

SOUTH HAMS EXECUTIVE



Minutes of a meeting of the **South Hams Executive** held on **Thursday, 17th September, 2020** at **10.00 am** at the **Via Skype**

Present: **Councillors:**

Chairman Cllr Pearce
Vice Chairman Cllr Bastone

Cllr Hopwood
Cllr Hawkins

Cllr Baldry

In attendance:

Councillors:

Cllr Abbott
Cllr Brazil
Cllr Long
Cllr O'Callaghan
Cllr Reeve
Cllr Spencer

Cllr Birch
Cllr Holway
Cllr McKay
Cllr Pennington
Cllr Smerdon
Cllr Sweett

Officers:

Chief Executive
Director of Place & Enterprise
Director of Governance & Assurance
Section 151 Officer
Democratic Services Manager
Head of Housing, Revenues & Benefits
Head of Assets
Head of Strategy and Projects
Specialist – Democratic Services

10.

Minutes

E.10/20

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 30 July 2020 were confirmed as a true and correct record.

11. **Declarations of Interest**
E.11/20
Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of this meeting but none were made.
12. **Public Question Time**
E.12/20
No questions were received.
13. **Executive Forward Plan**
E.13/20
Members were presented with the Executive Forward Plan setting out items on the agenda for Executive meetings for the next four months and noted its content.
14. **Reports of Other Bodies**
E.14/20
i) **Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 16th July 2020**
O&S.4/20 – **Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2020/21**

RESOLVED

That, with effect from 1 April 2020, the Executive adopt the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2020/21 (as attached at Appendix 3 of the presented report to the Panel).
- ii) **Joint Development Management Committee and O&S Panel – 3rd September 2020**

The Leader informed that Minutes OSDM.10/20 (Draft Amended Budget 2019/20) and OSDM.11/20 (Recovery Plan to the COVID-19 Crisis) were to be read in conjunction with agenda items 7 and 8 below (Minutes E.15/20 and E.16/20 below refer).
15. **Recovery Plan to the Covid-19 Crisis**
E.15/20
The Leader introduced the report and drew attention to the fact that this was the first time that the Executive had had the opportunity to review the draft Plan, and, as outlined in the report presented to the Joint Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) Panel and Development Management Committee, work would continue to be led by Members of the Executive under the themes set out in the current strategic framework.

Therefore, the Leader requested that the Chairmen of the O&S Panel and Development Management (DM) Committee consider withdrawing recommendation 6 from the Recommendations to Council as the establishment of a Working Group was not considered appropriate. Regarding recommendation 7, the Leader also clarified that it would not be possible to request that a member of Team Devon provide a Member Briefing, as Team Devon was a concept and not a specific group. The Leader confirmed that Team Devon had long existed but

had strengthened during the pandemic and included other Local Authorities and stakeholders from across Devon, excepting Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council. The Leader asked officers to provide an enhanced explanation of this in the internal Members' Bulletin publication this week. It was hoped that this explanation would result in the recommendation to Full Council on 24th September 2020 being withdrawn at that meeting. The Executive thanked the O&S Panel and DM Committee Members for their input to reach this point.

Under Paragraph 13 of the presented agenda report, the Executive then laid out their priorities:

The Leader commented that improving the Council's reputation was key to the Recovery Plan as was ensuring that the Council worked at all times for the well-being of residents and businesses in the District.

The Deputy Leader then stated his belief that the priorities for the Business and Economy Theme were to understand and represent key business sectors in South Hams to facilitate better business for all to create business to business links to further best practice, to provide a channel to lobby and influence, and to improve access to Central Government and other support where the District Council was best placed to help. The Council should also wish to align its commercial strategy and land assets to deliver projects with multiple objectives, such as regeneration, revenue, housing and employment. In addition, the Council should take an active role in promoting tourism, working with partners and stakeholders across Devon. Work with partners to support the evolution of the 'High Street' creating place, fostering change and putting the community first. This priority was added as a response to how village shops had supported their communities through the Covid pandemic. The Deputy Leader concluded that his final objective was to work with partners to support green recovery and the principle of building back better.

Theme 2 Place and Environment Lead Member, the Leader, stated her view that the objectives under this theme should be to protect and enhance the beauty and character of the built and natural environment in South Hams. A further priority she considered was that the Council sustained and supported the vibrant towns and villages through the delivery of the Joint Local Plan, and by providing housing for the community, and that the Council should support a sustainable and resilient South Hams in line with the Council's commitments on climate change, including the identification of nature corridors and land use strategies to support the Council's biodiversity objectives.

