

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Monday, 7 October 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

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

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

Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Sarah Wakefield

In attendance:

Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Fran Smith
Cllr David Woan

Cllr David Fothergill
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr Lucy Trimnell

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Steve Ashton
Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Mark Healey
Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Gill Slocombe
Cllr Gwil Wren

Cllr Suria Aujla
Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Val Keitch
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Claire Sully

28 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors Mike Rigby and Graham Oakes.

29 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

Resolved that the minutes of the Executive held on 2nd September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

30 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

31 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Public questions were received from:

- Daniel Mumby
- Brenda Orr

The questions and responses provided are attached in Annexe A.

32 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 5

The Executive noted the forward plan.

33 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report - Month 4 - Agenda Item 6

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

Cllr Leyshon highlighted that the Month 3 report gave the council room to breathe, but this month's report has shown deterioration and that there is no room for complacency.

Cllr Leyshon then handed over to Nicola Hix, Service Director for Finance and Procurement, who explained the forecast overspend as of 31st July 2024 and the work needed to mitigate, and then went through each service area in detail and highlighted the comments from Scrutiny.

Maria Christofi, Interim Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer), also highlighted that the £35m of savings shown in green still need to be delivered.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present. Questions and points raised included: good commissioning work ongoing in Adults to keep cost of care down; the increasing number of children coming into care, particularly at age 10-15 and with additional difficulties such as exposure to serious violence and exploitation; the need for more foster carers to reduce spend on residential care; the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit; the education for life strategy; the pressures in the Communities directorate including Open Spaced and the Coroners Service; that this is a national problem that requires a national solution; chronic and urgent funding issues; the things that are within and outside of the council's control; the 'Barnet graph of doom'; the possibility of savings relating to hospital discharge planning; the use of reserves and capitalisation in the budget; the need to mitigate overspends; that every council has different factors impacting their budget; overspends relating to

external placements in Children's Social Care; the Joint Targeted Area Inspection; the need to support groups that work with youth in Somerset and the potential for LCNs to be involved in this work; the need to work collectively and have a one council approach to the financial challenges.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussion and highlighted the shortage of foster carers and the need for them in Somerset. The committee proceeded to vote on the recommendations, which were agreed unanimously.

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

- a) **To note the Service Directorate Revenue forecast overspend of £8.4m for the year.**
- b) **To note the total Council Revenue forecast overspend of £2.3m for the year.**

34 Medium Term Financial Plan and Strategy 2025/26 to 2029/30 update - Agenda Item 7

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

Cllr Leyshon highlighted that: the MTFS has been extended to 2029/2030; the assumptions in that have been updated following budget setting; the ongoing work to create a viable and stable council; the list of actions taken so far.

Cllr Leyshon then handed over to Maria Christofi, Interim Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer), who detailed: the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit; the MTFP/S would be returning to the committee twice a year including as part of budget setting in February; the budget gap was predicted to be £104m in 2025/26 and would rise in four years to £199m; the financial challenges facing the council and that the 2024/25 budget had been set using reserves that need to be replenished; the background information used to inform the financial strategy; the challenge of planning financially based on one year funding; that the forecast overspend, cost of living crisis, and demographic changes have been taken into account; the three scenarios presented in the report; the reprofiling of the capital programme.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present. Questions and points raised included: the potential impact of an increase in living wage; the impact of the sale of commercial investment properties; the inflation figures used for each scenario; the impact of the pay award and pay inflation; the status of reserves; the work ongoing to avoid a Section 114 notice; the need for proposals to be brought to Scrutiny Committees; the need for the council to work together to progress savings.

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

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

- **To approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2025/26 to 2029/30.**
- **To agree that the Council continues with the aim of avoiding section 114 notice by taking all of the necessary actions and continuing to operate as if one had been issued.**

35 HRA Sewage Treatment Tank Replacements using MHCLG Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund Grant - Agenda Item 8

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture and Equalities and Diversity, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, to introduce the item.

Cllr Smith-Roberts highlighted that the HRA in North and West managed 20 sewage treatment plants and that £1m of funding would be taken from MHCLG and used to upgrade those plants to reduce the amount of phosphates.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present. Questions and points raised included: how the phosphate mitigation and credits created would be accounted for and who was responsible for using them; the timeframe for the credits to be passed on; the timescale for the commitment of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund (LNMF) grant; whether more funding could be bid for; the market for phosphate credits and transparency about how we use them; the level of responsibility for the sewage treatment plants and the number of the properties they support that are privately owned; whether it was possible to charge properties that benefit.

There was a drafting amendment to the recommendations due to the need for this item to be considered by Full Council for addition to the Capital Programme.

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

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

- **To agree to the program of Package Sewage Treatment Plants replacements where costs for the program are equal to or below the value of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund funding received.**
- **To recommend for approval by Full Council a supplementary budget of £1m to the HRA Capital Programme, that will be fully funded by the MHCLG Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund.**

36 Annual Approval as Sole Shareholder of Homes in Sedgemoor 2024/25 - Agenda Item 9

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture and, Equalities and Diversity, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, to introduce the item.

Cllr Smith-Roberts explained that the committee were asked to approve the accounts for the 23/24 period.

Cllr Smith-Roberts then handed over to Chris Hall, Executive Director – Community Services, who explained that the paper comes on an annual basis to the council as its sole shareholder, that the financial position is strong and creates stability and that there are no immediate risks identified.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present. Questions and points raised included: whether this paper should have come to audit or scrutiny; that Homes in Sedgemoor has its own process as the council is the shareholder.

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

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

- a) To agree the approval of the Homes in Sedgemoor annual company accounts for 2023/24.**
- b) To agree that the auditors, Bishop Fleming LLP, are re-appointed, in accordance with section 485 of the Companies Act 2006, for the 2024/25 audit of Homes in Sedgemoor.**

(The meeting ended at 12.10 pm)

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CHAIR