

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall,
Taunton TA1 4DY, on Monday, 10 July 2023 at 10.00 am

Present:

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

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Tessa Munt
Cllr Dean Ruddell
Cllr Ros Wyke

Cllr Adam Dance
Cllr Mike Rigby
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

In attendance:

Cllr Tom Deakin
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr David Fothergill
Cllr Lucy Trimnell
Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Cllr Val Keitch
Cllr Oliver Patrick
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene
Cllr Fran Smith
Cllr David Woan
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Andy Sully

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Gill Slocombe
Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr John Hunt
Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Claire Sully
Cllr Dawn Johnson

Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr Helen Kay
Cllr Nicola Clark
Cllr Adam Boyden
Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Rosemary Woods

Apologies were received from Cllr Sarah Dyke.

16 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 7 June 2023 were agreed upon and signed by the Chair.

The Chair paid tribute to Barnaby Webber, a valued member of the cricket community through Bishop's Hull Cricket Club, who tragically died last month, and offered sincere condolences to Barnaby's family and friends.

17 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

SOMERSET COUNCILLOR CITY, TOWN AND/OR PARISH COUNCIL

Cllr Theo Butt Philip - Wells City Council

Cllr Adam Dance - South Petherton Parish Council

Cllr Tom Deakin - Taunton Town Council

Cllr Andy Dingwall - Westonzoyland Parish Council

Cllr Val Keitch - Ilminster Town Council

Cllr Andy Kendall - Yeovil Town Council

Cllr Sue Osborne - Ilminster Town Council

Cllr Mike Rigby - Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council

Cllr Dean Ruddle - Somerton Town Council

Cllr Heather Shearer - Street Parish Council

Cllr Gill Slocombe Bridgwater Town Council

Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts - Taunton Town Council

Cllr Dave Woan - Yeovil Town Council

Cllr Ros Wyke - Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

18 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

The Chair noted that no public questions had been received or submitted, however, at his discretion, approved the online public question from Mr George Hitchens relating to Agenda Item 8 - Mendip Local Plan - variation to order of 16 December 2022.

The Chair invited George Hitchens to address to Committee.

Mr George Hitchens, Parish Councillor Norton St Philip, asked:

- a. Whether windfall permissions in the former Mendip could be counted towards the 505 dwellings - as a case was made for this in the submission of Local Plan Part II and examination
- b. Whether current applications could be considered as part of the 505 site assessments.
- c. Whether the Judge's directions to assess sites against the adopted strategy in Local Plan Parts 1 and 2 and that meant certain sites/areas in the former Mendip could be excluded.

It was also noted that the Council could apply to the Court to amend the Order if circumstances change.

The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Ros Wyke, undertook to provide a written response.

19 Director of Public Health Report - Agenda Item 5

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Public Health, Equalities and Diversity, Cllr Adam Dance, to introduce the report.

The Lead Member for Public Health, Equalities and Diversity, Cllr Adam Dance, introduced the report highlighting; that the 2022/23 annual report of the Executive Director of Public and Population Health covered the impact of Cardiovascular Disease (CVD); the call for a renewed focus on preventing CVD overall, and the inequalities that people experience relating to the disease; and the significant shortfall in public health funding for Somerset.

The Executive Director for Public and Population Health, Professor Trudi Grant, proceeded to present the report highlighting; the statutory duty and opportunity for the Executive Director of Public and Population Health to give an independent and personal view of health and well-being priorities in the County; acknowledgment of the input from colleagues across the health system, Somerset County Cricket Club and the Somerset Cricket Foundation; and the need to develop an environment that is conducive to people leading an active and healthy lifestyle, and make the choices easier to build healthier lifestyle behaviours.

Dr Orla Dunn, Public Health Consultant, presented the report, highlighting; the inspiration of the report presentation and the relevance to a 'good innings in life'; the significant impact of CVD on the health of Somerset population and the significant public health concern of this group of diseases; the challenges in Somerset, including an ageing population, with the above average life expectancy and the inequalities of the population; the factors that influence cardiovascular health; smoking as a risk factor for CVD; the Q risk metric and the ten year risk of heart attack or stroke; the recommendations within the report including, and the need to develop our environment with the purpose of improving health and environmental sustainability, to work with communities to reinvigorate efforts to promote encourage and support people in Somerset to enjoy a healthy lifestyle and all the benefits that it brings, renewed action to meet national challenge to reduce smoking rates to 5% or less by 2030, a system wide focus on finding and supporting those with high blood pressure, finding and sticking to the right treatments, improve data collection and use it to help predict risk of disease and diagnose and intervene early.

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 powerful message and presentation; the impact and importance of the report for the population of Somerset; the engagement and communication plan to residents of Somerset; the challenge of the smoking targets; blood pressure monitor availability; the significant funding challenges faced both nationally and locally; the benefits of a healthy lifestyle in the prevention and the availability and benefits of the active travel scheme; a whole system joined up response and the alternatives to medication.