The Lead Member for communication and service delivery then gave her objectives: Following the Council's 'Transformation 18 Programme', officers were perfectly set to be able to work from home with no detrimental impact on services, first with the 'Beast from the East' storm in 2019, then when the Covid Pandemic crisis. Members were also introduced to remote working arising from the Pandemic lockdown and all had responded well. The Member was strongly of the view that the Council now needed to concentrate on communication

with its partners and communities, ensuring greater connection with those who use our services. Any future role of the Follaton House, Totnes site needed to be explored, whilst the Council continued to work remotely with some Council meetings being taken around the District, with venues reflecting the agenda. Council communications needed to be more relevant to our residents, with the reinstatement of the Residents Forum being investigated. The Member was also convinced that the use of social media had to be enhanced, increasing communication of daily tasks, for example letting a community know when their play park was being inspected, or their streets cleaned: simple messaging that was engaging and tackling real issues. The Council provided many great services that were not known of by residents and of which the Council could be justifiably proud. The Council should also build on the community groups that either grew out of Covid-19 and those that existed prior to the pandemic – mapping the groups to help the Council to identify and support the most vulnerable to achieve better outcomes and ensure that work was not duplicated. The Member stated that this recovery plan was the start of modernising the Council and ensuring it was an outward facing organisation. From this, therefore, it was apparent that the Council required a new strategy to collate all learning achieved over the last months with the momentum and community spirit within South Hams captured and built on. The Member felt these were exciting times, improving communication and building on relationships with all residents and partners in South Hams.

The Lead Member for Health and Well-being began by thanking staff and residents for all the hard work that had been put in during the pandemic: he considered that the speed of response to the pandemic had been remarkable. The Member acknowledged the advances made in technological use by Members to enable working from home. Whilst he felt that the reputation of the Council had been dented by the aforementioned 'T18 Programme' and needed to be enhanced again. The Council needed to be supportive to all of its residents and communities ensuring that services were available when needed, and were quick, efficient, and easy to access. The Member outlined the main objective that South Hams District Council needed to be there for its local residents. To do this, he was of the view that there was a need to establish a Health & Well Being forum to build on the support developed recently, and thus ensuring sustainability for any future events, including a potential second wave of the pandemic. The Council needed to work with local Towns and Parish Councils to build community sustainability and self-help. Health and Well Being was the central thread to all services: housing, leisure, etc. For any residents facing unemployment, benefits and grants needed to be sourced quickly, efficiently, and as stress free as possible. The Member was looking forward to working with stakeholders, our community groups, and fellow Members irrespective of their political group.

The Leader of the Opposition, Lead Member for waste and environment, echoed the viewpoint that the response of residents during the pandemic had been tremendous. The Member thanked officers and Members for their input into the recent workshops and the

resultant draft Plan. The ongoing Localities review needed to be finalised. The Member felt it was important to consider those working from home to ensure that anyone who was not able to do so easily could still be accommodated in alternative ways where it was operationally possible, although as a general rule remote working was the way forward. The Member felt it was important to enhance the condition of the beach and street scenes, for residents, businesses and visitors. Clearing of waste had been an issue this summer, therefore the efficient delivery of refuse and recycling changes were part of his objectives with a wish to increase recycling rates across the District.

The Leader then spoke on the governance theme, which included the way the Council worked and how services were delivered. The Leader felt it was now imperative that a review of the Constitution was undertaken to ensure it was more accessible and user friendly both to Members and members of the public, to reflect current and future practice. The Council must ensure it provided good service at good value, at all times. The Leader also identified wider joint working and collaborative opportunities as important, but that they should not require structural changes. The Leader reiterated that there was no possibility of a merger with West Devon Borough Council, but, in the spirit of Team Devon and working better, any collaborative opportunities to save money and increase efficiency would be fully explored.

The final theme being financial stability, the Leader outlined one objective which was to ensure the future financial stability and sustainability of the Council as this was key to everything that the Council delivered. The Leader concluded by acknowledging the huge debt of gratitude owed to the Section 151 Officer, her team, and all the staff, for their work through the pandemic.

Following the objectives outlined above, the Leader added two further proposals to the report (recommendations 8 and 9). These were reviewed and explained that the officers would start working on developing a new corporate strategy to be taken to Council in May 2021, and the Governance theme be initially covered by the Leader working with officers, with changes being dealt with through the appropriate decision making process. The current strategy was acknowledged as having been developed by officers for the previous Council so it was agreed it was useful to have a new strategy for the new Council. The Strategy would cover the last two years of this Council and the first of the next, to allow the next administration to bed down and have time to develop its own strategy.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Executive:

1. Note the Council's continuing response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic;
2. Note the outputs of the Member Workshops as detailed in Appendix 1 of the presented agenda report;
3. Note progress on the development of the Recovery and Renewal Action Plan ('the Plan');

4. Take into account the conclusions of the Joint Meeting on the Plan (that are set at Item 7b on this agenda (Minute OSDM.11/20 refers) and reflected in the updated Plan);
5. Request that an update on progress against development of the Plan be brought back to an additional Joint Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel / Development Management Committee to be arranged to take place at 2.00pm on 19 November 2020;
6. Note that the Joint Meeting has **RECOMMENDED** to Full Council that a Member Working Group be formed to oversee the work of the Responsible Team/Group/Strategy (as set out at Appendix 1 of the presented agenda report) specifically the Recovery Management Team. The remit of this Working Group being to set priorities and direct officers accordingly, with this Group to become effective immediately following the Full Council meeting to be held on 24 September 2020;
7. Note that the Joint Meeting has requested that a representative and relevant officer be invited from Team Devon to an informal meeting of all Members to set out its plans and actions in respect of all those items set out in Appendix 1 to the presented agenda report as being its initial responsibility for instigation;
8. Instruct officers to start working on the development of a new Corporate Strategy with a view to adoption by Full Council in May 2021; and
9. Request that, for the Governance theme, it initially be covered by the Leader of Council working with officers, with changes being dealt with through the appropriate decision making process.

