

Executive – 19 January 2011

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Adkins, Cavill, Edwards, Hall, Hayward and Mrs Herbert

Officers: Penny James (Chief Executive), Shirlene Adam (Strategic Director), Joy Wishlade (Strategic Director), Tim Burton (Growth and Development Manager), Alison North (Performance and Client Lead), Lesley Webb (Housing Enabling Lead), Maggie Hammond (Strategic Finance Officer), Paul Fitzgerald (Financial Services Manager), David Evans (Economic Development Specialist), Andrew Hopkins (Tourist Information Lead), Bruce Carpenter (Somerset Waste Partnership), John Sumner (Asset Planning Manager, Southwest One), Tonya Meers (Legal and Democratic Services Manager) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager).

Also present: Councillors Coles, Farbahi, Henley, Morrell, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stuart-Thorn, A Wedderkopp and Mrs Wilson

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

1. Apology

Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 1 December 2010, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

3. Public Question Time

Councillor Henley drew attention to the problems with waste collections which had occurred in some areas of Taunton Deane over the Christmas period due to the heavy snowfall. This had resulted in parts of Wellington having no collection service for four weeks.

He asked whether a review of what had happened was going to take place to see if anything further could have been done to collect accumulated waste any earlier than it was.

In response, Councillor Hayward stated that the Waste Collection crews had done their very best in circumstances where the whole County had struggled. The problems with the collection service had been compounded by the Christmas and New Year Bank Holidays which meant that there were no additional dates available to catch up with missed collections.

Councillor Hayward confirmed that the Chairman of the Somerset Waste Board had already agreed to have a look into what had happened to see if there were things that could have been done differently. The Chairman's report was going to be submitted to the February meeting of the Waste Board.

4. **Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Mrs Adkins declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillor Hayward declared a personal interest as one of Taunton Deane's representatives on the Somerset Waste Board.

5. **Improvements to the High Street, Taunton**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a proposal to improve Taunton's High Street, which was part of the central retail area.

Although a small amount of investment in its improvement was made in 2010, the area had largely been left alone whilst plans for a comprehensive retail development covering both sides of the High Street were developed as part of Project Taunton.

However, due to the current economic circumstances this comprehensive scheme was likely to take longer to implement than initially thought and was also only likely to take in the eastern side of the High Street.

As improvements to other areas of the town centre had either been completed (Somerset Square) or were scheduled to take place (Castle Green), it was critical that the High Street was not left as the "poor relation".

With this in mind, it was proposed that work to design a scheme of works to improve the appearance and functionality of the High Street as a key retail area should be undertaken. A full scheme is unlikely to be affordable immediately and the proposal is to design an overall master plan that can be achieved in phases as funding is available, rather than investing in random improvements from time to time.

Submitted for the information of Members a concept paper that had been prepared by the Swan Paul Partnership, which proposed the development of a master plan for the High Street. This needed to be developed as a phased approach as a full scheme was not likely to be affordable immediately.

The timing for the project was however critical. To make as much impact as possible it was desirable to complete some works in time for the summer period though if a planning application was required this would take a little longer.

There was evidence that some of the current trees posed a health and safety risk. A survey of the trees had been carried out by specialists from both Taunton Deane and Somerset County Councils and a full report would be available at the end of January 2011. Any trees that did need to come down would need to be felled before the end of March or left until the end of the year to avoid the bird nesting season.

Noted that this scheme could only be delivered in partnership with others. A small project group consisting of officers from Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and the Town Centre Company had therefore been set up. The private sector who had interests in the High Street would also be engaged in the process.

Resolved that:-

- (a) the proposal to draw up a master plan for improvements to the High Street be approved;
- (b) the final plans and implementation strategy are discussed at Scrutiny prior to full approval by the Executive; and
- (c) trees identified in the specialists report as being at risk, be taken down prior to the end of March and replaced with smaller trees, perhaps in pots, in line with the overall new scheme.

(Councillor Henley declared a personal interest during the discussion of the above item, as he was an employee of Job Centre Plus.)

6. Halcon North Regeneration Project Progress Report

Reference Minute No. 59/2010, submitted an update report concerning the proposed regeneration of Halcon North.

Halcon North comprised 7.25 hectares of housing land and approximately 220 dwellings. The area featured in the top 10 per cent of the most deprived wards in the country and despite work by a range of agencies, had shown no sign of improvement. Housing was deemed to be a contributory factor, not only due to the fabric, but also the high proportion of two bedroom dwellings. This had resulted in overcrowding that led to other social problems.

The Council's aspiration was to make Halcon a place that residents were proud of but a multi agency approach would be needed to achieve this.

