

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall,
Taunton TA1 4DY, on Wednesday, 2 August 2023 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Bill Revans (Chair)
Cllr Liz Leyshon (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Tessa Munt
Cllr Ros Wyke

Cllr Adam Dance
Cllr Dean Ruddie

In attendance:

Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Lucy Trimnell
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr David Fothergill
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Tom Deakin

Cllr Faye Purbrick
Cllr Mark Healey
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Val Keitch
Cllr Fran Smith

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr David Woan
Cllr Nicola Clark
Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Sue Osborne

Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr Oliver Patrick
Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Tony Grimes
Cllr Mike Stanton

24 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Cllr Mike Rigby and Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

25 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 10 July 2023 were agreed upon and signed by the Chair.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans,

- Paid tribute to former Somerset County Councillor and South Somerset District Councillor, Derek Yeomans, who sadly passed away over the weekend, and offered his condolences to Derek's family and friends.
- Expressed good wishes and a speedy recovery to Somerset Councillor Andy Kendall.
- Noted that currently there was no formal replacement following Sarah Dyke stepping down from the role of Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, and that the responsibilities of this role are currently being informally covered by Associate Lead Member for Climate Change & Active Travel, Cllr Dixie Darch.

26 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

SOMERSET COUNCILLORS WHO ARE ALSO CITY, TOWN AND/OR PARISH COUNCILLORS

Theo Butt Philip -Wells City Council

Adam Dance - South Petherton Parish Council

Mike Rigby - Bishop's Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council

Dean Ruddle - Somerton Town Council

Federica Smith-Roberts - Taunton Town Council

Ros Wyke - Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

27 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

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

28 Academisation Finance Policy and Procedure - Agenda Item 5

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr

Tessa Munt, to introduce the report.

The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Tessa Munt, introduced the report, highlighting: that Somerset Council is seeking to move to a more transparent and financially rigorous methodology for planning academisation to increase the level of clarity and consistency of support for schools so that they can feel better and deliver much better outcomes for children and young people; and that the report had been shared with the Department for Education and Diocese of Bath and Wells through the Somerset Education System Leadership Group; the establishing of a pipeline of conversions.

The Executive Director - Children, Families and Education, Claire Winter, further added to the above points, highlighting: the academisation finance policy and procedure in relation to Somerset schools; the Core Offer proposal including rebates and eligibility criteria; the Council's academy charge for schools electing to convert to academy status; surpluses and deficit balances on conversion to academy status following the DfE guidance; and the consultation with schools and stakeholders.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the essential clarity for schools and striving for the best use of money to make improvement in all schools, including academisation cost recovery; retained surpluses and Academy sponsors for Directive Academy Order schools and Multi Academy Trust sponsorship; the shared consultation with schools and trusts; the treatment of surpluses and deficits, including the management of failing schools surpluses; the current Department of Education policy for the resources and financial support regarding Multi Academy Trust; and exceptions when calculating the balance to be retained by the Local Authority following a conversion under a Directive Academy Order.

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

The Executive:

- a. Agreed to an amendment to the Core Offer contract.**
- b. Approved the Council's academy charge for schools electing to convert to academy status.**
- c. Approved the proposal to apply Department for Education guidance when dealing with surplus and deficit balances on**

conversion to academy status.

d. Agreed to implement the proposal at (c) in relation to surplus and deficit balances effective from the date of decision (2 August 2023).

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report.

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

29 UPDATE - the Outturn Position across all Legacy Somerset Authorities for 2022/23 - Agenda Item 6

UPDATE - the Outturn Position across all Legacy Somerset Authorities for 2022/23 - Agenda Item 6

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

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, introduced the report, highlighting: the remaining outstanding audits and the continued work on the five predecessor Councils Statement of Accounts to report the overall position of Somerset Council for 2022/23; the challenging national external audit situation, with some Local Authority outstanding audit opinions dating back to 2016/2017/2018; that 48% of all authorities had published their draft accounts for 2022/23; and that the report updates the Executive on the current status as of 21 July 2023, with the final position expected to be reported at the Executive meeting in September 2023. Cllr Leyshon further: thanked Council officers for the considerable work on the Statement of Accounts; highlighted the national position on finances, including the continued rise in inflation and interest rates, the impact for Local Authorities and households of years of very low rates, the ability to build houses across Somerset, the demand on social care continues to grow in complexity; noted the all member briefing CiPFA session to be held 24 August 2023, with the CiPFA CEO, Rob Whiteman; and informed Members of the work on the risk statement which will form part of the budget setting process along with the continued challenge through the first years of Somerset Council.

