item 12)**

- Page 109, recommendation C – a member noted that £4m was a large sum – and asked what the thinking was behind it please? Another member noted that many individual capital projects already had a contingency factored in and asked whether this proposed corporate contingency was effectively a contingency to a contingency?

- Para 74 linking to para 84 – a member sought clarity of the implications if the possible changes detailed in para 74 happen?
- Page 170, near top – a member noted that the line ‘regeneration’ under Place & Recovery has zero across all columns and queried if the line needed to be included if it was all zero?
- Para 81, table 7 - a member noted the information detailed income from commercial investment properties, however, there was no mention of maintenance which is detailed in the appendix at the bottom of page 177 and 178 – has the maintenance expenditure been taken into account with the income detailed in table 7 (on page 81)? He also sought clarification as the report appeared to propose that £4m is taken from the commercial investment reserve to fund other capital projects, so leaving £2 million in the reserve – was this prudent?

**District Executive Forward Plan (Agenda item 13)**

- No comments.
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**120. Date of next meeting (Agenda Item 7)**

Members noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 10.30am - as a virtual meeting using Zoom.

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Chairman