

Public Agenda Pack



Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil BA20 2HT, on Wednesday, 8 November 2023 at 10.00 am

Present:

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

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Mike Rigby
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

Cllr Adam Dance
Cllr Tessa Munt
Cllr Dean Ruddle
Cllr Ros Wyke

In attendance:

Cllr Steve Ashton
Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Oliver Patrick
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr David Woan

Cllr David Fothergill
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Faye Purbrick
Cllr Andy Soughton
Cllr Richard Wilkins

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Jason Baker
Cllr Alan Bradford
Cllr Norman Cavill
Cllr Peter Clayton
Cllr John Cook-Woodman
Cllr Tom Deakin
Cllr Caroline Ellis
Cllr Dawn Johnson
Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Evie Potts-Jones

Cllr Adam Boyden
Cllr Hilary Bruce
Cllr Nicola Clark
Cllr Simon Coles
Cllr Hugh Davies
Cllr Dawn Denton
Cllr Bob Filmer
Cllr Val Keitch
Cllr Jenny Kenton
Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr Matthew Martin
Cllr Emily Pearlstone
Cllr Leigh Redman

Cllr Brian Smedley
Cllr Martin Wale

Cllr Mike Stanton
Cllr Rosemary Woods

56 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

No apologies were received.

57 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 4 October 2023 were agreed upon and signed by the Chair.

58 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

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

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

59 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Public questions were received from:

- Nigel Behan – Item 6 - General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Month 5
- Eva Bryczkowski – Item 6 - General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Month 5
- David Redgewell – Item 6 - General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report –Month 5 and Item 12 - Award of contract for Highways Services
- Rossa Kell – Item 12 - Award of contract for Highways Services

- David Mears – Item 9 - Policy for the Disposal of Assets

All questions were considered under the relevant agenda item. The questions and responses provided are attached to the minutes in Annex A.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, referred to storm Ciaran and its impact on the County, thanked Officers of the Council and acknowledged their work to keep Somerset residents safe.

60 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 5

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

61 General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report - Month 5 - 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: that the report detailed the month 5 budget position; that the projected overspend is £27.3m, the majority of which relates to Adults and Children's Services; the national financial situation across the sector; that the Council is faced with serious challenges and a serious financial deficit that requires urgent and decisive action; the open and transparent strategy and communication required to address the viability of Somerset Council; the continued use of reserves and the impact of the financial sustainability of the Council; the local and national impact on Local Government Reorganisation, including: the global Covid pandemic, the vaccination programme, the end of multiple Government grants and funding, Brexit and its impact on European workers, the Fair Cost of Care, the Ukraine War, rising energy and food costs, high inflation, increased interest rates and the reduction in value of commercial assets; the income from and disposal of the amalgamated portfolio of commercial assets; the scale and focus of actions and that the Council is committed to ensuring its financial sustainability, delivery of key services, as well as the wellbeing and safety of staff and customers; the full engagement and work across the Council to challenge the financial assumptions which are being forecast, understanding those assumptions and working together to mitigate overspends where possible; and the budget monitoring consideration across the Scrutiny Committees and Audit Committee.

The Director of Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, added to the

above points, highlighting: the complex challenges aligning the five predecessors Councils and setting a budget for a Unitary Council; the impact of the agreed national pay award; the revised Scrutiny Committee – Corporate and Resources dates; the change in budget monitoring reporting from month 6; the spending controls previously put in place and the financial focus group established to provide focus with a clear programme of activity to address the budget overspend in the current year and the forecast budget gap for next year; the three control boards set up to monitor and oversee the following areas: establishment and recruitment, commercial and procurement, any other spending over £100; that the cost pressures will continue into the 2024/25 financial year; and that the Council cannot rely on reserves to cover the budget gap as the Council would not be financially sustainable.

The Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr Dean Ruddle, further added to the above points commenting on the improvement in home and domiciliary care, the impact of high interest rates, the historic Adult Social Care financial challenges and pressures, and the work to balance the overspend.

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: thanks to the Audit Committee and the Finance Team for the work undertaken; the impact and challenges nationally and locally; the Adult Social Care historic cost factors and the continuing funding crisis in Somerset, including paying for social care, the global Covid pandemic, the resourcing of the track and trace program and government funding; budget predictions, inflation and interest rates; Childrens Social Care and the impact of the global Covid pandemic; the high increase in the cost of care and the impacting factors; the fair cost of care exercise; the actions and decisions required to balance the new Council budget; Council tax, including low rates, Council tax freeze and comparator Local Authority Council tax rates; the Adult Social Care programme of changes and the Newton savings; the changes needed and the impact of the model of national funding for social care; and the need to work together across Councils and organisations to resolve and reform.

