

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the JMR, The Deane House, Taunton, on Monday, 15 July 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

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

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Richard Wilkins

Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts
Cllr Ros Wyke

In attendance:

Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene
Cllr Lucy Trimnell

Cllr David Fothergill
Cllr Fran Smith

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr Suria Aujla
Cllr Andy Hadley
Cllr Dawn Johnson
Cllr Christine Lawrence
Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr Oliver Patrick
Cllr Mike Rigby
Cllr Andy Soughton
Cllr Martin Wale

Cllr Steve Ashton
Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Susannah Hart
Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Gill Slocombe
Cllr Mike Stanton

158 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

No apologies were received.

159 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the Executive held on 5th June 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the chair.

160 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

The following declarations of interest were automatically recorded:

Cllr Theo Butt Philip - Wells City Council
Cllr Heather Shearer -Street Parish Council
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts – Taunton Town Council
Cllr Ros Wyke - Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

161 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no public questions received by the submission deadline.

162 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 5

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

163 Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review Consultation - Agenda Item 6

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, to introduce the report. Cllr Leyshon highlighted that the proposed changes to the scheme only impacted working age adults and explained the timeframe for setting the new scheme and the decision to be made regarding the consultation today.

Richard Sealy, Interim Revenues & Benefits Manager, added to these points: setting out the areas of the schemes that may need to change and the financial impact of those, which are estimates; the legal obligation to carry out a full consultation exercise to make changes to the scheme; the Equalities Impact Assessments that had been undertaken; the benchmarking exercise comparing to other councils, including those in the Local Government Futures ‘family’ group, those that have had to serve a Section 114 notice, and in the geographical area; the potential saving of £12m which may result in significant hardship and be counterproductive if it leads to an increase in arrears; and that the consultation would be coming to Scrutiny – Corporate and Resources in their August meeting.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, questions and points raised included: the unfairness and unsustainability of the council tax system; the potential for hardship among disabled people and carers; the likelihood of achieving the £12m savings; the importance of ensuring the public are aware of Somerset Council’s financial situation; support from central government for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme; ensuring the consultation is fair and good information will be gathered; whether a timetable could be put forward on the single person discount and moratorium; the possible benefits of a campaign to get more people on direct debit payments; the impact of the DWP inflation figure on council tax payments; the potential for government policy on council tax to change; collection rates; the need for a member briefing; the data from the 5 previous councils used in modelling; the implication for Care Leavers.

Cllr Theo Butt Philip proposed an amendment to remove Section 3 – Removing the Disregard of £25 a week from earnings, and Section 5 – Removing the disregards for certain incomes and families with disabilities, which was seconded by Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts. The motion was

carried.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices, debate and an amendment, the Executive approved the consultation exercise on proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2025/26, as set out in Appendix 2, following the removal of Part 3 – Removing the disregard of £25 a week from earnings, and Part 5 – Removing the disregards for certain incomes and families with disabilities from the consultation.

164 Budget Monitoring Report – 2024/25 Emerging Issues & 2023/24 Provisional Outturn - Agenda Item 7

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

Cllr Leyshon highlighted that: the outturn figure is now more favourable; the numbers are still draft and there may be minor amendments; the full outturn papers will be going to Scrutiny – Corporate and Resources in August and Executive Committee in September; the lateness of the outturn papers are due to the exceptional circumstances and the challenge of the new unitary council; the change to Microsoft Dynamics; the need to be mindful of the growing deficit in the Dedicated Schools Grant; the delivery of savings in 23/24 and the current year's position; the emerging issues and the areas that are outside of the Council's control such as interest rates and energy costs.

Jason Vaughan, Executive Director – Resources and Corporate Services, added to these points: the status of auditing the accounts of the predecessor councils; the budget setting process for the unitary authority; how the budget monitoring had progressed throughout the year and the actions taken; the headline figures; the comparison to other upper tier councils on the Dedicated Schools Grant; the reserves position.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: appreciation for the hard work of the staff; the comparison to other councils for Children Social Care overspends; the Dedicated Schools Grant Deficit Management Plan; the predicted overspend of £5.1m in Children's Social Care for this year and the demand-led causes for it, including fostering and residential care; the importance of early help; the Children's transformation programme; the work to make the Adult Social Care budget sustainable and the risk posed by capital drop; the confidence in the figures for the General Fund Reserve; the underspends in some areas masking the overspend in Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care; the progress of the work on the local plan; the importance of reducing debts; the effectiveness on the control boards; the incoming capital receipts and their impact on the budget; the impact of discharge planning on the Adult Social Care budget and how it is being addressed; Adult Social Care remaining a person-centred service.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed.

