

SWT Special Executive - 9 February 2021

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)

Councillors Benet Allen, Chris Booth, Ross Henley, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Peter Pilkington, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith and Sarah Wakefield

Officers: James Hasset, James Barra, Alison North, Paul Fitzgerald, Marcus Prouse, Amy Tregellas, Clare Rendell, Emily Collacott, Martin Evans (Shape Legal Partnership), Jo O'Hara (Specialist - Heritage at Risk), Kerry Prisco and Joe Wharton

Also Present: Councillors Simon Coles, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, John Hassall, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Phil Stone, Andrew Sully, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

89. Apologies

No apologies were received.

90. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive

(Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 January 2021 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Executive held on 20 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

91. 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 C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke

92. **Public Participation - To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions, statements or petitions from the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 14,15 and 16**

Mr Roger House spoke on Agenda Item 6, Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2021/22:-

The Victoria Park Action Group had been campaigning for new safer public toilets in our park for five years. The current toilets were closed having failed the Covid 19 test, we had recently written to the Executive Postholder, asking for finance to be assembled to build a new extension with two new safe and accessible toilet cubicles. The recent debate on Flook House revealed the only town public toilet north of the river had no insides, with an obvious need for new public toilets in the evolving Coal Orchard and Firepool sectors. At the same time a new Unitary Council or Councils in some form looked likely to emerge, and as a consequence with either, a long overdue new Taunton Town Council too. From the example of Weymouth Town Council in the new Dorset Unitary reorganisation, this new Council would suddenly have duties to provide and maintain garden town green spaces, public toilets, markets and community halls, the latter were now well below the standards of our villages. As the Weymouth Council came into being, some high quality toilets were built on the seafront and handed over to them.

So regards the future creation of the Town Council, with its fair share of the old Borough area financial and built assets:

Q1 - In the capitol programme table last page of the report, could the council introduce a new line in order to build up capitol for new toilets and community halls or conversions, the key need for the successor Town Council? The December Executive meeting, financial monitoring Q2 showed a CIL projects and infrastructure budget with Community Development £500,000 slipping to the 2023/24 year, perhaps after the Town Council formation.

Q2 - Connected to the same cause, the recent schedule of S106 developer's contributions for the Taunton Unparished Area revealed monies being collected under headings of Play, Outdoor Recreation, Allotments and Community Halls. In our parks case the toilets and community hall were both linked. Was it possible, given the need for more Town Centre Toilets, that the S106 heading could be amended to Community Buildings/Public Toilets? This would require action and documentation to demonstrate both these were a leading infrastructure need as Taunton expands with its central residents and visitor's numbers, both rising.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources responded:-

Q1 - Thank you for your question but at present resources wre fully committed on the current priorities within the capital programme. Table 9 in the Qtr 2 Budget Monitoring report presented to Executive on 16th December showed the indicative timing of how any CIL collected may be utilised. The figures have therefore been allocated to the years based on this indicative timing and the budget had not slipped from this financial year. The budget allocation was based upon the money that might be collected based on an estimate of new build property that could come forward and did not guarantee funding in any one particular area. At present the Community Development allocation of £500k was to support the delivery of the Multi-Purpose Venue at Firepool and to provide match funding to support the Taunton Future High Street Fund bid.

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/830-million-funding-boost-for-high-streets>)

This project was no longer included in the Future High Street Fund project list because of the lower provisional award from Government, but the Council remained committed to delivering this project.

Q2 - The headings for S106 allocations reflect the terms under which the money was originally collected. The council published its available S106 money on its public website. If any interested party was minded to apply for S106 funds they were able to do so and their application would be judged against the legal basis for which the money was originally collected.

93. **Executive Forward Plan**

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

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.

94. **Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2021/22**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources proposed a further recommendation to add two one-off budgets into the budget proposals:-
 - The first was for £100,000 towards further tree planting across the district; and
 - The second was for £100,000 towards a Community Enhancement Fund to help support the community across Somerset West and Taunton following the impact of the Covid Pandemic.

Both were seconded by the Leader and became part of the substantive motion.

- Councillors thanked the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources and the Finance Team for all their hard work on producing a balanced budget.
- Councillors queried how long it would be before the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) became a precepting body.
The Section 151 Officer would report back with an update as to when the SRA would be able to administer their own precept.
- Councillors highlighted that the Taunton Chartered Trustees had to charge a precept for the Unparished Area of Taunton until the Governance Review had been completed.
- Councillors were pleased that Somerset County Council had taken back the cost of the Park and Ride, which then enabled Somerset West and Taunton to spend the money on community enhancement especially after the Covid Pandemic.
- Councillors queried whether the £200,000 saving from the Park and Ride would be for this financial year only.
The Section 151 officer advised that he did not expect the saving to go any further than this financial year.
- Councillors queried why the Watchet East Quay Development Loan had been included in appendix B and requested an explanation.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources clarified that the existing budget was originally approved by West Somerset Council, and provided a 'last resort' funding option to the developer if they were unsuccessful in fully funding the works from other sources. At this stage no loan had been provided, and was unlikely to be needed as the developer had been very successful in obtaining other funding, but it was sensible to retain the facility in case it was needed to complete the development as it moved through to completion. If a request for loan finance was forthcoming it would be subject to the usual due diligence at the time. He further explained that this was separate to the £5m of grant funding awarded to the developer from the Coastal Communities Fund for the project. Whilst this was not Council funds, the grant was administered by the Council as the accountable body, to reimburse the developer based on actual costs incurred.
- The Chair of Scrutiny advised that the Committee had discussed the budget at length and highlighted the amount of work involved for officers to produce the budget, however, the Committee wanted to ensure that services could be delivered upon.

