

Public Agenda Pack



Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Monday, 8 April 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

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

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts
Cllr Richard Wilkins

Cllr Adam Dance
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr Ros Wyke

In attendance:

Cllr Steve Ashton
Cllr David Fothergill
Cllr Faye Purbrick
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene

Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Leigh Redman

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Norman Cavill
Cllr Tom Deakin
Cllr Mark Healey
Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Lucy Trimnell
Cllr David Woan
Cllr Gwil Wren

Cllr Peter Clayton
Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Gill Slocombe
Cllr Martin Wale
Cllr Rosemary Woods

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, praised the Knife Angel, an initiative to prevent knife crime, for coming to Taunton, and expressed his gratitude to the partners involved, including the Barnaby Webber

Foundation, Stand Against Violence, Taunton Town Council, and Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts for her leadership role.

129 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Cllr Oliver Patrick.

130 Minutes from the 6 March 2024 & 12 March 2024 meetings - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 6 March 2024 and the Extraordinary meeting held 12 March 2024, were agreed upon and signed by the Chair.

131 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

Cllr Theo Butt-Philip - Wells City Council
Cllr Adam Dance - South Petherton Parish Council
Cllr Heather Shearer - Street Parish Council
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts - Taunton Town Council
Cllr Richard Wilkins - Curry Rivel Parish Council
Cllr Ros Wyke - Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

132 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Public Questions were received from Mr David Redgewell.

The questions and responses provided are attached to the minutes in Annex A.

133 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 5

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

134 Developing the Approach to Transformation - Future Council - Agenda Item 6

The Leader of the Council, 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: the progress that had been made to further scope, define, and deliver the approach to whole Council transformation; the recognition of the complexity, scale and pace of transformation and change that is required to deliver the Council vision and support financial sustainability; that the report is the first of a regular series of progress reports that will be provided to the Executive; that the approach to whole Council transformation is now encompassed within the Improvement and Transformation Programme, which brings together the activity required to deliver the Council's vision, redesign the organisation, reshape the workforce, transform the services, and deliver savings; that the Programme will comprise five component interrelated parts which will run concurrently over the next 12 months: New Organisational Design, Workforce Programme, Innovation and Change Programme, Partnerships, Devolution and Localities Programme, Savings Delivery Plan; that the overarching transformation approach is key to closing the budget gap for 2024/25 and to support long-term financial stability of the Council; the workforce reduction programme within the transformation portfolio delivers the single largest financial benefit in 2025/26 and is therefore an essential element toward future financial stability; the change programme and delivery plans through devolution work; thanked the Scrutiny Committees for their valuable engagement and feedback into the process and programme.

The Service Director for Strategy and Performance, Sara Cretney, further added to the above points, highlighting: that the improvement in transformation programme further refines the approach to transformation and brings together key threads of activity to provide a whole organisation overview and prioritisation of time and resources; the pace, scale and complexity of the transformation and change that is required to deliver the vision and to support financial sustainability.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the all Scrutiny Committees' feedback and valued continued updates, including the planned cross scrutiny working group with clear terms of reference and a timeline to be defined and communicated; the loss of key talent, organisational memory, knowledge and skills; the systematic processes to capture and support managers to retain and transfer knowledge; the difficult and uncertain times for staff leading into a more efficient Council, including service stability, health and well-being implications of all staff, particularly for those who may have particular circumstances or protected characteristics and the programme of support for staff and managers through change and organisational development; the Voluntary Redundancy process and the need to ensure that staff are not leaving the Council insufficiently resourced; the target operating model, including risks and mitigation, the impact of taking resources out of the organisation and the need to understand and manage the

impacts on services, the interpretation and provision of statutory / non statutory services and service standards both locally and nationally, and the work needed to clearly communicate the clarity of expected services Council wide and to Somerset residents; the impact of non optimum services; the social value implications of the report and the concern about the social value implications of creating a smaller Council; the progress and partnership work on the Somerset Charter; the mitigated rag ratings identified in the report and concern regarding the non-delivery of medium-term financial plan savings; the work taking place to form continuity and consistency of risk reporting Council wide, including setting up a performance, risk and budget monitoring board; the ongoing devolution work with City, Town and Parish Councils; the disposing of assets and the capitalisation directive; the scale, ambition challenge considering local government reorganisation and an election impacts; and Voluntary Redundancy assessment and analysis.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, emphasised the Council's achievements over the past year and expressed his gratitude to staff for their hard work and excellent performance under the most challenging conditions and the Scrutiny Committees for their crucial work, input and feedback.