Whilst community engagement had continued over the past six months, it was clear that strong governance and project management arrangements needed to be put in place, as well as the development of a full business case in order to explore all potential delivery options and risks.

The Housing Enabling Lead, Lesley Webb, had continued to keep residents engaged and informed. A Communication strategy was being prepared which would ensure that residents continued to be kept up to date and that all necessary links were made to consultation on the Council's Priority Areas Strategy.

Reported that whichever delivery mechanism was chosen this would be a major project for this Council and it was therefore vitally important that the project was founded upon strong project management principles.

The Performance and Client Lead, Alison North, had recently taken on the role of Project Manager. She reported that she would be working with the Change Project Members Steering Group to fill identified gaps in the Business Plan and that detailed stakeholder mapping, together with a full Risk Assessment would be undertaken.

The two key strands currently were finalising the Business Plan and the procurement process. With regard to the latter, work had begun towards tendering

for consultants to work with the Council on the overall project.

A first draft of the Outline Business Case, which included the identification of the areas that require further work, was submitted for the information of the Executive. Although this document included an indicative Project Plan, it was fully accepted that this required further development.

Noted that an important element of the Project Plan would be the Project Governance arrangements. In accordance with the Executive's resolution in June 2010, any final or binding decisions would be made by either Full Council or the Executive and be reported to the Community Scrutiny Committee prior to the decision being made.

The Tenant Services Management Board had recently been updated on progress and had expressed a wish to be involved in the decision making process. It was considered that providing regular updates and feeding the Board's views back to the Community Scrutiny Committee and the Executive would be the most appropriate mechanism to achieve this.

Further reported that an Officer Working Group had been formed which included representatives from the Housing, Community Development, Strategy, Performance and Finance teams.

The Community Scrutiny Committee had received a progress report at its meeting on 7 December 2010. A number of local residents had attended this meeting and had expressed concerns, particularly in relation to the need for the continuation of maintenance of the properties pending a final decision.

The recommendations made by the Community Scrutiny Committee were reported.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the progress on preparation of the Outline Business Case, Project Plan and timetable be noted;
- (2) the proposed Governance arrangements be approved;
- (3) Full Council be recommended to allocate a sum of up to £50,000 from the Housing Revenue Account for consultancy fees; and
- (4) it be ensured that routine maintenance and repairs be undertaken in the affected properties and that such properties were not prejudiced.

7. **General Fund Earmarked Reserves**

Reference Minute No. 96/2010, reported that as part of the budget savings plans, Theme Managers had been asked to review the reserves that fell within their theme.

Each reserve had been reviewed to ensure that it was still required and the spending profile was reviewed at the same time.

The reserves no longer required were as follows:-

Earmarked Reserve	£	Reason
Planning Compensation	35,000	Investigations almost complete with only one claim outstanding. Whilst some provision needed to be maintained this could be reduced to £5,000 returning £35,000 to the General Fund Reserve.
SmokeFree	26,018.85	Will now not be able to use. Write back to balances.
Kerbside Recycling	39,310	Review of the waste budgets have identified that this reserve is no longer required.
Reward Grant Waste	11,415	Review of the waste budgets have identified that this reserve is no longer required.
Project Man Waste Contract Contribution	15,000	Review of the waste budgets have identified that this reserve is no longer required
TOTAL	126,743.85	

Of the £126,743.85 of reserves identified, it was proposed that £66,743.85 should be returned to the General Fund Reserve. The remaining £60,000 should be used as a Revenue Contribution towards Capital Outlay (RCCO) for this current financial year 2010/2011 to fund the replacement of the Pay and Display machines because of the change to coinage.

Noted that the new coinage would be released as from April 2011. The Council therefore needed to be ready for this by the end of March 2011. Thirteen of the old single-coin multi-slot machines would have to be replaced now to cope with the coinage change. Therefore the Capital request for 2011/2012 had been brought forward into 2010/2011.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to:-

- (a) transfer £66,743.85 of surplus earmarked reserves to the General Fund Reserve in the 2010/2011 financial year; and
- (b) agree to the funding of a Revenue Contribution towards Capital Outlay RCCO of £60,000 in 2010/2011, to pay for thirteen new Pay and Display machines, from the remaining earmarked reserves that had been identified as being no longer required.

8. **Council Tax Base 2011/2012**

Reported that the Council Tax Base, which was calculated annually, had to be set between 1 December and 31 January each year.

The Council Tax Base was the “Band D” equivalent of the properties included in the Valuation Officer’s banding list as at 15 October 2010, as adjusted for voids, appeals and new properties and the provision for non-collection.