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

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

a. Noted the forecast overspend of £27.3m (5.5%) for the year and the recovery actions being taken to address this.

b. Approved that it will continue to receive a monthly update on the financial position and actions being taken to address it.

c. Noted that the format of the Budget Monitoring will be changed from month 6.

d. Approved a £0.3m budget virement from the Corporate Contingency budget to Strategic Asset Management to carry out the RAAC (Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) surveys.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

62 Financial Strategy Update - Agenda Item 7

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 critically important report outlining the scale of challenge and complexities faced by Somerset Council financially and as a new organisation; that all Councils are facing the same challenges but with varied financial starting points; summarised and outlined the direct and challenging recommendations in the report, including declaring a financial emergency, that at their meeting 26 October 2023, the Audit Committee considered the section 151 officer's letter to DLUHC on Somerset Councils Financial Challenges and the letter from Grant Thornton on the Financial Sustainability of the Council but was not assured that arrangements were in place to address the current years forecast overspend or to close the 2024/25 budget gap, as a result, they have called a special Audit Committee in December 2023; the essential review and work on Council reserves with the Amalgamated Report to be considered by Executive on 6 December 2023; the vision for a sustainable Somerset Council at 6 December 2023 Executive meeting; and the changing, developing and emerging emergency situation and programme of work required at pace to avoid the requirement for the S151 Officer to issue a Section 114 Notice.

The Director of Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, added to the above points, highlighting: that the new Council faces a very stark and challenging financial position; summarised the complexities of Local Government finance, including revenue, taxation, investments reserves and grants; that the increase in

costs at the same time as income has been restricted has resulted in a fundamental imbalance and a very considerable budget gap between the costs of providing services and the income the Council receives; summarised the range of actions being taken to close the £100m forecast budget gap, including: the Service Director challenge sessions, deep dive sessions for Adult and Childrens Social Care, the review of the existing capital programme, staffing review, reviewing the inherited commercial investment portfolio and developing a disposal programme; the rationalisation of the council offices and other asset disposals to generate capital receipts and reduce running costs; the development of a transformation programme to reshape the Council's services; the upcoming Autumn Statement and financial settlement; and the updated position and progress on these actions to be reported to the 6 December 2023 Executive.

The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Tessa Munt, further added to the above points, highlighting: the challenges faced in Children's Social Care, the statutory requirements; the increase and complexity of demand; the school transport challenge session outcomes, focus and ongoing work; The County Council Network and the Society of County Treasurers report of financial pressures; and the continuing work to reduce the overspend.

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 external input, budgetary and financial impact of a Section 114 notice; the need for a communication message regarding Council spending to be sent to residents of the County; the circumstances affecting the One Somerset business case, the complex transformation from five Councils to one Council, including the changed financial landscape; the work of the Council to mitigate financial situation; and the comparison of local Unitary Councils Council tax charges.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Executive unanimously agreed to amend recommendation d, to include 'in conjunction with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets':

d. To approve the disposal of the commercial investment portfolio, delegated the appointment of external agents to the Director of Strategic Asset Management in conjunction with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, and uses the Property & Investment Executive sub-committee to oversee the disposal programme.

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

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

- a. That Somerset Council faces a financial emergency and acknowledges that urgent actions need to be taken to address the position including the setting up of the Financial Focus Group and the introduction of further financial controls to limit spending.**
- b. To approve that the Council should continue its discussions with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) following the letter from the Section 151 officer to them concerning the councils' financial challenges and the initial meeting.**
- c. That there should be a special meeting of the Audit Committee in December to consider the council's financial sustainability and the issues raised in the letter from Grant Thornton.**
- d. To approve the disposal of the commercial investment portfolio, delegated the appointment of external agents to the Director of Strategic Asset Management in conjunction with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, and uses the Property & Investment Executive sub-committee to oversee the disposal programme.**
- e. To receive an update report on the actions being taken and progress in closing the budget gap for the 2024/25 Budget at the 6 December Executive 2023 meeting.**
- f. To receive a report on the review of Earmarked Reserves at the 6 December Executive meeting.**
- g. To task the Asset Management Group with bringing forward asset disposals including council office rationalisation proposals, with an update to the Executive on 6 December 2023.**
- h. Agreed to receive a report on the vision for a sustainable Somerset Council at the 6 December 2023 Executive meeting.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

63 Proposed formation of Property and Investments Executive Sub-Committee - Agenda Item 8

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, introduced the report, and invited the Monitoring Officer, David Clark, to present the report.

The Monitoring Officer, David Clark, proceeded to present the report, highlighting; the details of the proposed sub-committee and the key step in the management of the disposal of the Council's commercial investment portfolio; that Somerset Council had inherited a portfolio of commercial investments from the predecessor District Councils, and that with the current economic climate, and in the light of the financial pressures, the proper management of these investments pending any disposal is crucial to the financial wellbeing of the Council.

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 sub-committee governance process and the importance of collective wisdom and transparency of decisions; the planned disposals over a period of time; and the long programme of work and the use of external professional advice and internal skills, experience and expertise.

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

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive noted and approved the decision of the Leader of the Council to establish a Property and Investments Executive Sub-Committee with the Terms of Reference set out in Appendix 1 of the report, with effect from 9 November 2023.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

64 Policy for the Disposal of Assets - Agenda Item 9

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the 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: the published amended Policy and recommendations; the policy wording to clarify that a Framework for Asset and Service Devolution will be brought forward early in 2024, to provide supplementary guidance on how City, Town and Parish Councils can assist with some of the financial pressures to protect service delivery and to clarify that City, Town and Parish Councils are important strategic partners for Somerset Council; that discussions on asset disposals will be held with individual Local Councils as appropriate; the clear, transparent and robust policy and the importance of collective decision making; the importance of local knowledge and engagement with local Councillors and the continued building of relationships to ensure the input of local knowledge, and the challenging commercial market across Somerset.