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

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

- 1. Approved the proposed scope of the Improvement and Transformation Programme.**
- 2. Noted the emerging programme timeline.**
- 3. Noted the progress made since February 2024 and the intention to provide regular update reports to Executive.**

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

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

The Leader of the Council, 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 Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 to 2029/30 and appendices, the Capital Programme Report and Treasury Management Strategy to be considered at Full Council in either April 2024 / May 2024; the key budget concerns and complex budget monitoring and setting; formally thanked the Chair and Members of the Audit Committee in completing and approving the many sets of accounts over the year; the request to Government for the capitalisation direction and government timeframes; the critical and welcome regular budget updates; work to incorporate the LGR savings into the transformation plans and the current and future budget; and the work on strategic risk reporting.

The Executive Director, Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, further added to the above points, highlighting: the financial challenges faced, including making savings, costs increasing more than income and the pace of delivery; summarised the recommendations including savings targets, campaigning for the reform of local government funding and local freedoms and flexibilities, practical changes to how the financial control boards to operate based on the feedback and learning from the past six months; the forecast budget gap for 2025/26; summarised the key strands of the financial strategy and process to prepare and set the budget for 2025/26; the high level medium term financial plan and the underlying key assumptions to be updated September 2024; summary of the key financial achievements, including a new financial system, amalgamating five Councils into one Council in a very quick timetable, closed ten sets of accounts during the year, the assessment against the CIFPA code and action plan; and the assessment as the 151 officer in respect of a Section 114 notice.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the continuation of financial control measures and the progress made in the no PO, no pay process and the need for consistency across the board; grants and funding, including the need for a longer-term settlement across the sector locally and nationally, the inefficiency of the grant application process, highlighting the significant amount of officer time both pre and post bid and estimated resource required; the financial management style, including the budget control, responsibility and understanding across the organisation, how the budget links into plans especially regarding the change to the workforce and pace of transformation, the work to improve risk reporting, pressures across the services, and national funding context and timetables.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, thanked the finance team and the Audit Committee for their hard work over a sustained challenging period.

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

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

- 1. Recommends approval of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2025/26 to 2029/30 and the savings targets for 2025/26 to Council.**
- 2. Recommends that the Council continues with the aim of avoiding a section 114 notice by taking all of the necessary actions and continuing to operate as if one had been issued.**
- 3. Agreed to receive an updated Medium-Term Financial Plan in September 2024 which sets out the latest forecasts of future service costs, income and funding from 2025/26 to 2029/30.**
- 4. Recommends to continue actively campaigning for the reform of funding of councils and greater local freedoms.**
- 5. Approved that the Financial Control Boards continue to operate in 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 3 of the report.**

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

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

136 Asset Rationalisation Programme: Yeovil and West Somerset Customer Facing Accommodation - Agenda Item 8

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

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning & Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke, presented the report, highlighting: the office rationalisation work to bring together the former five Councils' assets and accommodation services; the co production of the report and consultation including Division Members, Parish Councils and Trade Union staff, the due care and attention and work to address consultation comments

and feedback.

The Programme Manager, Property Rationalisation, Strategic Asset Management, Sara Kelly, further added to the above points, highlighting: that post Covid working had seen a dramatic change in the way that offices are used and had resulted in significant under-utilisation of office buildings; that now the five former Councils have merged to form one Somerset Council there is an over-supply of office accommodation; that a property rationalisation programme is underway, with an initial focus on office / customer service sites; the large and complex programme that is being broken down into manageable phases in order to generate capital receipts and revenue savings from reduced running costs; summarised phase one projects identified - moving the existing customer service provision from Petters House, Petters Way, Yeovil into Yeovil Library and moving the services offered at Williton Library and Williton Children's Centre into West Somerset House; and summarised input, feedback and actions following feasibility studies, engagement with staff, members and public consultation.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: public security, protection and mitigating actions in the Yeovil proposal; Yeovil future investment and development plans; West Somerset House proposal including, past under utilisation, business users requirements and support, use as a sustainable, flexible long term facility for West Somerset, the need for increased member and public engagement throughout projects, the multiple impacts on third sector organisations, face to face customer service provision and public meeting space.

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

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

- 1. To relocate services from Petters House Yeovil to Yeovil Library.**
- 2. To relocate services from Williton Childrens Centre, Williton Library and Beckett House to West Somerset House.**
- 3. To delegate authority to Service Director, Strategic Asset Management in consultation with the Lead Member for Economy, Planning and Assets to appoint professional services as required, go to tender, evaluate, and award contracts up to £700k in line with approved capital bids, to make layout changes to Yeovil library and West**

Somerset House to facilitate the co-location of services.

- 4. The case for Appendix B of the report to be regarded as exempt information and 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.

The Leader of the Council thanked all for their work and contribution to the meeting and confirmed the next meeting of the Executive to take place 8 May 2024.

