

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE SOUTH HAMS DISTRICT  
COUNCIL HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON WEDNESDAY 8 JUNE 2022**

**MEMBERS**

\* Cllr L Austen – Chairman

\* Cllr B Taylor – Vice-Chairman

* Cllr V Abbott	* Cllr M Long
* Cllr K J Baldry	* Cllr J McKay
* Cllr H D Bastone	* Cllr D M O’Callaghan
∅ Cllr J P Birch	* Cllr G Pannell
* Cllr J Brazil	* Cllr J A Pearce
* Cllr D Brown	∅ Cllr J T Pennington
∅ Cllr M Chown	* Cllr K Pringle
* Cllr R Foss	* Cllr H Reeve
* Cllr J D Hawkins	* Cllr J Rose
* Cllr J M Hodgson	* Cllr R Rowe
* Cllr T R Holway	* Cllr P C Smerdon
* Cllr N A Hopwood	∅ Cllr B Spencer
∅ Cllr S Jackson	* Cllr J Sweett
* Cllr L Jones	* Cllr D Thomas
∅ Cllr K Kemp	

\* Denotes attendance

∅ Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance:

Cllrs J Birch and B Spencer (both via Teams)

Officers in attendance and participating:

For all items: Chief Executive; Deputy Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer; Democratic Services Manager; and FCC Representatives – Mr Brian Ashby and Mr Steve Longdon

**19/22            DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but there were none made.

**20/22            COUNCIL'S WASTE AND RECYCLING SERVICE - PERFORMANCE**

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1(f), five Members of the Council had requested that a Special Meeting of Full Council be called to provide for ‘the attendance by a representative of FCC, the Council’s Waste Collection Contractor, for the purpose of presenting a report to Members on its performance in the delivery of the waste service followed by Questions and Answers’.

**(a) Chairman's Introductory Comments**

In introducing the agenda item, the Chairman made the following comments:

*'Members, before we begin the main item of the business this afternoon, I want to make some introductory remarks.*

*This is a special meeting of the Council. It has been called for the purpose of allowing FCC to attend to present a report on its performance in delivering the waste service, followed by Questions and Answers. Mr Steve Longdon and Mr Brian Ashby are here representing FCC. I understand that they will be making a statement and that Cllr. Keith Baldry will then make a short response setting out the council's position, followed by the Leader of the Council in her capacity as the chair of the Waste Working Group. I will then open the meeting to Members to ask their questions of Mr Longdon and Mr Ashby. I would ask that Members ask questions rather than make statements and confine themselves to the purpose why the five Members requested a meeting to be called.*

*Before I invite Mr Longdon and Mr Ashby to address the Council, I must remind Members that the Council has a contractual relationship with FCC. Consequently, the Council is required to comply with the obligations and procedures provided for in that contract. To that end, Members should follow the advice given previously and should refrain from saying or doing anything that might cause the Council itself to be in breach of contract.'*

**(b) Statement from FCC Representative(s)**

The FCC Representative(s) proceeded to make the following comments:

- FCC Environment understood South Hams residents' frustration and annoyance with the continued disruption to the waste and recycling services and wished to sincerely apologise for the failure to deliver the service that was expected and deserved;
- In particular, the representatives wished to say sorry for the difficulties experienced with the reintroduction of the garden waste collection service. There were reasons for this but it was clarified that, when the service was rolled out, FCC had recruited sufficient staff required under the contract to deliver the service. However, since then staff had left the contract and the organisation had been unable to replace them. FCC was operating an average absence level of 14% and, along with other issues which had made ongoing recruitment challenging, this had made delivering the service problematic. Notwithstanding these issues, residents had a right to expect a good and reliable service;
- At all stages, FCC had sought to work with the Council to improve and resolve the situation and this remained the case;

- Finally, FCC remained fully committed to ensuring that everybody had a garden waste collection service on a reasonably regular basis whilst the ongoing issues were resolved. In addition, the organisation was looking at how it could adjust its collection rounds to ensure that the same households were not missed each time.