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

- a. **Noted the 2023/24 draft outturn for services.**
- b. **Noted that the final 2023/24 outturn for Revenue, Capital, and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) will be reported to the Executive at a later meeting.**
- c. **Noted the 2024/25 emerging issues identified at Month 2**
- d. **Agreed to continue to receive monthly budget monitoring report which sets out the forecast outturn for the year with details of any mitigations and actions being taken to address any forecast variances.**
- e. **Agreed to receive a report at a later meeting setting out proposals to change how the control boards and panels operate in light of the experience and learning over the last year.**

165 Treasury Management End of year report - Agenda Item 8

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

Cllr Leyshon highlighted that the report is necessary for CIPFA Code of Practice compliance and that it was considered by the Audit Committee at their meeting. Cllr Leyshon then invited Alan Sanford, Principal Investment Officer, to present the report. Alan Sanford highlighted that the report provides assurance on Treasury Management activities, and that inherited borrowing is in Table 1.37.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the £15m limit in the CCLA Property Fund; the status of the intra-unitary lending and how that is reflected in the figures; the increases and decreases in the figures through placement borrowing.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion the Executive approved the report being in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management and recommends it to Full Council at the next available meeting.

166 Review and Adoption of Productivity plan - Agenda Item 9

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.

Cllr Butt Philip highlighted the ask of DLUHC to create the productivity plan, which outlines the transformation work the authority has completed, how the authority will make the most of digital opportunities, how the authority is can cut down on spending, and any actions the government can take to support the authority.

Cllr Butt Philip then invited Alyn Jones, Executive Director of Strategy, Workforce, and Localities, to present the report. Alyn Jones highlighted: that the productivity plan had followed the guidance; that where possible published information was used to create it; that each step is linked with constitution and governance; that it will form part of the engagement with the new department (MHCLG) and new government.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the importance of the document; the impact of lack of fast broadband on productivity in Somerset, particularly north Somerset; the impact of the phosphates issue on wellbeing and productivity; the lack of long-term funding post-Brexit and the need for long-term UK funding rather than the short-term UK Prosperity funding; the need for clarity on figures relating to Adult Social Care; the importance of housing, infrastructure, and transport; the importance of Early Help and prevention work for families; the need to promote the work the council is already doing such as Early Help, Somerset Independent Living Centres, Reablement; how tackling the housing crisis will improve productivity; the importance of climate change and net zero and the need for national intervention and funding in this area; the importance of highlighting resilience as Somerset is susceptible to flooding; the need to put pressure on national grid around sustainable energy; the need to consider the new Labour government and their manifesto pledges in this document.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed with the amendment of DLUHC to MHCLG.

Following consideration of the officer report, appendices and discussion, the Executive agreed and adopted the plan attached as Appendix A, prior to submission to MHCLG and subsequent publishing on the Council's internet site. Executive delegated authority to the Executive Director for Strategy, Workforce, and Localities, in consultation with the Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources, to make any minor amendments prior to submission.

167 Yeovil devolution programme - Agenda Item 10

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

Cllr Wyke highlighted that this report was focusing on Yeovil as there are a considerable number of assets for discussion, and that this was the first of many papers to come to Executive Committee regarding devolution.

Service Director - Culture, Elizabeth Dawson, proceeded to present the report detailing the service and staff devolution and the identified savings of £500k per annum plus further corporate savings yet to be identified.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, thanked Yeovil Town Council for stepping forward to support their residents and Somerset Council, and expressed

gratitude to other city, town, and parish councils who have stepped forward. Cllr Revans then invited other members present to comment, questions and points raised included: which councillors were the local members for this item; the capacity for resilience and financial stability; the importance of due diligence and ensuring servicing records and maintenance are handed over seamlessly; the provision of support through the transitional period; the importance of comprehensive valuations; the relationship with the Chief Executive of Yeovil Town Council and the work with him to understand the full financial implications; the outstanding internal loan for Westlands; the importance of capturing the agreements and learning for the future; that every town and every asset will be different and the methodical phased town by town approach to devolution; the need to consider services and assets that benefit not just Yeovil residents but wider Somerset and neighbouring counties such as Yeovil Rec; the strong working relationship with Yeovil Town Council and the need to maintain that after devolution; the involvement of South West Heritage Trust; appreciation for all of the hard work both on Somerset Council's part and Yeovil Town Council.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed.

