

SWT Executive - 18 September 2019

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)
Councillors Benet Allen, Chris Booth, Marcus Kravis, Mike Rigby and Alan Wedderkopp

Officers: Emily Collacott, Paul Fitzgerald, Christine Fraser, Paul Harding, Clare Rendell and Amy Tregellas

Also Present: Councillors Simon Coles, Hugh Davies and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

37. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors R Henley, R Lees, P Pilkington and F Smith.

38. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive

(Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 23 July 2019 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Executive held on 23 July 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

39. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

| Name | Minute No. | Description of Interest | Reason | Action Taken |
|----------------------|------------|--|----------|-----------------|
| Cllr C Booth | All Items | Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr S Coles | All Items | SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke |
| Cllr H Davies | All Items | SCC | Personal | Spoke |
| Cllr M Rigby | All Items | SCC & Bishops Lydeard | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr F Smith-Roberts | All Items | Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr A Wedderkopp | All Items | SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr L Whetlor | All Items | Watchet | Personal | Spoke |

Councillor M Kravis further declared a personal interest on agenda item 9, in that his partner had an ongoing complaint registered with Somerset West and Taunton Council.

40. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

41. **Draft Corporate Strategy 2020 - 2024**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were excited to see the Strategy going through the democratic process for approval. They agreed it set the tone for the Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) priorities and the vision for the Council as a whole.
- Councillors queried how the document would be publicised and whether hard copies of the document would be available.
The Strategy Specialist confirmed that the Strategy would be publicised via the SWT website and customers would be able to print hard copies from the website and that key stakeholders would be issued with hard copies of the document.

Recommended that the Executive:

- Recommend that Full Council approved the priorities, outcomes and objectives within the attached appendix; and
- Authorised the Head of Communications to agree the final design and publication style for the Strategy.

42. **Financial Strategy 2020/21 to 2022/23**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors highlighted the graph on Real Terms Funding Reduction Since 2010 and raised concern that readers of the document might not identify the drop in funding from Central Government and that they might only register the increase in their Council Tax. They were keen to add more information to the document to make it more user friendly.
The Section 151 Officer appreciated that the Strategy was a public document and that maybe they had not been very proactive in the past about publicising it. A press release was normally sent out on an annual basis to align with the budget setting process.
- Councillors queried whether there was a recommended minimum level of reserves set by Central Government.
The Section 151 Officer's role was to recommend the minimum level of reserve at the Local Authority level.
- Councillors requested more detail on the figures reported under the Earmarked Reserves.
More detail would be explained in agenda item 7, Finance Monitoring, on page 86 of the agenda.

- Councillors queried when Central Government would advise on whether the £5.00 increase on Council Tax would be approved.
The Section 151 Officer advised that it was normally confirmed around December each year.
- Concern was raised on the drop from 2.99% to 1.99% increase in Council Tax and the effect it would have on the funds raised due to the lower amount of band D equivalent properties in the District.
- Councillors found the summary of the Financial Strategy on page 64 of the agenda very useful.
- Councillors were glad to see that the Council was no longer dependant on the New Homes Bonus.
- Councillors queried what the Union proposals were and what percentage had been proposed.
The Section 151 Officer advised the percentage increase could be as high as 10% and that they possibly could propose changes to annual leave.
- Councillors queried the figures given under the section on Savings Targets.
The Section 151 Officer advised that the Transformation Project had built in several efficiency targets which were included in the original business case in 2015 but some savings were not known at that point and several working practices and resources had changed since then, which included improved technological systems. The targets stated in the table were realistic targets that had been set.
- Concern was raised that the Transformation Project had assumed that the new technological systems would be able to assist with the staffing loss but those assumptions had not been delivered yet.
There had been implications on financial planning and SWT had invested in temporary cover until the benefits had been delivered. The savings target had included contingency to deliver through a challenging time and to minimise risk.
- Councillors queried the section on commercialism of services and treasury investment.
Clarification was given.