**(c) Cllr Baldry (lead Executive Member) Response**

In his response, Cllr Baldry advised that:

- he could not over emphasis just how angry and frustrated he was at the ongoing situation;
- with the support of his fellow Executive Members and Council officers, they had all worked tirelessly in an attempt to resolve the problems. At this point, Cllr Baldry wished to put on record his gratitude to Council officers for their efforts in incredibly difficult circumstances in an attempt to protect the reputation of the Council;
- daily operational meetings between Council officers and FCC representatives continued to be held;
- he remained fully committed to the roll-out of the Devon Aligned Service across the entire South Hams district;
- he wished to personally apologise to all residents that the Garden Waste Service had spectacularly failed within six days of its re-launch. In so doing, Cllr Baldry confirmed that he had no intention to let this current situation continue.

**(d) Cllr Pearce (Leader of Council) Comments**

Cllr Pearce echoed all of the comments expressed by Cllr Baldry and, in particular, emphasised her anger at the current service level and added her thanks for the work of Council officers. In addition, Cllr Pearce provided an update on the work of the Waste Working Group and the paramount concern for all Members being the best interests of local residents.

In striving for the service to return to a satisfactory level, Cllr Pearce informed that, whilst all Members were fully aware of the legal advice that they had received, she could confirm that a formal letter had been sent to FCC.

### (e) Member Questions

In the ensuing Member Question and Answer session, the following points were raised:

- When questioned, the FCC representatives advised that, due to the nature of ongoing discussions with Council Officers, they were unable to provide responses to queries on issues that included:
  - o whether or not FCC was fulfilling its contractual obligations;
  - o whether or not FCC would ever be able to deliver a service (to an acceptable standard) in accordance with these obligations and, if this was felt to be possible, how was it intended to achieve this objective;
  - o a number of requests for, during the interim period, a regular, but less frequent, Garden Waste Collection service to be delivered;
  - o whether or not it was accepted by FCC that the new collection rounds were unsuitable;
  - o the lack of an appropriate Improvement Plan that was initially promised to be in place before the end of 2021;
  - o a timeline for when service levels would reach an acceptable standard;
- It was noted that FCC had seen a slight improvement in its staff retention levels over the last few months. However, this trend only related to loaders and the challenges in recruiting (and retaining) drivers remained despite driver salaries being increased considerably. At the time when the Garden Waste Service was re-introduced, Members were again advised that staff numbers were at an appropriate level, however, unfortunately a vast number left the employ of the organisation within weeks of the re-launch;
- In respect of the contents of staff exit interviews, the representatives informed that they were able to provide summary information to interested Members. The number of staff vacancies was exacerbated further by the high levels of staff sickness absence;
- With regard to a specific example of a repeat failing on the medical / clinical collection service, the representatives asked that further information be sent to them outside of the Meeting;
- Regarding the restructuring of the collection rounds, the representatives stated that, in order to comply with the requirements of the Devon Aligned Service, they had to be changed;
- The FCC Operations Director confirmed that Senior Officers had his personal contact details and he stated that he had no intention of resigning from his position;

- A number of Members vented their frustrations that the FCC representatives claimed that they empathised with Members and were aware of the extent of the ill-feeling being expressed by residents. These Members reiterated that residents and town and parish councils were not interested in the repeated excuses that had been given by FCC over the last twelve months and only wanted to see an acceptable service being delivered;
- Members could not understand how FCC was able to provide an excellent service to other local authorities but was continuing to provide a woefully inadequate service to the Council and its residents. In response, the representatives advised that there were a specific set of circumstances that were pertinent to this Contract and these were part of the ongoing discussions with Council Officers. Nonetheless, Members felt that the mission statement on the FCC website was not reflective of service performance in the South Hams and the request was made to the representatives to review the contents of the website;
- The representatives gave a number of assurances that FCC had looked at every single aspect of the Contract on a number of occasions in an attempt to rectify the current service performance;
- Despite the responses given by the representatives, Members repeatedly stated that staff were advising them that they were not being listened to by their FCC supervisors or management. As a result, staff morale was perceived to be very low.

At this point, the Chairman thanked the representatives for their attendance and proceeded to formally close the Special Council Meeting.

(Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.45 pm)

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Chairman