The Chair, Scrutiny Committee, Adults and Health, Cllr Gill Slocombe, commented that the report had a positive reception by the Committee, with supportive comments, and put forward a suggestion that the presentation should be shared with schools and other areas, to provide a greater understanding of the prevention of CVD.

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

The Executive agreed to note the 2022/23 Annual Public Health Report and support the recommendations to have a greater focus on preventing and addressing cardiovascular disease and reducing its impact on the Somerset population.

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

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

20 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27 - 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 2024/25 budget preparations and proposals had been considered at the Scrutiny Corporate and Resources Committee, 6 July 2023; the budget and performance monitoring changes; including the new software to aid this reporting and the planned work to increase the joined-up working, understanding and communication of performance, budget monitoring and risk understanding, leading to risk management route for reports including Audit Committee and all Scrutiny Committees; the importance of rapid implementation of proposed savings in an ever-changing financial environment, including increased demands, increased inflation, increased interest rates and a hot labour market; that the paper sets out the clear scale, depth and breadth of challenge; the composition and role of the internal MTFP Board; the importance of action to identify significant savings with the need to take decisive action, including the 17 key areas that are the main building blocks of the budget and financial framework.

The Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, further added to the above points, highlighting key points including: the forecast three year budget gap of £98.8m; setting out the size of the financial challenge for the revenue budget, with a need to save £100m over the next three years; pressure areas, including the Housing Revenue Account, Capital, the Dedicated Schools Grant, including the High Needs Block, with statutory override provided by the Government due to end 31 March 2026; the Statement of Accounts for the 2022/23

financial year of the five predecessor councils, the publication dates and the review of reserves.

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 reporting and monitoring of the 17 targeted areas of concern within the report including committee reporting and Member briefings; the national picture and the use of networks to lobby Government to increase awareness of the challenges faced by Local Government; the lack of funding and increasing demand to deliver services; communicating the Council's financial challenges and ambitions to Somerset's residents; the complex financial Local Government picture, both locally and nationally; the number of Councils across the country that have received and are at risk of receiving Section 114 notices; the reporting of reserves and key indicators of the financial direction of travel; and the reporting, monitoring and delivery of identified cost savings for adult social care.

In response, the Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey, summarised the complex situation in that this Council and Councils nationally were spending more year on year in absolute terms, however, due to increased costs, demands and funding that has not kept pace, it has been necessary to dedicate funding to the protective services areas and protecting people's lives, particularly social care. The Chief Executive continued, that this scale of the challenge has limited the Council in the ability to innovate, the capacity to do different and the capacity to work locally to mitigate the financial position, and that if Central Government fails to adequately address the current threat to Local Government finance and services, as they currently operate and exist, there is a risk to the future financial viability of some services, resulting in Local Authorities reaching the point where they only have funds to provide statutory responsibilities. The Chief Executive summarised that this Council's work on prevention and early intervention is essential to make plans quickly and deliver quickly and to lobby Government to focus on the future of Local Government and what it will look like next year and beyond.

The Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, further added to the above points, highlighting that currently there is no comprehensive Government support package for dealing with the forecast financial situation over the next few years.

The Deputy and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, further added to above points commenting on the extraordinary and unique set of circumstances and paid tribute to Council staff for their work through this challenging time.

The Executive approved the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024/25 to 2026/27 and the approach for the medium-term of the following proposals:

- **An early review of 17 key areas that are the main building blocks of the budget and financial framework**
- **A three-year approach and framework for balancing the budget to develop the Service Budget Options**
- **Reviewing and challenging all MTFP assumptions**
- **A review of the capital programme**
- **The criteria for any new scheme;**

And the Executive noted:

- **That the reserves position for the Somerset Council has not yet been completed pending finalisation of all five authorities Statement of Accounts**

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

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

21 Transport and Fleet Policy Decisions - Agenda Item 7

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: that the purpose of the report was to agree on a set of policy principles for Somerset Council to inform the development of the new Local Transport Plan, the overall approach to transport planning development management, consideration of planning proposals and other relevant policy and plans; the opportunity for the Unitary Council to pull key policies together; the intention to achieve a vision led, decide and provide, approach to develop, plan, and deliver a transport strategy which more fully reflects the needs of a largely rural county, and be more responsive to broader priorities; and that the principles are intended to promote active travel, high-quality design, create better places and support the Council's declaration of a climate and ecological emergency.

The Lead Member proceeded to invite the Strategic Manager, Highways and Transport, Mike O'Dowd-Jones and the Assistant Director, Strategic Place and Strategic Planning, Alison Blom-Cooper, to present the report.