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

- a. Devolve the operational services and staff relating to the following**
 - **Somerset Council assets**
 - **Yeovil Recreation Centre (and Café)**
 - **Yeovil Country Park (and Nine Springs café)**
 - **Westlands Entertainment Venue**
 - **South Somerset Heritage Collection****(the Devolved Services) to Yeovil Town Council, in line with the Council's adopted Asset and Services Devolution Framework from 1st August 2024.**

- b. Transfer existing equipment used by Somerset Council to deliver the Devolved Services which will become surplus to Somerset Council requirements as a result of the devolution to Yeovil Town Council from 1st August 2024, unless they have indicated they do not want it.**

- c. Delegate authority to the Service Director, Strategic Asset Management, in consultation with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets and the Executive Director (Communities) to agree the transfer of or grant of rights over the following land and property assets on appropriate terms as soon as practically possible on or after 1st August 2024, provided the Interim Head of Legal Services is satisfied that all relevant legal requirements have been met:**
 - **Land at Milford Road (freehold transfer)**
 - **Former Monmouth Hall Store (freehold transfer)**
 - **Yeovil Recreation Centre (and Café)**
 - **Yeovil Country Park (and Nine Springs café)**
 - **Westlands Entertainment Venue (sub-lease)**

- **Part of Lufton Depot housing the South Somerset Heritage Collection (lease)**
- d. **Grant such licences to Yeovil Town Council to occupy the land and premises currently used by Somerset Council to deliver the Devolved Services at:**
- **Yeovil Recreation Centre (and Café)**
 - **Yeovil Country Park (and Nine Springs café)**
 - **Westlands Entertainment Venue**
 - **South Somerset Heritage Collection**
- as will enable them to deliver the Devolved Services as if they were the owners of that land and premises.**

168 Asset Rationalisation programme: Taunton office accommodation - Agenda Item 11

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

Service Director – Strategic Asset Management, Oliver Woodhams, presented the report, highlighting: that this is a step on the journey of property rationalisation; the other sites within Taunton to be considered (A Block); the ongoing work around this; the risks, in particular the impact on staff and other users of the building.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: that although the timeline is difficult this is too difficult an opportunity to miss; whether there would be break out space for Deane House when it is used for Committee Meetings; that the ground floor space would be retained for meetings and customer service; the importance of the B Block refurbishment; the parking situation; the importance of signposting for customer services.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to vote on the recommendations with a wording amendment, which were agreed.

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

- 1. Approve the basis for the Council to enter into lease/licence agreements with 2 local partners to take accommodation at Deane House, Taunton as set out in the business case in Appendix A;**
- 2. Delegate authority to the Service Director – Strategic Asset Management and Head of Estates Operations in consultation with the Lead Member for Economy, Planning and Assets to enter into and complete the Lease/Licence Agreements, and coordinate necessary resource to implement the decision;**
- 3. Delegate authority to the Service Director – Strategic Asset Management to authorise expenditure as identified in the**

**business case to remodel B Block at County Hall using a proportion of income from the first year of the licenses;
4. Relocate impacted staff from Deane House to County Hall, implementing revised parking arrangements as agreed via collective consultation with Trade Unions.**

169 Update on Waste - Agenda Item 12

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Dixie Darch, to introduce the report. Cllr Darch highlighted the challenges to the Suez contract and the different options explored.

Service Director – Climate and Sustainability, Kirsty Larkins, then presented the report, detailing the recommendations and the alternative options considered.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: appreciation for the hard work on this; the potential for challenge in the marketplace and where the risk falls in that; the challenge of dealing with a large multinational company; the importance of continuing the good service from the provider; that there are sufficient safeguards in the contract to stop this happening again; the increased penalty for repeated missed collections; learnings that could be applied to the procurement process; the challenge of the national market on waste procurement and whether lobbying can be done; whether the pressure will feed into the Medium Term Financial Strategy; challenges of market regulation in other areas such as children's homes.

Cllr Chilcott declared an interest as her niece works for Suez in another county.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed.

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

- a. that the Council pays SUEZ an additional £3M this financial year, and further payments until the end of the contract as set out in the confidential annex.**
- b. To delegate authority to Head of Legal Services to draw up and complete the legal documents to bring effect to this decision.**
- c. To make changes within the contract to deal with unforeseen circumstances in the Clinical Waste Collection Service**
- d. To obtain protection by increasing the liability cap within the contract.**
- e. To delegate authority to the Chief Executive to sign off the final contract variation.**

(The meeting ended at 13:26)

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CHAIR