

Statement from Totnes CLP Executive Committee, 29 April 2020

Totnes Constituency Labour Party condemns the decision of the Tory majority on South Hams District Council to suspend full council meetings for the rest of the year. Using the Emergency Legislation process, the Council has ruled that all decisions will be taken by the Deputy Chief Executive and ratified by an Executive Group made up of five Tories and one LibDem councillor. There will be no public scrutiny, effectively handing the full powers of the Council to one unelected official.

This assault on the democratic process comes at a time when it is essential that decisions are taken effectively, transparently, and with cross party support. South Hams communities are suffering both a public health crisis and the start of a severe economic downturn. Decisions taken by the District Council are crucial to how the local area and its residents will cope. Decisions such as:

- Safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in lockdown
- Support for benefit claimants, especially the many new claimants of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit who may be in desperate circumstances
- Support for local businesses e.g. to access government grants and loans
- Whether and when to allow businesses, markets, events and trade of various kinds to resume
- Support for the local economy in the longer term
- Waste services during the crisis
- Regulation of food delivery
- Rent collection and property maintenance

Increasing numbers of local residents are turning to charities and voluntary/community organisations at this time. So how the District Council coordinates these efforts is also critical.

An effective response requires regular meetings of the full council, with the chance for representatives of every ward and every resident group to be heard. Meetings are being conducted remotely at other levels of government: there is no reason why SHDC should not follow the same protocols.

Our Tory-dominated district and county councils have spent ten years waving through cuts to local spending, handed down from their party in Westminster. As a result our local health, social care and education services have been decimated. This latest act by SHDC is admission that we have no effective local government, only a rubber stamp to a national party that is determined to destroy our public sector and the safety net that keeps vulnerable people from destitution.

All credit to those opposition councillors at Town and District level who have called out this power-grab for what it is. We call on every SH District Councillor, whatever your party affiliation, to consider your position. Reverse this terrible decision or – if you no longer wish to carry out your duties as an elected representative of the people – stand aside for someone who will.