The Band D equivalent was arrived at by taking the laid down proportion of each Band as compared to Band D, and aggregating the total. The approved Tax Base had to be notified to the County Council, the Police Authority, the Fire Authority and to each of the Parishes.

Adjustments had also been included for new dwellings and for initial void exemptions for empty properties.

The Council Tax Base also had to reflect the provision for losses on collection. The rate for 2011/2012 was 1% (0.8% in the previous year), giving an anticipated collection rate of 99.0%.

The Council Tax Base for 2010/2011 was 40,384.49 and the recommended Base for 2011/2012 of 40,390.60 represented an increase of 6.11 or 0.02%. Recent experience had shown that the estimated rate of increase of Band D equivalents had not happened. A prudent approach had been taken on estimated growth and other changes, particularly in view of the wider economic conditions.

Resolved that:-

- (a) the report of the Financial Services Manager for the calculation of the Council Tax Base for the whole and parts of the area for 2011/2012 be approved; and
- (b) pursuant to the Financial Services Manager’s report, and in accordance with the Local Authority (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amount calculated by Taunton Deane Borough Council as its Tax Base for the whole area for the year 2011/2012 shall be 40,390.60 and for the parts of the area listed below shall, for 2011/2012 be: -

Ash Priors	78.84	Neroche	251.93
Ashbrittle	97.37	North Curry	748.27
Bathealton	88.08	Norton Fitzwarren	820.30
Bishops Hull	1,075.48	Nynehead	157.34
Bishops Lydeard/			
Cothelstone	1,116.85	Oake	333.62
Bradford on Tone	290.50	Otterford	170.04
Burrowbridge	205.44	Pitminster	458.91
Cheddon Fitzpaine	639.63	Ruishton/Thornfalcon	614.50
Chipstable	128.01	Sampfard Arundel	132.51
Churchstanton	335.61	Staplegrove	713.43
Combe Florey	121.40	Stawley	130.08
Comeytrowe	2,092.08	Stoke St Gregory	389.61
Corfe	132.48	Stoke St Mary	204.23
Cotford St Luke	800.55	Taunton	16,033.53
Creech St Michael	946.10	Trull	1,029.79

Durston	59.57	Wellington	4,683.53
Fitzhead	123.27	Wellington (Without)	302.74
Halse	141.39	West Bagborough	168.06
Hatch Beauchamp	260.51	West Buckland	444.62
Kingston St Mary	452.76	West Hatch	141.96
Langford Budville	236.73	West Monkton	1,116.84
Lydeard St Lawrence/ Tolland	204.07	Wiveliscombe	1,119.67
Milverton	598.41	GRAND TOTAL	40,390.60

9. Review of the Location of the Taunton Tourist Information Centre

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the location of the Taunton Tourist Information Centre (TIC).

As part of the Core Council Review, savings had been sought in relation to the TIC. Staffing numbers had been cut and greater emphasis had been put on sales and income from commissions. Alternative premises had also been investigated which would lead to reduced running costs without compromising the level of service provided.

The following locations had been considered:-

- Taunton Library (existing location) – a three year lease had been signed with Somerset County Council to extend the TIC's existing accommodation adjacent to the Library in Paul Street. The lease had reduced the rent from £23,000 to £12,000 per annum. Although the current location had limited visibility, it had adequate space and was close to the main visitor car parks;
- The Market House – Age Concern had surrendered its lease in September 2010. Whilst this was a prime location, the amount of space was limited on the ground floor and significant refurbishment works, estimated at £20,000, would be required;
- County Museum – refurbishment had progressed, but no provision had been made in the property for the kind of space that would be required by the TIC;
- The Deane House Reception – this would avoid accommodation costs and would open up the future option of management of the service as part of the Southwest One contract. However, The Deane House was poorly located and the opening of the building at weekends could also be problematical; and
- The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre – although the Brewhouse was located in a town centre location, it was not on a main shopping street. However, it would benefit from linked trips and encourage footfall through Somerset Square. Shared use of the property could also lead to shared box office and ticketing facilities and shared staffing resources. The annual rent would lead to increased costs for the Council and there were refurbishment costs estimated at £22,000.

Since consideration of the relocation of the TIC in February 2010 (Minute No. 23/2010 refers), accommodation costs had been reduced. It was therefore suggested that the TIC should remain in its current location for the following reasons:-

- The one-off costs of refurbishment and relocation of the other properties;
- The disruption to customers caused by moving the service;
- The lease commitment in the current location; and
- The reduction in space offered in the other locations.