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 continued work to foster and develop the relationships, partnerships and collaboration between City, Town and Parish Councils and the strong voice for the sector; the communication and availability of asset information awareness and land ownership through Local Government and Central Government sources, including websites, ward members, local Councillors; the legal and property team internal resource capacity, challenges and management of public expectations regarding response times; Local Community Networks engagement; the developing framework for the new service and asset devolution to clarify consultation and discussion as appropriate with Parish Councils; the importance of managing a policy designed to cover the range of commercial and local assets; and the Standards Committee Member Code of Conduct work with City, Town and Parish Councils.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Executive unanimously agreed to add an additional recommendation:

c. A delegation to the Service Director for Strategic Asset Management, in consultation with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, to make any minor amendments to the Policy for the Disposal of Assets.

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

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

a. The approval of the Policy for the Disposal of Assets.

b. To note that a subsequent Framework for Service and Asset Devolution will

provide further supplemental guidance covering the devolution of Assets to City, Town and Parish Councils.

c. A delegation to the Service Director for Strategic Asset Management, in consultation with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, to make any minor amendments to the Policy for the Disposal of Assets.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

65 Celebration Mile - Bridgwater Urban Realm Enhancement Scheme Contract Award - Agenda Item 10

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke, introduced the report, highlighting: that the project budget is delivered via Government Towns Fund grant; the procurement process, financial and delivery options for the Celebration Mile in Bridgwater; the public realm improvement scheme and the enhancement and delivery of streetscape improvements from the railway station through to the docks.

The Regeneration Project Manager, Stuart Martin, presented the report, highlighting: the identified preferred main contractor to deliver the works with formal appointment being subject to the successful outcome of further officer and contractor discussions to value engineer and de-scope elements of work to bring an agreed contract price to within project budget levels; the procurement process and contingencies; the enhancement of Bridgwater town centre through accessibility to pedestrians and cyclists, creating a better trading environment for the businesses and match the expectations of the major investors already in the area; and the extensive consultation undertaken.

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 change in town deal project undertaking and government funding requirements; the importance of Tell Local Councillor and the sharing of information and involvement of local members; and the planned all member regeneration briefing and communication learnings through previous projects.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Executive unanimously agreed to delete 'The result of this process to be brought back to Executive for ratification' from recommendation b, and amend to:

b. That a delegation be provided to the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets in consultation with the Service Director Economy, Employment and Planning to confirm contractor appointment following the discussions and which must result in the assurance that the project will not require additional top-up funds from Somerset Council.

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

a. That Taylor Woodrow SWH Contracting be identified as the preferred main contractor to deliver the works with formal appointment being subject to the successful outcome of further officer and contractor discussions to value engineer and de-scope elements of work to bring an agreed contract price to within project budget levels.

b. That a delegation be provided to the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets in consultation with the Service Director Economy, Employment and Planning to confirm contractor appointment following the discussions and which must result in assurance that the project will not require additional top up funds from Somerset Council.

c. The work to de-scope and value engineer the project will include the following; a reduction in the area identified for enhancement, alternative materials to replace natural stone such as granite and removal of the proposal to create new facades in the colonnade area of Angel Crescent.

d. The case for exempt information in Appendix B and Appendix D of the report to be treated in confidence, as the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing that information.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

66 Decision to award Contracts for Care and Support at Home in Somerset -
Agenda Item 11

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr Dean Ruddle, to present the report.

The Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Cllr Dean Ruddle, introduced the report, highlighting: that the report included a conclusion and recommendations from a procurement process to award a number of block contracts to successful applicants to secure the supply of quality care and support at home services; that the approach will help to develop a market that delivers a wide range of sustainable high-quality care and support services in difficult to source or high demand areas; that this service will deliver better outcomes for people, enabling them to continue living at home for as long as it is safe to do so; and the contribution to reducing hospital admissions, delayed discharge or long-term care home placements and associated costs.

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 need for good quality support arrangements to enable people to stay in their own homes; and the collaborative approach to meeting needs at local levels with commissioned care providers working alongside micro providers to provide a choice of delivery.

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

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

- a. Approved the outcome of the procurement process to award contracts to the suppliers named in Tender Evaluation Report Confidential Appendix B of the report, to provide home care services via a guaranteed block contract for a period up to 10 years.**

| Lot Number | Title | Awarded supplier |
|-------------------|--|-------------------------|
| 1 | Glastonbury and Street – 150 hours p/w | Bidder E |
| 2 | Shepton Mallet and Wells – 200 hours p/w | Bidder E |
| 3 | Frome – 100 hours p/w | Bidder A |
| 4 | Yeovil – 150 hours p/w | Bidder A |

| | | |
|----------|----------------------------|----------|
| 5 | Bridgwater – 200 hours p/w | Bidder A |
| 6 | Minehead – 200 hours p/w | Bidder G |

b. Approved the establishment of an open framework for the Provision of new care and support at home for an initial period of 5 years, with an option to extend by two further periods of up to 2 years each and one further period of up to 1 year (up to 10 years in total). The annual value of the open framework is estimated at £26m in year 1. This figure will be adjusted for inflation annually as part of the Council’s MTFP process.

c. Agreed the case for applying the exempt information provision as set out in the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and therefore to treat the attached confidential Appendix B in confidence, as it contains commercially sensitive information, and as the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing that information.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

Lunch Break – 12.35 – 1.15pm

67 Award of contract for Highways Services - Agenda Item 12

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Mike Rigby, to introduce the report.

The Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Mike Rigby, introduced the report, highlighting: the contract awards for Highway Surfacing, Highway Surface Treatments, and Highway New Assets, including contract periods and costs.

The Strategic Manager of Highways and Transport, Mike O’Dowd-Jones, presented the report, highlighting the robust procurement process, the capital budget funding, and the forward funding from the Department of Transport.

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 climate change and sustainability

considerations.

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

- a. Approved the award of a 4 year contract with the option of a four year extension to Supplier B as identified in the confidential Appendix A of the report; for the provision of Highway Surface Treatments services from 1st April 2024.**
- b. Approved the award of a 4 year contract with the option of a four year extension to Supplier B as identified in the confidential Appendix B of the report; for the provision of Highway Surfacing services from 1st April 2024.**
- c. Approved the award of a framework contract for a period of 4 years to Supplier D as identified in the confidential Appendix C of the report; for the provision of Highway New Assets services from 1st April 2024.**
- d. Delegated the future decision regarding the extension of the contracts beyond their initial term to the Lead Member or equivalent responsible for Highways Services having due regard to the contract terms.**
- e. Agreed that Appendices A, B and C be treated in confidence, as the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing that information.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

68 Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Strategic Funding - Agenda Item 13

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources, Cllr Theo Butt-Philip, to introduce the report.

The Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources, Cllr Theo Butt-Philip, introduced the report, highlighting: that the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) is an acknowledged key partner for the Council and broader Integrated Care System (ICS) as underlined by the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding on 28 September 2023; the value of the longer term

multi-year funding settlement; that the report relates to core funding for two key strategic partners for the Council: Citizens Advice Somerset and Spark Somerset; and that the agreement will enable the two organisations to continue and provide a wider range of services.

The Service Director – Partnerships and Localities, Sara Skirton, presented the report, highlighting: the work led by the Partnerships and Localities service to review and consolidate agreements with the VCFSE sector to develop a more strategic, sustainable and efficient approach; and that the multi-year agreements will provide greater security of funding and enable VCFSE organisations greater flexibility in the delivery of outcomes, to support innovation, ensure consistency of service provision across the county, provide greater coherence and enable efficient monitoring, planning and administration for the organisation and the Council.

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 support of the voluntary sector; the importance of a vibrant VCFSE sector for Somerset Council and Somerset residents; the small community grants and two predecessor District Council lotteries; the process and implications of a Section 114 Notice; and the resilience of the voluntary sector and the focus on strategic relationships with key partners to communicate regarding the financial situation.

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

- 1. To a three-year core funding agreement (Early Help and Prevention) for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2027 (with options to extend 1 plus 1), for Citizens Advice Somerset (CAS) and Citizens Advice West Somerset (CAWS).**
- 2. To a total core funding (Early Help and Prevention strand) allocation of £629,000 in year one followed by funding of £600,000 in subsequent years for Citizens Advice Somerset and Citizens Advice West Somerset, allocated as follows -**
 - i. £629,000 – CAS £581,137; CAWS £47,863**
 - ii. £600,000 – CAS £552,137; CAWS £47,863**
- 3. To up to five-year contract, jointly funded with Somerset ICB, to support VCFSE infrastructure and sector engagement with Spark Somerset for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2027 (with options to extend 1**

plus 1), with a combined value of up to £750k per annum.

- 4. To allocate a minimum £250k local authority contribution to VCFSE infrastructure per annum for 3 years.**
- 5. To delegate responsibility to the Service Director Partnerships and Localities in consultation with the Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources to finalise and agree a mechanism to support a small grants process.**

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED: As set out in the officer report

REASON FOR DECISION: As set out in the officer report

(The meeting ended at 1.40pm)