The Strategic Manager, Highways and Transport, Mike O'Dowd-Jones and the Assistant Director, Strategic Place and Strategic Planning, Alison Blom-Cooper, proceeded to present the report, highlighting: the draft guiding principles for the planning and transport strategy; the delivery of an all-Member briefing and future Member engagement, stakeholder and public consultation, including attending Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place and a developer forum; and the work to develop an ambitious devolved long term Government funding settlement. The officers proceeded to summarise the draft set of placemaking principles, noting that these were subject to further engagement, analysis and consultation as part of the formal development of those policies before adoption.

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 consideration of all lighting technology; the ambition to electrify the Somerset Council light vehicle fleet, following current trials and additional improvements in technology; the balanced and rounded approach and the learning from other organisations regarding the adoption and operation of fleet vehicles; the existing network of footpaths and the Rights of Way improvement plan; the Bridge repair and replacement programme and budget; the inclusion of Local Community Networks (LCNs) as part of the engagement process; the adoption of alternative fuel options for the Council fleet; parking standards across Somerset and the impact of parking changes understanding and balancing both the carbon and financial impact; the consideration and recognition of the many different facets of Somerset in its urban and rural geography when working through the local plan, infrastructure planning, planning policies and reducing reliance on private vehicles; consideration of highway capacity and sustainable new development proposals; governance and monitoring of the outcomes and actions; the use of section 106 money for public – private partnerships; the integrated transport strategy, including linked bus timetables; the need for a cohesive strategy and to look at cumulative effects regarding development and parking; and the welcome Audit report on Climate Emergency Governance.

In response, the Strategic Manager, Highways and Transport, Mike O'Dowd-Jones, and the Assistant Director, Strategic Place and Strategic Planning, Alison Blom-Cooper, advised the Executive that LCNs will be included in the draft Statement of Community Involvement, which sets out how the Council will consult, and is to be presented to Executive; along with a commitment to share the current stakeholder list with elected Members.

The Associate Lead Member for Localities (LCNs) & Public Health, Cllr Val Keitch,

further added to the above points, reporting that there had been a high level of interest in highways and transport issues at the nine LCN meetings that have taken place.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Executive unanimously agreed to amend recommendation k 'and we will adopt alternative fuels such as hydrogen for larger vehicles' to read and 'we will consider alternative fuels for larger vehicles'.

This was agreed unanimously. The Executive proceeded to vote on the recommendations, as amended, which were also agreed unanimously.

The Executive agreed:

- 1. To endorse and adopt the following set of guiding principles to inform the development of statutory policies and Somerset Council overall approach to transport planning and development planning challenges and opportunities:**
 - a. Reducing carbon emissions will be the key priority for the transport and development plans including adoption of a transport decarbonisation pathway.**
 - b. We will adopt a holistic approach to policy and strategy development, working beyond just transport. We will ensure that all our policies are rural-proofed and will continue to build relationships with public health, education services, adults and children's social care and others within the organisation to deliver co-benefits.**
 - c. We will adopt a vision-led 'decide and provide' or 'vision and validate' approach to new development whereby a strong vision for great places to live with a reduced need to travel is agreed. This will involve co-locating housing and other facilities to create neighbourhoods where the natural first choice is to walk or cycle to access work, education, learning and healthcare etc.**
 - d. We will endorse the vision led approach to street and highway design as part of wider high quality placemaking; and agree the vision and principles as set out in Appendix A for consultation with key stakeholders. Having taken into account comments received authority is given to the Service Directors in conjunction with the Executive Lead Members to adopt the vision and principles as a material planning consideration for the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes.**
 - e. Subject to detailed analysis, priority policy interventions will be**

related to reducing the need to travel and promoting sustainable travel (active travel for shorter distances, e-bikes and micro mobility for slightly longer distances, shared transport, bus, demand responsive transport, and rail for longer distances; and policy interventions such as parking management that aim to reduce demand for travel by private car).

- f. We will expect developers to provide high quality active travel and public transport networks within and accessing new development areas, to ensure new development does not create significant additional congestion, rather than creating additional highway capacity for private car traffic. We will expect developers to implement high-quality sustainable travel plans which include a wide range of measures and incentives to enable active travel.
- g. Increasing highway capacity will only be considered as a last resort and in exceptional circumstances. We will continue to complete highway capacity improvements that are already in the pipeline as funded schemes but it is likely that we will not be seeking Government funding for improvements that increase capacity for private car travel beyond the current pipeline.
- h. We will build on the successful community -led approach to constructing rural multi-user paths between settlements and will co-develop a proposed network for community-based delivery. We will also consider how to create an improved environment for pedestrian movement in more semi-urban, rural locations where the environment can be dominated by high-speed traffic.
- i. We will aim to secure a devolved Government funding package to implement an ambitious sustainable transport programme, building on our current success with Bus Service Improvement Plan funding and Active Travel funding.
- j. We will oversee delivery of a comprehensive charging network for electric vehicles and will appoint a private sector delivery partner to ensure that public funding is only used where necessary to address market failure in a similar way to that adopted for Broadband rollout. EV recommendations are set out in Appendix B.
- k. The Council's own vehicles up to and including 3.1 tonnes GVW and those of our contractors will be electric vehicles as soon as this can be realistically, and cost effectively achieved; and we will consider alternative fuels for larger vehicles at the earliest opportunity in line with the evolution of emerging technology.
- l. We will work with bus operators to agree the most appropriate alternative fuels pathway for public transport operations and support them in implementing this.