16. **Amended Draft Budget 2020/21**

E.16/20

The Leader presented the amended draft budget report for 2020/21. One Member stated that he would have liked to move an amendment but had ascertained that there was no seconder, therefore he would be voting against the proposals. The Leader confirmed that a briefing note would be circulated by the S151 Officer that sought to clarify the purpose of unearmarked reserves. Although CiPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability) no longer recommended a minimum level for unearmarked reserves, the amount suggested by the Section 151 Officer was in line with the previous recommendations.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Executive **RECOMMENDED** to Council:-

- 1) That the ten options set out in 5.2 totalling £1,313,000, in order to produce an Amended Revenue Budget for 2020-21;
- 2) To replenish unearmarked reserves through a range of measures to be agreed as part of the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) as per 5.8;
- 3) To note the future capacity of reserves set out in 5.13 which may have to be called upon to meet any future financial challenges and/or additional requirements;
- 4) To earmark the funding within the Business Rates Retention Fund for employment land opportunities as set out in 8.7; and
- 5) To approve Tranche 4 of the Discretionary Business Grants Policy (attached in Appendix 2), to confirm that in accordance with the Government guidance, Town and Parish Councils are able to apply to the scheme if they meet the eligibility criteria (as Section 11).

17. **Signing up to the Coastal Concordat**

E.17/20

The Leader introduced the Coastal Concordat paper which needed to be signed by all Coastal Councils. The Coastal Concordat provided a framework with which the separate processes for the consenting of coastal developments in England could be better coordinated. The benefits of working under the Concordat included upfront signposting to the right agencies for the applicant, reduced duplication of evidence requirements, streamlined regulatory processes with one body taking the lead for any required assessments, transparency and consistency of advice, time and cost savings for regulators and applicants, and met the commitments outlined in the 25 year environment plan. It was confirmed that there were no cost implications for the Council.

It was then **RESOLVED** that, with immediate effect, the Coastal Concordat be signed up to.

18. **Ivybridge Regeneration Project - Update**

E.18/20

The Lead Member for Enterprise introduced the Ivybridge Regeneration update. Some Members noted their dismay with the lack of involvement and monies from both Ivybridge Town Council and the owners of the Glanville Mills Shopping Centre on the issue of renovating the bridges linking the town to the Centre.

Carparking plans were outlined and discussed with confirmation that the issue would be brought back to Members in December for a final decision. Following a question from a Member, officers clarified that the current proposal of the Council undertaking the construction and then leasing the building aligned well with the adopted commercial strategy (enhancing public assets, regeneration, long term revenue), whilst recognising that it did carry risks around construction. Disposing of the land (sell or long lease) was an alternative that the market would have interest in, but it would not deliver all of those benefits.

It was then **RESOLVED** that the Executive **RECOMMENDED** to Council that:

Further to the update provided by this report, the Council continue to support the project as it moves forward to planning and tender stage, with a decision on progressing the project further then being made at a subsequent meeting of the Executive and Council.

19. **Exclusion of Public and Press**

E.19/20

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded

from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business as the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to the Act is involved.

20. **Community Housing Delivery Programme: Progress Report and Capital Requirements**

E.20/20

Members considered an exempt report on the above subject. One Member wished to have input on the procurement process and his offer of help was gratefully accepted.

It was agreed that a further Appendix on the cashflow position of the projects would be appended to the Council report.

There followed a full and frank discussion and it was then **RESOLVED** that:

1. The progress and spending commitments of the Community Housing Programme be noted; and
2. Approval be given to the signing of construction contracts to complete the St Anns Chapel and South Brent Developments; and

Council be **RECOMMENDED** to:

3. Approve Community Housing Development expenditure of up to £5.9 million to build out the first two Community Housing Schemes (St Ann's Chapel (13 units) and South Brent (17 units) as set out in the presented exempt agenda report; and
4. Approve funding of up to £5.9 million to build the schemes from a combination of internal borrowing and external borrowing (from the Public Works Loan Board).

(NOTE: THESE DECISIONS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF E.15/20 PART 4, E.16/20, E.18/20 AND E.20/20 PARTS 3 AND 4 WHICH WERE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2020, WILL BECOME EFFECTIVE FROM 5.00PM ON MONDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2020 UNLESS CALLED IN, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 18).

The Meeting concluded at 11.55 am

Signed by:

Chairman