.....
CHAIR

Annex A

Public and Members Questions – Executive 8 November 2023

| Question submitted from | Question |
|-------------------------|--|
| Nigel Behan | <p>Icebergs, Black Holes and Doom Loops</p> <p>I wish to make a statement/ask a few questions in relation to Item 7 Financial Strategy Update - Nov 23 (somerset.gov.uk)</p> <p>Public Finance reported that Short-termism leaves public services in 'doom loop' noting the problems (funding and workforce shortages etc) in Adult Social Care. As noted, there are also Funding issues in Childrens Social Care(and SEND) and some Local Authorities are at risk because of housing matters (homelessness and no housing stock apart from using the private sector etc). [Statutory provision.]</p> <p>The report referred to, also suggested: “A relationship “reset” with staff, with improved working conditions, workforce planning and pay negotiations.”</p> <p>It was announced at the recent Audit Committee that: “we can see the iceberg”.</p> <p>Black holes: Council looks to address £100m 'black hole'</p> <p>It was reported that: “Deputy leader and lead member for resources Liz Leyshon said: ‘No one wants to be in this position but we are well aware of the implications of a Section 114 notice.’</p> <p>She said Somerset intended to take ‘difficult decisions’ now with the benefit of local knowledge, rather than leaving government commissioners to find an answer.”</p> <p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>Does this mean that Somerset Council (SC),is in effect, doing the work that (unelected) Commissioners would be expected to do if a S114 Notice was to be issued?</p> <p><u>Question 2a</u></p> <p>As reported earlier in the year (BBC):</p> |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| | <p>Plans to increase council tax in Croydon by 15% have been approved by the government</p> <p>“Croydon Council sought permission to impose the rise without a referendum after declaring itself bankrupt for the second time in three years in November.</p> <p>Elsewhere, Thurrock and Slough councils, have also had requests approved to raise council tax by 10%.”</p> <p>Is SC considering (and modelled - including the proportionate increase in the ASC precept) raising Council Tax (CTAX) to a level that would “balance the budget” and, if so, what is the approximate CTAX increase (figure & %) -over the 4.99% increase “allowed” without a referendum”?</p> <p><u>Question 2b</u></p> <p>Since many other Councils are facing similar issues – Districts: Housing etc and Upper Tier/Unitary (as the County Council Network reported): Adults and Childrens Social Care etc – how are Councils working together to pressurise the Government (for realistic increases in the Local Government Settlement) to meet the existing needs of service users rather than further rationing of local government services?</p> |
| <p>Response</p> | <p>Responses from Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon</p> <p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>Somerset Council is doing the work it is here to do, at what is an inflection point in the long life of local authorities in Somerset, and the short life of this new Council.</p> <p>I believe that it is better for the residents, businesses and communities of Somerset, that where difficult decisions need to be taken, they are taken by local representatives with a democratic mandate and a strong interest in securing the best for Somerset, even in difficult times.</p> <p>We are not doing the work of ‘unelected commissioners.’ We are doing our job, using our very best endeavours to make sure that we do not need to issue a s114 notice.</p> <p><u>Question 2a</u></p> <p>Looking back to the introduction of Council Tax in the early 1990s, we can see that Somerset has had distinct challenges that have led to the</p> |

current structural deficit, where the income cannot keep pace with expenditure, particularly on social care services.

When Avon Council was formed, the Council Tax base for Somerset was reduced in terms of house banding numbers – many of the higher band homes near Bath & Bristol moving to Avon, now BaNES and North Somerset.

The yield from Council Tax was clearly affected by the six year Council Tax freeze, and although the previous administration then used maximum % increases and ASC precept, we have more than £20million 'lost' from the base budget, and a Band D Council Tax for Somerset Council that is lower than other Unitary Councils in the south west, and lower than average across the country.

As we know, Somerset also has an ageing demographic and so there is an obvious correlation with demand on social care being greater, and each 1% of council tax produces less income than in other places.

We have no idea yet whether Government will consider raising the referendum limit, or whether there may be a higher maximum level of social care precept.

We do know that people's budgets are well stretched by the cost-of-living crisis, higher energy costs and interest rates. We have a Council Tax Reduction Scheme that will be revisited for the next financial year, and an Exceptional Hardship Scheme to help those whose budgets are tightest, but we realise now more than ever that Government needs to take a very careful look at the future of local government, as there seems to be little understanding at times of the huge importance of the services and facilities provided locally. It's a shame that Members of Parliament don't have to do work experience at a local authority, that would be to the benefit of the whole country.

Question 2b

Councils are most definitely working together, across the country and across the political spectrum. We took the decision to stay in the County Councils Network (CCN), to rejoin the District Councils Network (DCN) as Somerset Council, to join the Local Government Information Unit (a specialist think tank) and we are of course also part of the Local Government Association (LGA), where the Leader of the Opposition, Cllr David Fothergill, is the Chair of the Community Wellbeing Board. We need all these memberships, the collective, national influence and combined data. This is by far the most effective way of influencing Government as well as helping all Councils explain to the public this

unprecedented time of extreme challenge in the life of local government.

Eva Bryczkowski

Out of the 21 councils across Britain who have funding gaps, Somerset County are 16th on the list.

| Council | Region | Funding gap for 2023/24 |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Birmingham City | West Midlands | £164.8m |
| 2 Thurrock | Eastern | £156.5m |
| 3 Wiltshire County | South East | £82m |
| 4 Sheffield City | Yorkshire Humber | £72.7m |
| 5 Bradford City | Yorkshire Humber | £72m |
| 6 Liverpool City | North West | £67m |
| 7 Leeds City | Yorkshire Humber | £59.2m |
| 8 Nottingham City | East Midlands | £50.9m |
| 9 Shetland Islands | Scotland | £47.1m |
| 10 Kirklees | Yorkshire Humber | £47m |
| 11 Highland | Scotland | £46.7m |
| 12 Norfolk County | Eastern | £45.9m |
| 13 Bournemouth | South West | £44.4m |
| 14 Christchurch & Poole | | |
| 15 Leicester City | East Midlands | £44.2m |
| 16 Somerset County | South West | £41.6m |
| 17 Warrington Borough | North West | £39m |
| 18 Medway | South East | £38.7m |
| 19 Glasgow City | Scotland | £37.7m |
| 20 Edinburgh City | Scotland | £37.6m |
| 21 Caerphilly/Caerffili | Wales | £37.4m |

As we are all aware, Birmingham City is at the top of the list, with a funding gap of £164.8 million, and Thurrock next on the list with £156.5 million.

