

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Monday, 4 November 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

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

Cllr Theo Butt Philip
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Sarah Wakefield

Cllr Mike Rigby
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts
Cllr Richard Wilkins

In attendance:

Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr David Woan

Cllr Caroline Ellis
Cllr Lucy Trimnell
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Graham Oakes
Cllr Norman Cavill
Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Faye Purbrick
Cllr Fran Smith
Cllr Martin Wale
Cllr Gwil Wren

Cllr Suria Aujla
Cllr Nicola Clark
Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Claire Sully
Cllr Rosemary Woods

37 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillor Graham Oakes (in attendance online).

38 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

Resolved that the minutes of the Executive held on 7 October 2024 be confirmed as a correct record subject to an amendment to the attendance to include Cllr Jo Roundell Greene.

39 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

The following declarations of interest were automatically recorded:

Cllr Theo Butt Philip – Wells City Council
Cllr Graham Oakes – Yeovil Town Council / Yeovil Without Parish council
Cllr Mike Rigby – Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council
Cllr Heather Shearer – Street Parish Council
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts – Taunton Town Council
Cllr Richard Wilkins – Curry Rivel Parish Council

40 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Public questions were received from Cllr Caroline Ellis.

The questions and responses provided are attached in Annexe A.

41 Executive Forward Plan - Agenda Item 5

The Executive noted the Forward Plan.

42 Somerset Council Improvement and Transformation Programme – November Update - Agenda Item 6

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources, and Localities, Cllr Theo Butt Philip to introduce the report. Cllr Butt Philip drew Members attention to the dashboard and the project risks.

Cllr Butt Philip proceeded to hand over to Alyn Jones, Executive Director Strategy Transformation and Resource, who highlighted the regular updates, the restructuring proposals as part of staff consultation, and the inclusion of the whole risk register.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: risks to community safety due to reduced service levels; the need to ensure there is enough support in key areas such as Planning, which uses locums and is struggling to recruit and retain; the challenge of mitigating risks with such a significant change; the impact on staff morale; KPIs and current pressure areas; the potential for further work once the new structure is in place; the details of the indicators within the monthly dashboard; the importance of IT resource for transformation; the positive impact transformation has had in Adults Services with Newton Europe; the high risk of the programme and the confidence levels in mitigations; whether people are choosing to leave the organisation; the timing of reports with the fast-moving nature of the programme; the possible interdependencies of risks and cumulative impacts; whether the Council will have the capacity to meet their four priorities; the fifth priority – ‘an efficient, effective council’.

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 note the latest progress update report including:

- **Progress made in the month from 12 September to 11 October, including the product and milestone for delivery contained within Appendix A.**
- **The current assessment of programme risks, which includes the programme risks that have a score of 16 or higher and that might occur during the change process, and the status of actions to reduce these.**

43 2024/25 General Fund Revenue Budget Monitoring Report - Month 5 - Agenda Item 7

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Deputy Leader and the Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, to introduce the report. She highlighted that there is an improved position compared to the previous month but still requires the corporate contingency to project an underspend at the end of the year, and the pressures within the Children's Services budget, including the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) deficit.

Cllr Leyshon proceeded to hand over to Nicola Hix, Service Director Finance and Procurement, who detailed the main reasons for the decrease in overspend, including: the improved position in the learning disability and leisure budgets; vacancies in Workforce and Localities; an underspend in ICT; an unbudgeted income that had been identified. She explained the progress towards achieving the savings and the savings that are at risk and effort to identify alternative savings.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: the ongoing work to reduce placement costs in Children's Social Care and the importance of delivering Homes and Horizons; that reducing school exclusions is a protection measure for children's life chances; the cost savings created by the seven operating Homes and Horizons and the progress towards further homes being delivered; the impact of the increase in employers costs as a result of the Autumn Budget on the cost of providing residential and nursing care; whether provision of special schools and specialist places at mainstream schools could be increased and the need for central government funding to do so; the challenge of funding school places for children who have or may have SEND; whether the overspend in Children's services will increase further; the overspend in Places and mitigations in place; the increase in children coming into care, particularly in the 10-15 age range; the overspend in Waste services and mitigations.