- m. We will develop a new policy seeking greater consistency in highway lighting, creating a default preference for part-night lighting, dimming and user activated lighting.**
 - n. We will examine the implications of incorporating explicit requirements for carbon reduction and reduced travel across all the Council's services, including carbon reduction targets within our contracts with suppliers, with a view to implementing changes to our procedures at the earliest opportunity.**
- 2. To consult key stakeholders on the Vision and Principles to Placemaking;**
 - 3. And taking all feedback received into account, the Executive agreed to delegate to the Service Directors for Infrastructure & Transport, and Economy, Employment & Planning in consultation with the Lead Members for Transport & Digital and Economic Development, Planning and Assets the adoption of the Vision and Principles to Placemaking as a material planning consideration.**

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

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

22 Mendip Local Plan - variation to order of 16 December 2022 - Agenda Item 8

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: that the report summarised the Judicial Review of Mendip Local Plan Part II (LPP2), resulting in a court order being made against Mendip District Council on 16th December 2022 and an amendment was noted in the supplemental agenda p12, the date in Appendix 2, Para 5 which should be October 2022 not 2023.

The Monitoring Officer, David Clark, further added to the above points, advising of the necessary urgency and implementation of the report to meet with the clear direction of the High Court to deliver the outlined timetable, additionally he clarified the inclusion of any necessary scrutiny and public consultation in the following delivery process and plans.

The Assistant Director, Strategic Place and Strategic Planning, Alison Blom-Cooper presented the report, highlighting; that following publication of the report, the Judge requested a review to expedite the timetable; the addition of a further recommendation regarding a delegation to officers and the Lead Member to bring forward the date for Regulation 19 publication if feasible. It was further emphasised that the work would be subject to public consultation before being submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

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 reason for the process and the allocation 505 houses; the call for a clear process across the Eastern part of Somerset to meet requirements, and the effect on communities; the deliverable date of the dwellings by 2029; the consideration of unallocated windfall sites and current developer sites; access to the former Mendip District Council reports and papers; and oversight and governance of the process.

In response, the Assistant Director, Strategic Place and Strategic Planning, Alison Blom-Cooper, and the Principal Planning Officer, Andre Sestini, advised of the thorough assessment process required by legislation, including: reasonable alternative options for the delivery of homes; a process of sustainability appraisal; and habitat regulations assessment and that all options suitable, available and deliverable in the time period to be considered, with the use of unallocated windfall sites to be advised on following consultation and legal advice.

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

e. Agreed that delegated authority be granted to the Service Director – Economy, Employment and Planning in consultation with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, to expedite the timetable, if feasible, to bring forward the date for the Regulation 19 publication and submission of the allocations. Agree that any minor changes to the text and the final graphic design of the document are delegated to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Executive Lead Member(s).

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

The Executive agreed:

(a) Confirmed a commitment to commence the Mendip Local Plan Part II

site allocations review specified in the Order to the following timescales

- **To undertake a call for sites limited to the 505 dwellings within 28 days of the amended order, commencing on 24 July 2023 for 6 weeks until 4 September 2023**
 - **To publish a Regulation 18 consultation with proposed allocations by 8 January 2024 (for 6 weeks consultation as required by the Regulations)**
 - **To publish a Regulation 19 statement seeking representations for a 6 week period as required by the regulations by 13 May 2024**
 - **To submit for examination by 1 September 2024.**
- b. Agreed the proposed approach to the review as set out in the report and notes the site allocations review for the Mendip Local Plan will be subject to Member and community consultation;**
- c. Noted the resource and financial implications of the Order and project plan and that further reports will be made to Executive prior to the Regulation 18 consultation on the preferred option for allocation of the additional 505 homes and the Regulation 19 publication prior to submission to the Inspectorate;**
- d. Agreed that delegated authority be given to Service Director – Governance, Democratic and Legal Services to apply to the Court to seek to vary the Court Order should circumstances beyond the Council’s control mean that the timetable set out above cannot be achieved;**
- e. Agreed that delegated authority be granted to the Service Director – Economy, Employment and Planning in consultation with the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, to expedite the timetable, if feasible, to bring forward the date for the Regulation 19 publication and submission of the allocations.**

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

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

23 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 9

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

(The meeting ended at 12.30 pm)

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CHAIR