(The meeting ended at 12.25 pm)

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CHAIR

Annex A
Public Questions – Executive 8 April 2024

Question submitted from	Question
<p>David Redgewell</p>	<p><u>Question 1</u></p> <p>With the merger of the District Council and Somerset council, we are still very very concerned about the lack of progress in the setting up of structure to manage the public transport Network and infrastructure. Such as the county bus and coach stations and interchanges, It appears the structure at present is not effective on management of the bus shelters and especially the bus and coach stations Bus priority measures there does not appear to be a bus and coach station in infrastructure manager or a Department head to look after facilities at Bus and coach stations such as Wells bus and coach station Travel centre and toilets, Yeovil bus and coach station and it now closed passengers facilities toilets and waiting room, or repair it shelter, Frome Cork Street coach station, Wincanton bus and coach station facilities now with Wincanton Town Council, Wellington coach station, Glastonbury coach Park, street coach park ,Bridgwater bus and coach station, Interchanges at Shepton mallet. With Wincanton Town Council, and Shepton mallet Town Council taking over passenger facilities and toilets, The appears to be not structure set up to manage these facilities or staff to manage the infrastructure example of Is Yeovil bus and coach station Where Yeovil Town Council do not have Infrastructure management team to maintain a passengers bus and coach station This is very worrying as the Somerset unity Authority has to provide by the 12th June 2024 a submission to the Department for transport funding for its bus services improvement plan money 2024 2025 and bus and coach station and interchanges are part of the submission along with community safety partnership, cctv, policing, Equalities impact for passengers travelling with reduced mobility and partly sighted, so what progress is the council making urgently to set up a structure to manage with the City Town and parish councils to manage it public transport Network infrastructure and save money with staff Duplication and structure that do not work for the passenger and Taxpayers, this of course involves the setting up of new structure urgently. Including redundancy or early retirement.</p> <p><u>Question 2</u></p>

	<p>We welcome the urgent Restructuring of Somerset unity council to make effective service delivery for its stakeholders and residents, This was a difficult time when council merger, we saw this in Dorset Council, Bournemouth Poole and Christchurch, Wiltshire and Swindon Councils and Cornwall Council in South west England, Whilst this is very difficult in the short term to reduce offices, staff and building a streamline organisation should be able to make savings sale property, But must importantly protect front line service by partnership working with city Town and parish councils, the Private sector and community sector So what public consultation and discussion are taking place to transfer assets such as public toilets, bus and coach station terminals building to other council in service level agreements whilst protecting front line services.</p> <p>In the case of Transport, car park fees and bus coach departure fees at bus and coach station should be ring fenced to maintain the bus and coach station facilities or devolved to city Town and parish councils.</p> <p>What is happening to bus and coach station departure and park charges at Somerset bus and coach stations and why is this not being revested in maintenance of bus and coach station like Wells, Yeovil, Bridgwater, and a future Taunton bus and coach transport hub as per the Department for transport provision for bus and coach stations.</p>
<p>Response</p>	<p>Response from the Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Cllr Richard Wilkins:</p> <p>Taking both of your questions together as they are closely aligned, the existing Bus Service Improvement Plan sets out our aspirations for improving passenger facilities, but we have always been clear that these aspirations are subject to funding. Thus far, we have not received the level of fund from Government to deliver all the aspirations and have prioritised investment in bus service provision and reliability. To clarify the position, the submission of an updated Bus Service Improvement Plan in June 2024 does not represent a funding bid to Government on this occasion but will, again set out our ambitions, subject to funding. We are following Government guidance on the submission and will meet the deadline for the submission.</p> <p>As you will be aware, we have needed to make some very difficult decisions in recent months to set a balanced budget. Those decisions included the closure of public toilets because of the cleaning and maintenance costs. Some town, city, and parish councils are stepping in to keep some of these facilities open. Once devolved like this Somerset Council passes control to the other organisation and they would be</p>

managed as best that organisation sees fit – so there isn't a role for us. We have had discussions with Yeovil Town Council but they are not currently in a position to take on the responsibility for the facilities at the town's bus and coach station.

Thank you for your comments regarding the restructuring, it is vital that Somerset Council moves forward to a long term financially sustainable position to deliver the vital services. Bringing together five complex organisations takes time, we are still in the process of aligning some areas because we don't have the resources to do everything at once. I have asked officers to take a detailed look at bus and coach infrastructure over the next year so that we will be in a better position to move forwards from.

In terms of car park fees, you'll note from the decision taken by Executive on 6 Dec 2023 that surplus parking income is being used to support the Taunton park and ride. We will continue to evolve our use of income, where available, to best support the needs of the travelling public.

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