- Concern was raised that too much reliance had been placed on the Commercial Investment Strategy.
The Leader of the Council advised that the Executive had been prudent with their decisions which had also been backed by the Section 151 Officer. The Chief Executive also advised that officers and the Board were cautious in their decision making and he wanted to reassure councillors that they had even been audited and found that they had strong and robust processes in place.
- Concern was raised on Taunton and that as the county town, it had lost a sense a vibrancy. Councillors queried what could be done about this.
The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Asset Management advised that the Economic Development Team were working hard to engage with traders and event organisers to ensure the balance of activity was right for the town. The Team were also working on a policy to ensure this was carried out.
- The Leader of the Council stated that it had been a tough year and advised that the funding provided by Government had not been as much as the Council required. She appreciated all the comments and concerns that had been raised but assured councillors that she wanted to continue to provide services of a high standard within the area. The Leader of the Council commended the budget and its ambition.

Resolved that the Executive:-

- 2.1 Noted the S151 Officers Statement on the robustness of the budget and adequacy of reserves as set out in section 17;
- 2.2 Recommended Full Council approved the Draft Revenue Budget expenditure, savings and income targets, subject to any final adjustments as may be required for new information prior to Full Council (such as the NNDR1 final estimates and the Final Finance Settlement);
- 2.3 Recommended to Full Council a basic band D council tax of £169.63, comprising £167.88 for services and £1.75 on behalf of the Somerset Rivers Authority;
- 2.4 Recommended Full Council approved the new capital schemes of the General Fund Capital Programme Budget of £3,116,980 for 2021/22, £2,033,980 for 2022/23 and the asset for sale target of £2,472,720, as set out in Table 11;
- 2.5 Recommended that Full Council delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the S151 Officer, to allocate the £813,000 one-off grant funding to meet COVID-related exceptional service costs and income losses during 2021/22;
- 2.6 Recommended that Full Council approved the transfer of £2.4m from General Reserves to an earmarked reserve to create a Budget Volatility and Risk fund for 2021/22 financial year; and
- 2.7 Recommended Full Council approved a continued policy of suspending parking charges, as detailed below, on the three Saturdays leading up to Christmas and on one Sunday in Dulverton in line with previous years, to support local economies;
 - a) Free parking would apply from 15:00 to 23:59 on the three Saturdays (subject to car park opening hours) in Taunton Car Parks.

- b) Free parking would apply all day; from 00:00 to 23:59 on the three Saturdays (subject to car park opening hours) in all other Council owned Car Parks.
- c) (c) Free parking would apply all day; from 00:00 to 23:59 on one Sunday (subject to car park opening hours) in Dulverton Car Parks to support the Dulverton by Starlight events.

95. **HRA Revenue and Capital Budget Setting 2021/22 including Dwelling Rent Setting 21/22 and 30-Year Business Plan Review**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Finance Team for their hard work in producing the budget.
- Councillors were pleased to see that the rents being charged were comparable.
- Councillors thanked the Housing Team for providing a member briefing on Homefinder and the housing system.
- Councillors were pleased to see new housing was being built and had been included in the budget.
- Councillors thanked the involvement of the Tenants Forum in giving their feedback on the budget figures.
- The Leader of the Council was pleased to see all the new housing projects coming forward, which included new developments using zero carbon and new housing in the former West Somerset area. She believed the budget provided a lasting legacy for the District.

Resolved that the Executive recommended that Full Council:-

- 2.1.1 Approved the HRA Annual Revenue Budget for 2021/22;
- 2.1.2 Approved the increase of 1.5% (CPI+1%) to Dwelling Rents for 2021/22;
- 2.1.3 Approved the HRA Capital Programme for 2021/22;
- 2.1.4 Noted the reviewed and updated assumptions in the 2021 HRA 30-Year Business Plan; and
- 2.1.5 Approved the minimum operational balance on HRA general reserves at £2m.

96. **Access to Information- Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved that the press and the public be excluded from the meeting for the item numbered 9 on the Agenda as the item contained exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

97. **Strategic Heritage Update**

Resolved that the Executive approved the recommendations within the confidential report.

(The Meeting ended at 9.10 pm)