

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held at 10am on

Wednesday 14 December 2022

PRESENT

Cllr Liz Leyshon (in the Chair)

Cllr Adam Dance
Cllr Sarah Dyke
Cllr Tessa Munt
Cllr Mike Rigby
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Ros Wyke

Associate Lead Members: Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Apologies: Cllr Bill Revans (in virtual attendance), Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Cllr Val Keitch

Other Members in attendance: Cllr Mandy Chilcott, Cllr David Fothergill, Cllr Bob Filmer, Cllr Mark Healey, Cllr Martin Lovell, Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cllr Sue Osborne, Cllr Lucy Trimnell

Other Members in virtual attendance: Cllr Nicola Clark, Cllr Dixie Darch, Cllr Tom Deakin, Cllr Dawn Johnson, Cllr Andy Kendall, Cllr Tony Lock, Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey, Cllr Leigh Redman, Cllr Brian Smedley, Cllr Mike Stanton, Cllr David Woan

056 Declarations of Interest – Agenda item 2

Members of the Executive declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member of a District, City/Town, or Parish Council.

Cllr A Dance – South Somerset District Council, South Petherton Parish Council
Cllr S Dyke – South Somerset District Council
Cllr V Keitch – South Somerset District Council, Ilminster Town Council
Cllr L Leyshon – Mendip District Council
Cllr B Revans – Sedgemoor District Council
Cllr M Rigby – Somerset West & Taunton Council, Bishop’s Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council
Cllr H Shearer – Mendip District Council, Street Parish Council
Cllr F Smith-Roberts – Somerset West & Taunton Council
Cllr R Wyke – Mendip District Council, Vice Chair Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

057 Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2022 – Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the Executive meeting held 16 November 2022, were agreed with the addition of Cllr Ros Wyke to be added as present at the meeting, and signed by the Chair.

058 Public Question Time (PQT) – Agenda item 4

The Chair noted that there had been no public questions submitted by the published submission deadline.

059 Proposed Council Plan for Somerset Council - Agenda item 5

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon, invited the Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans to introduce the item.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans introduced the report, highlighting; recognition of the contribution of all involved in drafting the report; that the report set out the priorities, principles and values of the new Council; and that feedback, comments and contribution from colleagues, stakeholders and members of the public would be welcomed.

The Deputy Leader of the Council, Cllr Liz Leyshon invited comments from other members present; questions and points raised included:

The Chair, Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Joint Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Bob Filmer, welcomed the report, commenting on the importance of the balance of support for existing businesses and attracting inward investment into Somerset. Cllr Filmer further noted that the LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee would be receiving the report and providing feedback and comments into the process for the final plan.

In response, the Lead Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure and Director of Commissioning, Paula Hewitt, advised of the economic futures work taking place to shape and deliver the economic plan for the new Council.

Further discussion points included: flood risk areas; and the challenge presented by Covid-19 in Somerset tourism areas.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive agreed that the Draft Council Plan, as set out in appendix A of the report shall be subject to an engagement process with partners and stakeholders.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report.

060 New Somerset Council Branding – Agenda item 6

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon, invited the Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, to introduce the report.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, introduced the report highlighting; thanks to the in-house team for the production high quality branding for the new Council; and the importance of the new branding reflecting the heritage of the County.

At the invitation of Cllr Revans, the Interim Director of Communications, Chris Palmer, proceeded to present the report, highlighting; the extensive engagement undertaken, including staff from the five Councils, members of the public, and members of the Youth Parliament; and the importance of accessibility, equalities and representation in statutory responsibilities.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources invited comments from other members present, questions and points raised included: the importance of using current and correct logos on documentation, the branding colour; and the heritage link and continued use of a dragon.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive approved:

- **The proposed visual identity of the council.**
- **The principles for branding council materials.**
- **The brand hierarchy developed from these principles, and**
- **The plans for brand roll out.**

The Executive further noted the brand guidelines developed in support of the above.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

061 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report (RBMR)- month 7 – Agenda item 7

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon, introduced the item and invited the Director of Finance and Governance, Jason Vaughan, to present the report.

The Director of Finance and Governance, Jason Vaughan, proceeded to present the report, highlighting; the overall projection of £21.3m overspend, including a summary of individual variances; the significant resources focused upon developing the 2023/24 budget proposals for the new Council and therefore there will be no formal reporting for Month 8; the current capital program; the inflation and fuel price impacts; and government funding announcements including the confirmation of the three year extension of the dedicated schools grant deficit.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources invited comments from other members present; questions and points raised included:

The Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr Heather Shearer, commented on: the Autumn Statement; the funding expected to aid winter pressures; and the extensive peer review work within Adult Social Care to manage costs and spending.

