

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House Taunton TA1 1HE, on Monday, 15 January 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

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

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Richard Wilkins

Cllr Adam Dance
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Ros Wyke

In attendance:

Cllr Steve Ashton
Cllr Hugh Davies
Cllr John Hunt
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene
Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Cllr Alan Bradford
Cllr Tom Deakin
Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Oliver Patrick
Cllr Lucy Trimnell
Cllr David Woan

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Adam Boyden
Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Shane Collins
Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Habib Farbahi
Cllr Dawn Johnson
Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Emily Pearlstone
Cllr Tony Robbins
Cllr Gill Slocombe
Cllr Rosemary Woods

Cllr Norman Cavill
Cllr Nicola Clark
Cllr John Cook-Woodman
Cllr Caroline Ellis
Cllr David Fothergill
Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Faye Purbrick
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr Mike Stanton
Cllr Gwil Wren

A minute silence was held following the sad passing of Cllr Dean Ruddle, formerly Lead Member for Adult Social Care.

The Chair, Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, paid tribute to Cllr Ruddle: Dean was a remarkable advocate for his community, a great colleague, and a superb mate. He brought his business acumen to the role of Lead Member for Adult Social Care since taking on that role in May 2023, but with it he has shown dedication and compassion to those residents of Somerset who are most in need of our support. I know we will all be devastated by this - colleagues, staff, friends, communities - as the news sinks in of his loss. Somerset Council's sincere sympathies go out to Rachael and all of Dean's family as they struggle to cope with this shocking news. Rest in Peace Mr Somerton. You will be so greatly missed.

86 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Cllr Fran Smith and Cllr Val Keitch.

The Chair welcomed Cllr Heather Shearer and Cllr Richard Wilkins in their new appointments to the Executive as Lead Member for Children, Families and Education and Lead Member for Transport and Digital respectively and thanked their predecessors, Cllr Tessa Munt and Cllr Mike Rigby.

Cllr Adam Dance and Cllr Jo Roundell Greene left the meeting at 12.30pm.

The Chair was absent from the Executive meeting from 10.05 – 10.25am, with the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon substituting during this time.

87 Minutes from the Previous Meeting 6 December 2023 - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the Executive meeting held on 6 December 2023 were agreed upon, with the amendment to minute 79: the work to align the work of the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources and the Audit Committee in the Democratic calendar and signed by the Chair.

88 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

89 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

The Chair welcomed public speakers online and meeting attendees representing

Westfield Academy to the John Meikle Room.

Public Questions were received from:

Eva Bryczkowski - 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update

Ray Tostevin - Somerset Acute Based Stroke Reconfiguration proposal.

David Redgewell - 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update

Joanna Stevenson - 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update

Geoff Coles - 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update

Nigel Behan - 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update - Agenda Item 7 - considered under the relevant agenda item

Alan Debenham - 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update - Agenda Item 7 - considered under the relevant agenda item

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

The Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources, Cllr Theo Butt Philip, thanked Bella and Henry for a leaflet handed out at the Executive meeting, detailing how much the Yeovil Recreation Centre meant to them and to the community.

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Cllr Bill Revans, thanked all for taking the time to share concerns and attend the Executive meeting and explained the unprecedented situation of Somerset Council in that heartbreaking decisions will need to be made to deliver a balanced budget at the Full Council 20 February 2024, a legal duty of the Council and that no stone will be left unturned in trying to find solutions. The Leader further explained the saving proposals decision route and the opportunities in which the local communities, partners and organisations could be involved in that decision-making process and work with the Council to find solutions.

90 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 5

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

91 2023/24 General Fund Budget Monitoring Report - Month 7 - End of October 2023 - Agenda Item 6

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

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, introduced the report, highlighting: the new format of budget monitoring report following the introduction of solver working and Microsoft Dynamics; that the report is from the end of October (month 7) with month 9 (Q3) to be considered at 7 February 2024 Executive meeting; the small improvement in the projected overspend due a range of actions and the introduction of the spending control boards; that the report details Directorate budget projections and mitigations; summarised table one of the report and the impact of Adults and Childrens Services budget overspend on the Somerset Council budget compared to the remainder of the Council; the added detail of government and special grants to aid understanding of funding specific parts of the Council's delivery of services.