The Executive Director, Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, further added to the above points, highlighting: the importance of all Statement of Accounts

being completed for each authority to give as accurate a picture as possible of the outturn position, and that risk will remain until all the accounts are signed off by the external auditors confirming that there are no corrections required that will impact on capital, revenue, or reserves; outlined the main reasons why the Statement of Accounts did not meet the Government deadline, including that the Statement of Accounts submission was brought forward from 31 July 2023 to 31 May for 2022/23; outlined the current publication position of the five legacy councils; that Nationally there is a significant backlog on the auditing of local government accounts with over 1,000 still outstanding; the final outturn, reserves, capital receipts position and the capital programme to be reported to the September Executive; the current year budget monitoring work including 8 August 2023 Scrutiny Committee – Corporate and Resources consideration, seeking feedback and comments on actions to increase financial control and parameters on the forecasted overspend; the work on a revised timetable to align Scrutiny Committee and Executive dates.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the affect, impact and contribution of the closure of the Audit Commission on the current external auditing issues; the issues that could affect the September publication of Somerset Council outturn position; the background work, preparatory work and extra resources used to complete the Statement of Accounts work; the opportunity for budget monitoring position review by all Scrutiny Committees.

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

The Executive noted the current position in reporting the outturn position for the Somerset authorities for the 2022/23 financial year and the timetable for completion outlined in paragraph 20 of the report.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report.

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

30 Staplegrove Housing Infrastructure Fund - Agenda Item 7

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke, to introduce the report.

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke, introduced the report, highlighting: that Staplegrove is allocated within the Development Plan for residentially led development of 1500 homes; that in March 2019 the Government confirmed £14.2m of Housing Infrastructure Funding (HIF) to deliver the Staplegrove spine road, primary school and associated infrastructure; that the HIF funding will operate as recoverable grant; the requirement for Somerset Council to enter into a deed of variation to the agreement; that following an intense period of negotiation, Homes England agreed to extend the HIF grant funding availability until 31 March 2024 and has also agreed a refined HIF funded infrastructure package for East and West Staplegrove focussed on expenditure/construction achievable within the funding availability period and reflective of the planning status of each part of the site.

The Taunton Garden Town, Implementation Manager, Jenny Clifford, further added to the above points noting: the refined infrastructure package focus is on what can be delivered before end of March 2024; that the Council is responsible for loaning the HIF funding to the developers, recovering it and recycling it to unlock further housing.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the welcome Local Member updates from Officers.

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

The Executive agreed to:

a. Enter into a deed of variation to the Staplegrove Housing Infrastructure Fund grant fund agreement;

b. Enter into funding agreements with interested parties over the use of the Housing Infrastructure Fund and its recovery;

c. Use Housing Infrastructure Funding for Somerset Council to acquire an interest in land on Staplegrove East to safeguard the future delivery of essential infrastructure (including the primary school site and access, highway including spine road and pedestrian/cycle routes and associated infrastructure land) and provide services to the school site;

d. Grant delegated authority to the S151 Officer and Service Directors for Economy, Employment and Planning; Infrastructure and Transport and

Strategic Asset Management to enter into negotiations and agree the detail for the implementation of recommendations a-c in consultation with the Lead Members for Economic Development, Planning and Assets; Transport and Digital; and Children, Families and Education.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report.

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

31 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 8

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

(The meeting ended at 11.00 am)

.....
CHAIR