Further discussion points included: the repetition of background information for clarity of the decisions being taken; the fragility of the economy and the potential inability to collect business rates; the differing business performance across the County; the use of reserves; and the level of overspend and the potential vulnerability for future budgets.

The Director of Finance and Governance, Jason Vaughan in response advised of the continuation of prudence regarding estimates and business rates and noted that further details would be available in the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – month 9.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive:

- **Noted the forecast overspend for 2022/23 of £21.3m and that the next report will be the full Month 9 - Q3 report.**
- **Agreed the removal of £7.056m following the review of the current capital programme.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

062 LA Maintained Schools – Core Offer – Agenda item 8

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon, invited the Lead Member for Children and Families, Cllr Tessa Munt, to introduce the report.

The Lead Member for Children and Families introduced the report, highlighting that due to on-going financial and Compliance risks for Local Authority Maintained Schools it was proposed to change the current support offer.

At the invitation of the Executive Member the Assistant Director Education Partnerships and Skills, Amelia Walker, proceeded to present the report highlighting; that the proposal was specifically designed to enable the Council to create the solid foundations necessary to provide effective and impactful support for raising standards for children of any age; the number of teams affected; the work and depth of the research undertaken to develop the proposals being considered; the focus on the management of risk to build coherence and stability and achieve better outcomes for children; that the proposal is a traded offer with no authority to compel schools to adopt; and the further work needed to secure local authority schools commitment.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon invited comments from other members present; questions and points raised included:

The Chair, Scrutiny for Children and Families Committee, Cllr Leigh Redman, welcomed the opportunity given to the Scrutiny for Children and Families Committee to consider the proposal. Cllr Redman made reference to comments made by the Committee including: that the Committee was generally supportive of option 3; and a request that a schedule of reporting be put in place to monitor and ensure benefit realisation.

The Lead Member for Children and Families, Cllr Tessa Munt, in response confirmed an update on the Core Offer would be considered at the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee in October 2023.

Further discussion points included: the importance of improving schools in Somerset through partnership and collaboration; and the important and detailed work of scrutiny committees.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive agreed to the implementation of an LA Maintained Schools core offer comprising a Base and Business Manager elements, based on the proposed charging model, with an effective date for new contracts of 1 April 2023.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

063 Housing Revenue Account Draft 30 Year Business Plan and Rent Charging Policy
– Agenda Item 9

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon, welcomed and the Strategic Director and 151 Officer, Sedgemoor District Council (SDC), Alison Turner, the Assistant Director – Finance (S151 Officer), Somerset West and Taunton Council (SW&T), Paul Fitzgerald, the Director Housing and Communities, (SW&T), James Barrah and invited Strategic Director and 151 Officer, (SDC), Alison Turner to present the report.

The Strategic Director and 151 Officer (SDC), Alison Turner, proceeded to present the report, highlighting; that the Council is required to produce a 30-Year Business Plan under the self-financing arrangements for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); that this is being prepared for the first time for Somerset Council following local government restructuring in Somerset, taking into account the preparations undertaken by the two predecessor Council's that currently operate a HRA; that the report outlines the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30-year business plan for the New Unitary Council and presents the individual plans for SDC and SW&T including proposals for reducing the use of balances to fund ongoing expenditure and ensure ongoing financial resilience is maintained; that the housing revenue account, is separate from the general fund and is a ring fenced landlord account; the Government guidelines and rent caps and the associated revenue scenarios based on differing rent caps; the HRA's immediate financial challenge to meet the aspirations of the Council and tenants; and that a housing summit is to be organised to help members understanding of the inherent risks and challenges.

The Assistant Director – Finance (S151 Officer), SW&T, Paul Fitzgerald added to above points noting that due to external factors affecting the sector, there would be a need to refresh and review the plan regularly to deliver the service on a long-term basis.

The Director of Housing and Communities, SW&T, James Barrah further added to the above points highlighting the operational and financial challenges of the affordable housing sector and the regulatory requirement expected in the local policies, specifically the difference between SDC and SW&T in terms of the application of rent flexibilities.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon invited comments from other members present; questions and points raised included:

Lead Member for Development and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke commented on the potential understating of risk levels regarding the HRA and the need to be mindful and aware of economic changes.