Resolved that the Executive approved the Financial Strategy for 2020/21 to 2020/23.

43. **Financial Monitoring as at 31.07.2019**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked the officers for their clear summary and agreed with the recommendation to delegate authority to approve changes to the budgeted spend for all of the HRA capital schemes.
- Councillors queried the figures quoted as Slippage within the Capital Programme Summary.
The Finance Specialist gave an explanation.
- Councillors queried whether all the Hinkley Point C Section 106 money had been spent.

Yes, it had all been allocated towards many different schemes but might not have been actually spent yet.

- Councillors queried the information on Right to Buy within the report.
The Finance Specialist would find out and report back to the Committee.
- Councillors queried whether the housing stock in the former Taunton Deane area would be kept or sold on as it had been within the former West Somerset area.

The Leader confirmed that the housing stock would be kept and that the Portfolio Holder for Housing had already visited sites within the former West Somerset area that could potentially be developed.

Recommended that the Executive:

- Noted the Council's forecast financial performance for 2019/20 financial year as at 31 July 2019; and
- Requested Full Council to approve the Housing Director/Head of Function, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder, to have delegated authority to approve changes to the budgeted spend for all of the HRA capital schemes, whilst remaining within the approved capital programme for 2019/20. The reason for that would help address flexible delivery of the programme in year.

44. **Corporate Performance Report and Update on Development of Future Reporting**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised on the red alert for the Planning Service. Councillors were aware that the service was nearly back to a full contingency of staff, however, they did not want to head back into a backlog for applications which could risk Central Government control. They had also noticed that the registration process had recently been streamlined which had resulted in positive outcomes for the application timescales.
- Councillors were happy to see that majority of the indicators were in green.
- Concern was raised on the red alert for Environmental Health and requested an update.
The Head of Performance and Governance would request an update be distributed to Councillors from the Head of Customer.
- Councillors requested whether a performance indicator could be added to monitor the statistics produced by Firmstep.
The Head of Performance and Governance was aware that Business Intelligence Specialist distributed a regular report on the statistics but would look into the possibility of adding it to the report. They were aware that each service area had different service level agreements for their targets, so would need to check how the statistics could be compiled.
- Councillors welcomed comments on performance targets and once officer workloads were back on track, they would look to push the boundaries and set challenging targets.

Resolved that the Executive noted that a new report was being developed which would bring together finance information, risk monitoring and performance reporting. The first report would be produced for the end of November (month 8).

45. **Complaints Policy**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried whether they could submit a complaint as a resident of the area.
The Monitoring Officer confirmed that yes they could act as a member of the public and use the Policy in the same way a resident would.
- Councillors were happy that the Council's policies were being updated and kept up to date.
- Councillors queried whether the same section of the Policy that related to 'unwanted attention on staff' was applicable to Councillors.
The Monitoring Officer confirmed that was applicable for Councillors as well.

Resolved that the Executive:

Approved the Somerset West and Taunton Council:

- a) Complaints Policy (Appendix A); and
- b) Policy for Unreasonable Customer Behaviour and Vexatious Requests (Appendix B)

46. **Executive Action Plan**

(Copy of the Executive Action Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Resolved that the Executive Action Plan be noted.

47. **Executive Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Executive Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried the dates set for Informal Executive as they seemed too far in advance of the Executive meetings.
The Governance Team would check the dates and adjust the meetings for the New Year.
- The Section 151 Officer needed to remove the Medium Term Financial Plan item from the October meeting as it had been covered in the financial reports included in the agenda. He also wanted to add a Budget Progress Report to the December meeting.
- Concern was raised on the amount of reports scheduled for the October meeting.
The Monitoring Officer advised that there were a few reports because officers had to give 28 days' notice to add an item and that some of the reports were likely to be pushed to the November and December meetings.

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

(The Meeting ended at 7.45 pm)