The Service Director - Finance and Procurement, Nicola Hix, added to the above points, highlighting: the Adult and Children Services forecast overspend, and that the rest of the Council is forecast to be £10.5m underspent; summarised the pressures and mitigations in Adult and Children Services budgets; summarised the current positive effect and value of the spend boards, including reduced payments, further sight and scrutiny of spend, the encouragement across the Council to think differently and the further monitoring and enforcement of the no purchase order, no payment and the work underway with services to ensure compliance.

At the invitation of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, the Executive Director for Adult Social Care, Mel Lock, further provided details for the reasons for the Adult Services overspend, including, the local and national pressure, the residential nursing placements that have increased, the increase in paying for services, and that work continues to mitigate this.

At the invitation of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, the Executive Director for Children, Families and Education, Claire Winter, further detailed the reasons for the Children Services overspend, including the external placements for children in the care system, the impact of a nationally driven market system, costs for children with increasingly complex needs and home to school transport, and highlighted the mitigations currently in place and the significant amount of work taking place to review contracts to reduce costs while making sure that children can still get to school effectively and safely.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the national and local growth in numbers of Children with special educational needs and disabilities, including the

impact of the change in the process and system over a period of time, the increase in required completion of education, health and care (EHC) plans post 2014, the increasing number of children with social, emotional mental health issues and the local and national stark situation, with Somerset slightly above the national average; the savings and delivery associated with Local Government Reorganisation, the unprecedented challenges and the additional savings needed to be found across the Council to create a sustainable organisation; and the current work to revise and redesign the programme to reflect the budget and financial challenges faced by the Council

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

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

a. The forecast overspend of £18.3m (3.7%) for the year and the recovery action being taken and mitigations put in place to address this.

b. The next report to be received by the Executive on Revenue Budget Monitoring will be the Month Nine report in February 2024.

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

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

92 2024/25 Budget and Somerset Council Vision update - Agenda Item 7

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: the very stark and challenging financial position faced by the Council, with the cost of delivering services increasing significantly faster than the income it receives, particularly in relation to social care; the unprecedented position and that the funding mechanism for local government is broken and needs urgent reform nationally; the need to set a balanced budget and the potential consequences of not doing so; Council tax base rates, charges, referendum limits and comparisons with local Councils; that the Council's finances have been significantly impacted by national factors outside of its control, including the impact of the full rebase of the Adult Services budget; Covid 19 pandemic, high inflation and interest rates, energy cost increase, cessation of Government Covid 19

grants, increase in homelessness, nutrient neutrality situation; the impact of the cost of social care to non-statutory services; the one somerset business case savings and the changed times and greater challenges; the consideration of the report, including the list of pressures and savings and the need for the Council to take difficult decisions; High Needs Block and the impact of what will happen when the statutory override ends where Somerset is facing a deficit of up to £45m by the end of this financial year; and that this is a national problem that requires a national solution, the need for one voice to look for a fairer funding mechanism so that we can continue to maximise opportunities in Somerset while taking care of those most in need of support.

The Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services, Jason Vaughan, added to the above points, highlighting: that the report updates Executive on the latest budget position and will form the basis of the budget consultation with the Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee (1 February 2024); that the Scrutiny Committee consultation response will inform the budget report to 7 February 2024 Executive which has the responsibility for recommending the 2024/25 budget to Council on 20 February 2024; the extremely complex budget and unique circumstances affecting the budget, including high inflation and interest rates, the financial settlement, the reduction in Government grants and funding, low Council tax and the impact on the income and Adult Social Care precept and that Somerset Council's income is not enough to cover the increase in costs; the positive impacts of the actions taken by Somerset Council on the forecast overspend - £26.8 million in month 3 being reduced down to £18.3m at month 7; the work on the medium-term financial plan and summarised the changes to the budget, pressures and savings, making clear that saving options had been put forward by officers on the basis of trying to avoid section 114, identifying any savings that could be delivered for the next financial year; summarised the reserves position; the significant impact of the repayment of High Needs Block and Dedicated school Grants and the need for a national solution; the three meetings with Department for Levelling UP, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) and the application made for a capitalisation direction, the next steps in finalising the budget proposals, including the consultation and engagement process.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the DLUHC decision regarding rural services delivery grant and the services grant; the helpful detail of table one, page 143 of the agenda report pack in understanding the Council core spending power, and that most of the money is generated within Somerset; Council Tax, including the low tax base, rates, national and local comparators, the cumulative impact of the council tax freeze, communication with the Government from Somerset Council and the Government mandated scheme for those of state pension age; the financial and

funding decisions subject to Central Government control and the limits Somerset Council on making decisions for a sustainable future; the untenable situation of the repayment high needs block overspend and SEND funding, including lobbying Government and the recognised national situation; the officer proposed savings proposals within appendix 7 of the report, including working with partners for solutions, the timings and start of the savings, Yeovil Recreation Centre, including grants and working with Yeovil Town Council, the potential close of five household waste recycling sites or centres, extension of opening hours and the Council statutory requirements, the RNLI and concerns around lifeguard coverage and options to work with partners; CCTV provision, partnership models and potential financial contribution and consultation; the number of jobs at risk, the resilience and capacity and resizing of the Council and equality impact assessments, communication and engagement with City, Town and Parish Councils, including the rurality and diversity of communities of Somerset, precepting, protecting services, the importance of local knowledge, working in partnerships, Somerset Council link officers and the response to asset devolution, finance and social consequences of not closing parks at night, particularly Vivary Park, the exploration of options and solutions not about withdrawing the service but withdrawing the funding; the complexities of asset ownership; the business case for a sustainable Somerset next steps, including the scope and development of core components for assurance to be considered at the 7 February 2024 Executive meeting; the timescales and Government correspondence in setting a balanced budget without issuing a Section 114 notice; the timing of the budget, the full year effect Section 25 Statement from the Section 151 Officer on the robustness of the budget proposals and adequacy of reserves will be a separate report to the 20 February 2024 Council; the reduction in highway services and the Highway Steward programme option; the budget consultation results and availability for Scrutiny Committee and Full Council review.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, emphasised that the list of proposed savings is not a final or definitive list of options, that there is still more work to do and there would be no decisions made today. The Leader further added that through openness Somerset Council can have conversations with communities and consider and explore all points when the budget is proposed through the Democratic process to Council.

The Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey, clarified that the Council is not proposing to shut down the Yeovil Recreation Centre, but that the Council cannot afford to fund it anymore, and advised of conversations currently taking place with many local partners and local residents for alternative solutions.

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

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

- a. Recognised that Council Tax in Somerset is low compared to other similar councils due to historical factors and formally requests from DLUHC the option of allowing an increase in Council Tax by an additional 5%, 9.99% in total, to £1,810.48 for the Somerset Council proportion of a Band D charge in order to set the 2024/25 budget.**
- b. To consult the Corporate & Resources Scrutiny Committee on the latest 2024/25 budget proposals including the savings proposals and Council Tax increases at their meeting on 01 February 2024 and receive their feedback at the next Executive meeting on 07 February 2024.**
- c. To receive the business case for the creation of a sustainable Somerset Council through 're-sizing' of the council and creating a sustainable workforce transformation programme, including the estimated costs and saving from this at the next Executive meeting on 07 February 2024.**
- d. Noted that the Section 25 Statement from the Section 151 Officer on the robustness of the budget proposals and adequacy of reserves will be a separate report to the 20 February 2024 Council.**

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

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

93 Asset and Service Devolution Framework - Agenda Item 8

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.

Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources, Cllr Theo Butt Philip, introduced the report highlighting: the importance of the devolution framework and the Councils commitment to work with communities to ensure increased local influence on assets and service devolution and that the Framework outlines the principles that the Council will work to, to support and achieve devolution where appropriate to do so; that by following the steps in the framework, Somerset Council are setting out principles and governance for devolution, helping to support continued service provision at a level appropriate for each Community in a controlled and transparent way; that the work to develop the framework began pre-

Vesting Day and has continued in Somerset Council through a cross service working group and that the Council has had ongoing engagement with the City, Town and Parish Council sector about devolution and this has informed the proposed approach and co production; the continued work with Somerset communities to ensure awareness of evolution and to facilitate influence, contribution and participation for taking on services and assets to the benefit of the local community; the financial emergency and the importance to work swiftly with our community leaders in the short term to resolve immediate issues; the significant work underway across the Council to develop a clear programme of devolution; and the work of the partnership and localities team on the development of wider devolution programme with input and information from Council services and partners.

The Service Director - Partnerships and Localities, Sara Skirton, further added to the above points, highlighting; the work, on the framework pre vesting day the input and feedback received from partner organisations; the careful consideration given to whether the draft Framework was still relevant and likely to fit for purpose in the current context, acknowledging the financial emergency and the importance to be agile and proportionate in discussions regarding service devolution; Noting the significant work that has gone into the development of the Framework, with input from subject matter experts from a range of services and stakeholders, along with the need to ensure that devolution activity is well managed; that the Corporate and Resources Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Devolution Framework on 5 December 2023, with discussion and comments focused on the level of information. The city, town and parishes were waiting for or expecting to be able to decide what they could support with and the ongoing work.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: sustained quality of services, the expectation for a process, discussion and collaboration to ensure resilience and sustainability of devolved services including the ability of smaller parishes to respond and what that might mean for equality of service provision across Somerset; contribution, management and funding of large facilities used by multiple areas, including shorter and longer term need and the asset disposal policy to be taken into consideration within the devolution discussion. the devolution concerns of smaller Parish Councils and the potential to group together for funding and shared services and how the Council can aid in facilitating discussion of this; the importance of volunteers in the sector; and the variety of approach to devolution from City, Town and Parish Councils and potential changes to the approach once detailed figures are available, and that devolution of services and assets is not a one size fits all model.

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

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

- a. Considered the overall approach to devolution set out in the report which reflects the draft Asset and Service Devolution Framework.**
- b. Agreed to adopt the draft Asset and Service Devolution Framework.**

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

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

94 Sign off of Equality Objectives and Action Plan from EFLG Peer Challenge - Agenda Item 9

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, expressed his support for the people impacted by the recent vandalism to the rainbow path in Taunton and the racist graffiti in Taunton and Yeovil. The Leader of the Council invited the Executive Director – Strategy, Workforce and Localities, Alyn Jones to introduce the report.

The Executive Director – Strategy, Workforce and Localities, Alyn Jones, proceeded to introduce the report, highlighting: that the report provided an update on the findings and the planned actions in response to the LGA Peer Challenge report, including the equality framework for local government peer challenge and an update on the Disability Confident Leader Assessment and Internal Race Audit; the work will support the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion delivery work for residents, communities and staff by developing and improving areas identified as requiring further development.

