

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Wednesday, 29 May 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Bob Filmer (Chair)

Cllr Henry Hobhouse (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Nick Cottle

Cllr Tony Lock

Cllr Martin Lovell

Cllr Diogo Rodrigues

Cllr Peter Seib

Cllr Andy Soughton

Cllr Simon Coles

Cllr Dawn Johnson

Cllr Sue Osborne

In attendance:

Cllr Liz Leyshon

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Norman Cavill

Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Cllr Andy Kendall

Cllr Marcus Kravis

Cllr Leigh Redman

Cllr Sarah Wakefield

8 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors as follows:

Councillor Andy Soughton – substituted by Councillor Simon Coles

Councillor Lucy Trimnell – substituted by Councillor Sue Osborne

Councillor Mike Murphy – substituted by Councillor Dawn Johnson

Councillor Philip Ham and Councillor Brian Smedley (no substitutes)

9 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

There were no additional declarations of Interest.

10 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 3

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate and Resources held on 25 April 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

11 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

No members of the public had registered to speak.

12 Forward Plan 2024/25 - Agenda Item 5

Members were informed that there were 5 items scheduled for the meeting on 19 June 2024 and items were being added to the July meeting.

Members had no comments to make on either the Forward Plan for this committee or the Executive Committee Forward Plan.

13 Gravity Update - Delivering Economic Growth Stage 2) - Agenda Item 6

Mickey Green and Paul Hickson joined the meeting to present the update report on the Gravity Project. The Financial Governance proposals were detailed within the appendix which would then go to the Audit committee and onto Full Council and would incorporate any comments made by the committees.

The committee were informed that this was the third stage of the decision making process for the delivery of the Gravity Enterprise Zone and the proposed investment in the site and Council's approach to managing and minimising the risks associated with the project. Also attached to the report was the proposed Gravity Locality Investment Plan which sets out the vision, rationale and benefits from the

investment for the site, the local area and wider Somerset; it also includes the investment needed to deliver the facility and long lasting benefits from the investment that will also attract further investment onto the wider site.

It was noted that it was hoped that the letter from the Government should arrive shortly with confirmation that the grant had been secured and for an extension to the enterprise zone designation as both were necessary for this project to succeed.

During discussion, the following comments/questions were responded to by officers: It was hoped that the Election would not affect the project nor the timetable that the Council and partners were working towards.

Although there were no solar panels and factory alignments confirmed within the Investment Plan, it was stated that the Local Development Order would have had conditions that covered environmental and climate change requirements.

Assurance was sought on the completion of the Dunball Roundabout before any further delays impede the project

There were a number of forums being set up, these included community forums involving both members and local community/parishes and will be reported back to the Executive

In response to a query in respect of risk management, it was confirmed that any major external projects would have tailored risk management and would be taken to the audit committee and there was new software being used.

The Chair thanked the officers in attendance for the update and looked forward to receiving the next update in the project.

14 Improvement and Transformation Programme - Agenda Item 7

Following presentation of the report by the officers, it was noted that risk is classified as high and that is reflected within the risk register. During discussions on this area, members were informed that if a Corporate Risk, it was tightly controlled through the Executive Leadership Team and other Boards, Monitoring was controlled and if any risks were highlighted, they would be added to the timelines.

Workforce Programme – the committee noted that Service Managers had proposed structures for their areas, and these had been included in the redesign proposals for the overall Council structure. By July it was planned that the rest of the structure to Level 6 would be out for consultation.

An update to the Target Operating Model to be issued in due course. It was noted that the Voluntary Redundancy scheme only allowed redundancies that was considered would have no impact on service delivery, it was ultimately down to the Chief Executive for responsibility and accountability for the Council to provide services.

The Chair thanked the officers for attending the committee and looked forward to further updates on a regular basis.

15 Treasury Management update for 2024/25 - Agenda Item 8

Anton Sweet presented his report to the committee explaining that a Revised Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2024/25 would need to be approved due to the Gravity project now significantly advanced to include within statement due to the implications of the proposed borrowing.

During discussion, it was confirmed to the committee that the support from Government would cover the costs of the additional borrowing until the business rates are generated from the Gravity site and that would support the costs in the long term. If the support from Government was not received then the whole project would be compromised. It was noted that borrowing could be affected by the Election and inflation rates.

In response to Councillor Coles asking about PFI's, it was confirmed that a written response will be distributed explaining the difference in PFI numbers; it was also explained to Councillor Chilcott the issues with bench marking and this explanation was included within the attached appendix.

The chair thanked the officer for their attendance at the meeting and the information provided.

16 Property Rationalisation Update - Agenda Item 9

The Service Manager Strategic Asset Management presented his report explaining that as part of the property rationalisation programme is was considering an opportunity to lease or licence the first and second floors of Deane House. It was considered that as there were two buildings within Taunton, this proposal would bring all Taunton based staff into one building at County Hall and would also generate income for the Council utilising an underused office building and reduce running costs. It was noted that the ground floor would not be affected and the customer services reception would remain along with some office space for those staff who need to work from the building to deliver services or meet with customers. The proposal has been subject to a collective consultation process and will complete at the end of May 2024. There were change agents within each service to bring forward any issues for consideration and the unions were fully involved in the process.

The committee welcomed the proposal and it was confirmed that further work was

being undertaken in respect of meeting rooms and the remodelling of B block to meet the needs of the Council.

The Chair thanked the officers for the update and welcomed further updates in due course.

(The meeting ended at 12.45 pm)

.....

CHAIR