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:

- a) **Note the Service Directorate Revenue forecast overspend of £5.324m for the year, shown in Table 1.**
- b) **Agree that mitigating actions are to be identified and implemented to pull back the forecast overspend in Service Directorates on an ongoing basis by outturn.**
- c) **Note the total Council Revenue forecast underspend of £0.736m for the year, due to contingency being released into the forecast outturn, shown in Table 1.**
- d) **Note the progress and delivery of the approved savings programme as set out in Table 2.**
- e) **Note the in-year overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant of £7.509m, an increase of £2.100m from Month 4. Further details in Appendix B.**
- f) **Note the total forecast Dedicated Schools Grant year-end deficit of £61.780m. Further details in Appendix B.**
- g) **Agree that the council continues with the aim of avoiding a Section 114 notice by taking all of the necessary actions and continuing to operate as if one had been issued.**

44 Treasury Management Mid Year Report 2024-25 - Agenda Item 8

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Deputy Leader and the Lead Member for Finance, Procurement and Performance, Cllr Liz Leyshon, to introduce the report. Cllr Leyshon explained why the paper had been amended with a supplement and highlighted that it was the mid-year review of the Council's treasury activities and that it needed to be in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice.

Cllr Leyshon proceeded to hand over to Maria Christofi, Section 151 and Chief Finance Officer, who explained that the report covered borrowing, annual investments, the treasury management policy statement and prudential indicators. She highlighted the capital financing requirement, the debt portfolio, the average rate of borrowing, the investment, the indicators and forecasts, and the revised flexible capital receipt policy included in the report.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: clarification on SONIA and the PWLB rates; that the large amount of borrowing showed the size of the Council in Somerset.

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:

- a) **Note the mid-year borrowing and investment position and that all treasury activities have been carried out in accordance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy, within the Prudential Limits, and in line with the full delegations to the Section 151 Officer.**
- b) **Approve the report as being in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management and recommends it to Full Council at**

- the next available meeting.
- c) **Approve the revised Flexible Capital Receipts Policy for 2023/24 & 2024/25 as set out as Appendix B and recommends it to Full Council at the next available meeting.**

45 Housing Complaints Annual Report 2023-24 - 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 report. Cllr Smith-Roberts highlighted that this was in relation to the in-house function only and did not include Homes in Sedgemoor, that the report followed Section 8 of the Housing Ombudsman Code, and that it provided a comprehensive update including compliments as well as complaints, the reasons for the increases in complaints at both Stage 1 and Stage 2, and the learning that was being taken from that.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: the general topics of the complaints, whether they were about the processes or the condition of the properties and the difference between complaints and service requests; concern about damp and mould and the national context; antisocial behaviour and how that is addressed; the importance of the report and monitoring trends; comparison with complaints for Homes in Sedgemoor and how they are managed differently; the learning taken from complaints in both housing providers; health and wellbeing implications for residents with complex vulnerabilities and needs; the vacancies within the team and the impact that has.

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:

- **Note the Housing Complaints Performance and Service report and provide any observations.**

46 Local Nutrient Mitigation Funding Allocation Approval - Agenda Item 10

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited the Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets, Cllr Mike Rigby, to introduce the report. Cllr Rigby explained that it was related to nutrient neutrality and the award of £9.6m to mitigate nutrient neutrality issues and unlock new development.

Cllr Rigby proceeded to hand over to Alison Blom-Cooper, Head of Planning/Chief Planning Officer, who provided a presentation on the status of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund, the purpose of the report, the background, the trial undertaken and the assessment of sites taking place, and that the six projects would be combined into three under the revised allocation.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, invited comments from Committee

Members and other Members present, with officers providing responses as appropriate. Questions and points raised included: how miscanthus grass works as a nutrient mitigation and previous challenges with this approach; whether this was covered by a Section 106 agreement; the long time-frame for land to recover from fertiliser user; the committed spend deadline and the importance of spending effectively; the need for this to be reviewed ahead of the committed spend deadline.

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:

- a) Delegate authority to the Executive Director Community, Place and Economy, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to commit spend up to £9.6m from the Local Nutrient Mitigation Capital Funding to deliver nutrient mitigation schemes in line with grant conditions in the financial year 2024/25.**
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director Community, Place and Economy, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to reallocate funding as necessary between the projects listed in Table 2 to ensure that the entirety of the £9.6m funding is committed by 31st March 2025, as required by MHCLG.**

(The meeting ended at 12.40 pm)

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CHAIR