The Equalities and Risk Manager, Angela Farmer, highlighted: she summarised the current position of three specific pieces of work: Disability Confident Leader Assessment, Internal Race Audit and Equality Framework for Local Government Peer Challenge; that the Council has taken the opportunity to develop a new set of Equality Objectives to meet requirements under the Equality Act 2010. She summarised the draft objectives and the limited consultation response; the initial 6 objectives and to that to reflect the transition and transformation that will occur over the next two years for the Council a new set of objectives to be created every 2 years instead of 4 years; that 6 initial objectives were created for consultation, based on data,

research, and past objectives, that the consultation had been undertaken at a challenging limited response; the learning taken from this consultation to develop more creative approaches when the next set of objectives need to be created in 2025; summarised the recommended 4 objectives, noting that further work will need to be undertaken to develop the actions to deliver the objectives from April 2024 and that a further report will be made to Executive when the actions have been developed and agreed by relevant services.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included: the size and capacity of the team; support for the report; the consultation feedback, including the timing and planned work with VCFSE colleagues to improve feedback; equality impact assessments and the work of the assurance group to ensure the savings options being considered are deliverable.

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

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

- a. **The Action Plan in response to the LGA Peer Challenge Report.**
- b. **The 4 Equality Objectives that will take effect from April 2024, noting that further work will need to be undertaken to develop the actions to deliver the objectives from April 2024 and that a further report will be made to Executive when the actions have been developed and agreed by relevant services.**
- c. **To note the progress that has been made on the Race Audit.**
- d. **To note that the Disability Confident Leader assessment will be completed by the end of January 2024 with external validation being completed by April 2024.**

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

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

95 Somerset Strategic Migration Board - Agenda Item 10

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, introduced the report; highlighting the increasing number of displaced people because of travels in other parts of the world

that are seeking Refuge in this country and the commitment made to support people who are in that position; that the Somerset Migration Board will be responsible for leading Somerset's multi-agency welcome and response to those who have been globally displaced and find themselves living in Somerset.

The Service Director – Housing, Chris Brown, further added to the above points, highlighting; the Somerset Strategic Migration Board is to be a forward thinking, strategic framework for Somerset's response to Government on migration coordinating a multi agency response as one voice in the Somerset area.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, there were no questions and points raised.

Having been duly proposed by the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon and seconded by the Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Cllr Heather Shearer, the Executive unanimously agreed to delete amend recommendation b 'To nominate up to 2 members to sit on this Board' to:

'To delegate to the Monitoring Officer to confirm the 2nd Member to sit on this Board, and to include this in the next outside bodies, internal and external report'.

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

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

- a. The establishment of the Somerset Strategic Migration Board as a strategic internal partnership body with member representation and endorsed the Terms of Reference.**
- b. To delegate to the Monitoring Officer to confirm the 2nd Member to sit on this Board, and to include this in the next outside bodies, internal and external report.**
- c. To nominate Cllr Fran Smith, Associate Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Housing, to fulfil the role of Chair.**

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

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

96 Decision to award contracts for Early Help and Prevention Services in Somerset - Agenda Item 11

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, introduced the report and invited the Executive Director – Adult Social Care, Mel Lock to present the report.

The Executive Director – Adult Social Care, Mel Lock, proceeded to present the report, highlighting: that the report included the conclusion and recommendations from the procurement process to award contracts for early help and prevention services in Somerset due to start 1 April 2024; summarised the review and co design of the service, including engagement with health colleagues, social care providers, voluntary sector and use the service; summarised the service aims, delivery and support; summarised the benefits and advantages of provision through a single provider; We need to ensure a continued supply of high-quality early help and prevention services for Somerset’s communities

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from other Members present, questions and points raised included; the importance of early help support to keep people independent and resilient; and the support for the service and benefit to the Somerset community and the welcome prevention work.

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 a contract to the supplier named in Tender Evaluation Report Confidential Appendix B to provide the following:

Lot 1 – Connector/Navigator Service –

The contract will be for a four-year period with the opportunity for extensions.

Lot 2 – Somerset Carers Support Service.

This contract is jointly commissioned with NHS Somerset. The contract will be for a four-year period with the opportunity for extensions.

b. Agreed to grant a delegation to the Executive Director for Adult Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Adult Services to agree annual extensions to the initial 4-year contract up to a maximum of 4 further years.

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.

(The meeting ended at 2.00 pm)

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CHAIR