As of Friday 29th of September 2023, Somerset County's funding gap was £41.6 million.

Councillors and officers, you will know what the more up to date figures are, with the biggest overspends being adult social care, children and families, and highways. This situation that the council, and council tax payers are in is: a local, a Somerset county, and a NATIONAL EMERGENCY.

I am not a Lib Dem member, and profoundly disagree with the choices they made when they were in coalition with the conservative government in 2010, but I think that since they have led Somerset council they've done a fairly good fist of prioritising and looking after the most vulnerable people in our county. However, they are not deeply rooted in the trade union and labour movement, unlike other parties.

This matters, because if they were, this would profoundly influence the decisions they have to make regarding the funding gap.

I don't envy what all you councillors need to do now, and as soon as possible in order to avoid insolvency. You have at the very least two directions you can go in:

You can do the usual things that governments and councils do, and say something like "We have difficult decisions to make....." Same old, same old. Or you could do something radically different.

THE ROOT CAUSE

Starting from the premise that the root cause of Somerset being strapped for cash, with council tax payers enduring the brunt of savage cuts having to be made since 2010, the root cause is:

The drastic underfunding imposed by the coalition originally, and now the Conservative government. Austerity has damaged the economy, with destitute people spending little, leading to less tax revenue, and local authorities burdened with more responsibilities but less cash to be able to fund these obligations. The root cause lies at the door of number ten Downing street.

OTHER ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION ARE POSSIBLE

One course of action is to stand shoulder to shoulder with the people you represent. i.e. Us council tax payers, the unions who are trying to save jobs & working conditions, and particularly, the most vulnerable people in Somerset.

CONTRAST BEFORE AND NOW

When I was a steward coordinator for Learning Disabilities, members in Unison local government branch would march outside county hall against cuts in funding, lobby councillors as they walked into full council meetings, and made sure the media knew about how much we were against the decisions the Tory led council were planning to make. Circumstances are different now. As a member of both Unite the Union and Unison, I know that you can't balance the books at this moment in time because we haven't got the money. Simple. Either you tackle in a united way the root cause of this underfunding or go forward forever in misery further cutting into the bone of services and witnessing even greater destitution than before.

SOCIAL SCARE, (deliberate misspelling).

Reading the figures we can see how much social care is affected, with costs spiralling. For example, the price of residential care shooting up exponentially. Plus other services - children and families, Special Educational Needs children, highways, e.g. potholes, essential repairs, and many other statutory commitments the council have to fulfil.

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

As I see it, the LGA is supposed to campaign against the years of drastic underfunding and help local authorities to get more funding. But all I can see is that they announce all the worrying figures, (which we already know anyway from the Institute of Fiscal Studies). And they

occasionally moan about the dire situation. This is unhelpful to me and other council tax payers, unions fighting deterioration in many directions, and frankly, local authorities themselves.

SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS

Mick Lynch and the RMT led the campaign against the closure of ticket offices. Going on strike, making sacrifices and losing money as a result of all this, led to making the general public aware of what was happening, who then voted a resounding No to the government's proposal. The LGA should act more like trade unions and campaign groups that are successful in achieving their aims, getting the public on their side and fully aware of the situation. Like the paramedics and NHS staff who walked out earlier this year. The attention grabbing headline in the Daily Mirror was,

WE ARE DOING THIS FOR YOU!

Somerset council, and maybe eventually the rest of the councils in Britain, could respectfully stand shoulder to shoulder with the people you are meant to serve. Frankly, you haven't done a bad job so far. Do something different. Like marching on Westminster, or a variety of other actions you think might be successful. That'll wake people up - your voters, (take them with you to London or elsewhere), the media and the rest of the country. No time to waste. Coaches, and other forms of transport, need to be organised. Listening to council tax payers and trade unions as part of this process.

Question 1

Councillors, are you going to go down the usual predictable route, telling council tax payers you have difficult choices to make, in order to justify savings/cuts in vital services and jobs, or are you going to do something different?

Question 2

Are you going to stand shoulder to shoulder with your people, the people you represent?

Question 3

If Yes to the second question, how soon are you going to do it? One final thought, regarding belief systems we may hold, 'Whether you think you can or can't, you are right.' Henry Ford. 'I cannot accept not trying.'