In response, the Director of Finance, Jason Vaughan advised of the current work to produce one strategic risk register for the new Council, incorporating the risk of the five Councils. The Director advised of the detailed and structured risks set out in the LGR programme and the current risk registers operated and reviewed as part of the core governance.

The Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Sarah Dyke asked for an outline of the commitment and approach to decarbonising Somerset and delivering retrofitting for the housing stock in Somerset.

In response, the Director of Housing and Communities, James Barraah explained the known challenges, the opportunities for match funding, the funding applied for and the broad emphasis of the strategy to blend two levels of investments together to have a positive impact on the thermal performance of properties and improve the EPC ratings.

Cllr Lucy Trimnell asked if there would be a disadvantage to the areas of the County not having Council run homes and would the approach to housing be harmonised across the County.

In response, the Lead Member for Development and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke advised of the Housing Options Database which is open to all residents across the County, where all can residents can equally apply for housing in all areas.

In response, the Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey, explained that: the new Council will be a stockholding authority, and that there will be housing stock available across the whole of the county run through a number of registered providers; and there will be no disadvantage in that affordable housing will be available across the Council.

Further discussion points included: the opportunity to build social housing and overcoming current challenges with planning applications; the requirement for training sessions to aid councillors to fully understand and familiarise themselves with items; and the potential risk and complexities of Council housing stock.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon thanked all involved and asked that a Housing briefing be provided to all Councillors.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive:

- **Noted the current draft HRA business plan position with further updates in February as part of the budget approval and rent set process.**

- **Approved the rent set policy for the New Somerset Council to be applied for 2023/24 onwards.**
- **Noted the future challenges for the HRA and the LGR product within the Service Alignment Landlord function workstream to develop a timeline with members for determining future service delivery options.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

064 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Somerset – Updated Implementation Plan – Agenda item 10

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon invited the Acting Strategic Manager Business Change, Alastair Higton, to present the report.

The Acting Strategic Manager Business Change, Alastair Higton, proceeded to present the report, highlighting; the legal requirement of the Structural Changes Order (SCO) setting out the mechanism for the reorganisation of local government and the establishment of a single unitary council in Somerset on 1 April 2023; that line with the SCO an Implementation Board is in place to monitor the programme and provide advice and recommendations on its implementation to the Executive of Somerset County Council; and that this report proposes amendments to the implementation proposals to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon invited comments from other members present, there were no questions and points raised.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive approved the amended Implementation Plan as provided in appendix A of the report, in order to discharge its responsibilities as laid out in the Somerset (Structural Changes) Order 2022.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

065 Approval to Adopt the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy – Agenda item 11

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon, invited the Assistant Head of Housing, Mendip District Council (MDC), Jeremy Manners to present the report.

The Assistant Head of Housing, MDC, Jeremy Manners proceeded to present the report, highlighting; that the housing enforcement policy explains how the new Council will enforce housing standards in Somerset to ensure that housing conditions are maintained to minimum standards so that residents can live in safe and healthy homes; that the policy covers: all tenures, with the exception of the Council housing stock, the action that can continue to be taken in a robust fare and consistent manner across Somerset; the development in partnership with representatives from each of the District Councils; and that much of the policy remains in line with existing District policies, and continues to emphasise willingness to work together with property owners and to support landlords to improve and maintain their properties to a safe standard.

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance and Human Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon, invited comments from other members present; questions and points raised included: balancing enforcement and preventative work against the need to support landlords through encouragement and education; the increasingly challenging housing market, including both the social and private sector; the inherent link between good housing and good health; rising energy costs; the approach for ensuring that the statutory minimum standards for HMO's; and the provision to ensure that local authority housing stock meets the same criteria as private sector housing and is fit for purpose.

In response, the Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey advised of the regulatory body which looks at the operation of Council owned stock to ensure that there are regular checks and compliance.

The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations as amended, which were also agreed unanimously.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive:

- **Approved the adoption of the Housing Enforcement Policy for Somerset Council and for this to come into effect on 1 April 2023**
- **Delegated authority to the relevant Service Director in consultation with the Executive Member covering this service to make future minor operational and legislative changes to the policy.**

066 Any Other Business – Agenda item 12

There were no items of other business.

(The meeting ended at 11.55am)

Chair