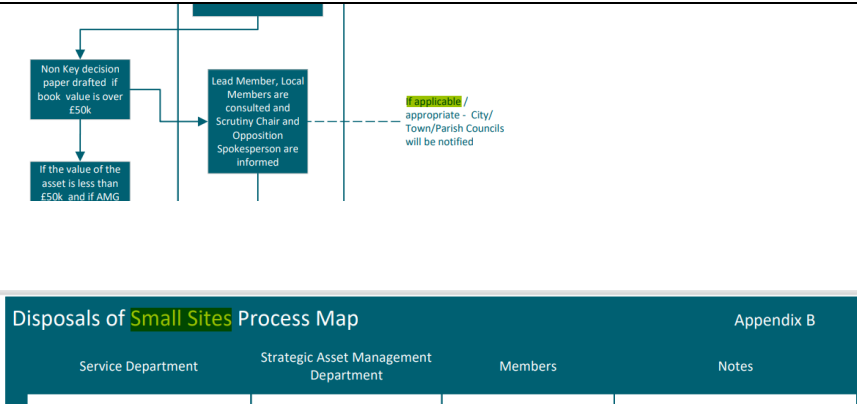
| | |
|-----------------|---|
| | <p>Michael Jordan, successful baseball player. So go for it, I humbly suggest.</p> |
| <p>Response</p> | <p>Responses from the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans:</p> <p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>There are very clear roles and responsibilities on Councillors and Officers. Officers must try to offer members proposals in the Budget that will enable Full Council to set a balanced budget. With the current size of the Budget deficit there are no ‘good’ solutions so it is certain that the proposals will include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • efficiency and other savings. • a transformation plan seeking to rapidly automate processes. • increases in charges, beyond inflation in many cases: a significant programme of asset disposal. • the offer of devolution of services and assets to our town, city and parish councils. • significant service reductions including in some cases the full closure of functions; and • substantial staff reductions. <p>Officers are required to offer potential solutions to Councillors to set a balanced budget. If we cannot do that then we will be in the position of issuing a s114 notice.</p> <p>Councillors are under a legal duty to set a balanced budget every year and not to do so will ensure Government intervention. Until Councillors have seen the package of measures proposed by Officers to balance the budget, I cannot say what the collective response will be. The law is clear however that we cannot decline to set a budget.</p> <p><u>Question 2</u></p> <p>I entirely agree that there are large pressure within the national financing of local government and wider public services that are a significant factor in Somerset Council’s current position.</p> <p>Officers are in regular communication with senior civil servants and after this meeting I will be writing to the Secretary of State highlighting my concerns. I have already briefed the local MPs and between myself, Executive Members and senior officers we have already briefed many of our partners.</p> <p>I and my Executive colleagues are all Somerset residents ourselves. We will always stand shoulder to shoulder with those who have Somerset’s</p> |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| | <p>best interests at heart and I, my colleagues and our partners will continue to lobby for Somerset.</p> <p><u>Question 3</u> Covered above.</p> |
| <p>David Redgewell</p> | <p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>Whilst we agree with the disposal of Council assets we want be to make sure that no public transport infrastructure assets are being put for sales. Such as the county's Bus and coach stations and interchanges facilities including Bridgwater bus and coach station, Wells bus and coach station, Yeovil bus and coach station leased. For a For the Northern Irish property Group. Frome Cork Street coach station, street coach station, Glastonbury coach station and coach parks, Wellington coach park and car park. Minehead coach park, Shepton mallet interchange and Chard interchange, Wincanton memorial hall bus and coach station and car park. the Future Taunton Transport hub former bus and coach station.</p> <p>But money can be made through Cafes Kiosks bike hire e scooter hire and Retail activities at theses transport hubs. Can we assured that no public transport infrastructure is be sold off</p> <p><u>Question 2</u></p> <p>At the Somerset place scrutiny commission meeting Somerset catch the bus campaign and South west transport Network</p> <p>We raised the concern about how theses contracts would work with regards to the public transport Network infrastructure that has been transferred from the former District Councils.</p> <p>So that the council owned Bus and coach station and coach park have proper maintenance contracts</p> <p>With repair contracts to cover the Bus and coach stations at Wells bus and coach station, Yeovil bus and coach station lease from the shopping centre company. Frome Cork Street coach station, Wincanton bus and coach station, Glastonbury coach station and coach park, street coach park Bridgwater bus and coach station Shepton mallet interchange Chard interchange Wellington coach park, Minehead Coach Park Minehead Bank Street Minehead railway station Transport interchange.</p> <p>The county bus stops and shelters. Many of which have been transferred from the former District Councils. With the new Highway contracts, we want assures that theses contracts are</p> |

| | |
|----------|---|
| | <p>Design to cover all the Highway and Transport Department assets not just the footways but castle kerbs, drop kerbs and bus and coach stops and interchanges.</p> <p>Would the council not have been better to taking the service in House like Cormac in Cornwall,</p> <p>With the unity council taking over all the public transport, car parks coach parks, public transport interchanges and Bus and coach stations. We are looking for assurance for bus and coach and public transport users that Somerset council has maintain contracts in place.</p> <p><u>Question 3</u></p> <p>With the county looking to sale assets</p> <p>Which we support the Sale of the portfolio of shops shopping centres, Offices across the county and in Bristol. Including leasing buildings to commercial organisations like Gloucester City Council Bath and North East Somerset council and Bristol city council who lease a lot of buildings in theses 3 city's</p> <p>We are looking for assurance that the</p> <p>Trackbed and Railway infrastructure will not be sold to a Private Railway company including the west Somerset railway company Ltd</p> <p>But remain public ownership under Somerset unitary council to be able to develop a future public transport railway service between Minehead Dunster Blue Ancor Washford, Watchet, Dunsford Beach willton Stogumber Crowcombe Heathfield Bishop Lydeard Norton Fitzwarren and Taunton along with a steam Tourist railway.</p> |
| Response | <p>Responses from:</p> <p><u>Question 1</u> – The Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Mike Rigby & the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke</p> <p>We have no current proposals to dispose of the assets listed by the questioner. We will when resources permit look to exploit the income potential of all Transport Hubs to support transport and council services where additional facilities would provide a better customer experience.</p> <p><u>Question 2</u> – The Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Mike Rigby</p> |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| | <p>The new highways contracts have been designed to accommodate a wider range of Unitary Council services than the previous highways contracts. For instance, the surfacing contract could be utilised for a wider range of council asset needs (such as surfacing car parks or other spaces) and the new assets contract can be used for a wide range of construction activity in the public realm if on a case-by-case basis this offers better value for money than other potential routes to market.</p> <p>The new highway contracts will not meet the maintenance needs of all our assets; for instance, we envisage that specialist contracts will be needed for bus shelter cleaning and maintenance. We need to review the maintenance arrangements as each District had different systems and contracts in place. Some had earmarked budgets, and some undertook ad-hoc maintenance when required. There were no dedicated staff associated with these services, so Transporting Somerset is now taking responsibility for this activity. We need to establish what budget provision there is and then establish a level of service and delivery mechanisms that reflect the budget. There will of course also be facilities that are not our responsibility so we will have to clearly identify these. All this will take a while unfortunately so please bear with us whilst we work this through.</p> <p>Question 3 – The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke</p> <p>There are no proposals to sell the Council's freehold land on which the trackbed and rail infrastructure of the West Somerset Railway is situated. A sale of ancillary car parking land at Bishop's Lydeard was commenced by the former Somerset West and Taunton Council and is currently in progress.</p> |
| Rosa Kell | <p>As part of the new Highway contracts</p> <p>Will the council new Highways and Transport Department contracts Take over the maintenance and cleaning of bus and coach station in Wells.</p> <p>The Transport interchange at Shepton mallet, Glastonbury, street and Frome coach stations.</p> <p>And the bus and coach shelter bus stops and timetables information display formerly owned by Mendip District council.</p> <p>We would also support hypothecation of car and coach parking charges into funding the bus and coach services.</p> <p>And public transport infrastructure.</p> |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Response | <p>Response from the Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Mike Rigby</p> |
| | <p>The new highways contracts have been designed to accommodate a wider range of Unitary Council services than the previous highways contracts. For instance, the surfacing contract could be utilised for a wider range of council asset needs (such as surfacing car parks or other spaces) and the new assets contract can be used for a wide range of construction activity in the public realm if on a case-by-case basis this offers better value for money than other potential routes to market.</p> <p>The new highway contracts will not meet the maintenance needs of all our assets; for instance, we envisage that specialist contracts will be needed for bus shelter cleaning and maintenance. We need to review the maintenance arrangements as each District had different systems and contracts in place. Some had earmarked budgets, and some undertook ad-hoc maintenance when required. There were no dedicated staff associated with these services, so Transporting Somerset is now taking responsibility for this activity. We need to establish what budget provision there is and then establish a level of service and delivery mechanisms that reflect the budget. There will of course also be facilities that are not our responsibility so we will have to clearly identify these. All this will take a while unfortunately so please bear with us whilst we work this through.</p> <p>As part of the current financial review, we are considering the implications of using hypothecated revenue from parking charges to fund transport services and infrastructure.</p> |
| David Mears | <p>How town and parish councils can assist with some of the financial pressures to protect service delivery and the need for Somerset Council to speak with one voice on devolution and the need to invest in devolution and highlight delays with the Bridgwater Pilot.</p> <p>Raise positive areas of agenda item 9 'Policy for the Disposal of Assets' and raise the following concerns/points:</p> <p>Page 121 of the public report pack</p> <p>Delete - "If applicable/appropriate city, town and parish councils will be notified."</p> <p>and replace with "City, town and parish councils will be consulted prior to any decision to dispose of any asset identified as surplus."</p> |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| |  <p>Disposals of Small Sites Process Map Appendix B</p> <p>Service Department Strategic Asset Management Department Members Notes</p> <p>After the heading “Small Sites”</p> <p>Insert “City, town and parish councils will be consulted prior to any decision to dispose of any asset identified as surplus.”</p> |
| <p>Response</p> | <p>Response from the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke</p> <p>Thank you for the helpful question and further emails, which the Executive and relevant officers have considered. Following feedback from a number of Town Clerk colleagues over the past few days, we have amended the original decision report and policy wording to clarify that the Framework for Asset and Service Devolution will be brought forward early in 2024, to provide supplementary guidance on how City, Town and Parsich councils can assist with some of the financial pressures to protect service delivery. The amended Policy document before this committee today clarifies that City, Town and Parish Councils are important strategic partners for this Authority, and how discussions on Asset Disposals will be held with individual local councils as appropriate.</p> |