Whilst it was recognised that keeping the TIC at the Library for the present time was the best option, the Council needed to be aware of opportunities which might arise in the future through possible redevelopment proposals, which would enable this issue to be revisited.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee had considered this matter at its meeting on 16 December 2010 and had recommended the Executive to support the continued location of the TIC in its current position. It also requested the Executive to consider providing additional directional signage for the TIC.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the Taunton Tourist Information Centre remained in its current location, adjacent to the Library, for the remainder of its lease;
- (2) the provision of additional directional signage for the Tourist Information Centre be addressed; and
- (3) the Council should remain aware of the need to relocate the Tourist Information Centre to suitable alternative premises in the future.

10. **Somerset Waste Partnership Business Plan**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Somerset Waste Partnership's (SWP) Draft Business Plan including consideration of an extension of the Waste and Recycling Collection Contract.

The SWP had, since October 2007, managed waste and recycling services on behalf of all local authorities in Somerset. The partnership was governed through a Joint Committee known as the Somerset Waste Board. The SWP Constitution required the single client unit to prepare a Draft Business Plan with an accompanying Action Plan on an annual basis.

The Somerset Waste Board would be requested to finally approve the Business Plan at their meetings in February/March 2011 after each Partner authority had considered and commented on the proposals.

The Draft Business Plan and associated Action Plan described the “business” of the partnership and any major changes to the operating environment, together with details of strategic risks and key priorities. It was the primary means to seek approval for - and resources to implement - its proposals from the partner authorities. The plan covered a 5 year horizon with particular focus on the next 12 months.

A copy of the Draft Business Plan was submitted, along with the Action Plan, Budget, Communications Plan for 2011/2012 and Risk Register.

The key issue for the disposal contract was the savings target agreed by Somerset County Council before Christmas which could require the Waste Board to close up to eight Recycling Centres (HWRCs) as a means of finding the necessary savings for the period 2011/2012 - 2013/2014. This was in addition to further reductions in opening hours/days and implementation of charging for “industrial” materials.

A range of criteria has been used to identify the initial four HWRCs for potential closure and these included site costs, household numbers served, level of materials received and distances to alternative sites. The application of these criteria has led to the following sites being identified for potential closure by 1 April 2011:-

Coleford in Mendip
Crewkerne in South Somerset
Dulverton in West Somerset
Middlezoy in Sedgemoor

Reported that a number of workshops had been held to discuss the proposed closures. It had been made clear by the County Council that any alternatives to closure which could realise the same level of savings as closure would be considered.

The Somerset Waste Board had therefore authorised its Managing Director to proceed to investigate alternative options together with any necessary consultation and contract negotiations in relation to the potential Recycling Centre closures and report back to the Board on 11 February 2011.

Further reported that the key issue for the collection contract was in relation to the annual inflation uplift. The contract with May Gurney set out a process for annual consideration of increases in contract costs. The default position, in the absence of any other agreement was the application of the Retail Price Index (RPIX), to which the Council would be bound to add the deferred RPIX uplift from the current year. The alternative proposition was a mix of measures that would reduce this by around 48%.

In exchange for this improved offer, May Gurney had proposed a contract extension, probably by a second seven year term, taking the contract to October 2021. The proposed package of measures also included the secondment of SWP staff to May Gurney which was considered to be helpful as it would help prepare the organisation for changes required to deliver efficiency savings.

Other Key Areas for 2011-2016 included:-

- The roll out of Sort It Plus in West Somerset. The dates were to be confirmed with West Somerset District Council but it was intended to complete this by March 2012 as originally envisaged. The roll out needed to be complete by this date to avoid loss of the county-wide discount from May Gurney;
- Promotion of the “recycle for all it’s worth” message;
- Providing solutions for communal and other properties that were not served or only partially served by Sort It Plus.
- Development / use of Anaerobic Digestion facility or facilities for food waste processing and renewable energy generation;
- Identifying efficiencies at the client contractor interface to cut out any duplications;
- Supporting recycling and waste minimisation for small businesses; and
- The cessation of direct funding to the Somerset Waste Action Programme from 2011/2012.

During the consideration of this item, the Executive **resolved** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public. This was necessary to enable the information in the confidential appendix, which detailed the basis for the proposed contract extension, to be discussed.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the contents of the Draft Somerset Waste Partnership Business Plan be approved; and
- (2) the proposed contract extension with May Gurney be approved, subject to assurances from the company that this would not limit the Somerset Waste Partnership’s scope to press for further efficiency savings year on year throughout the full extended term of the contract.

11. **Executive Forward Plan**

Submitted for information the Forward Plan of the Executive over the next few months.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

12. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

13. **Flook House, Station Road, Taunton**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the future use of Flook House, Station Road, Taunton.

The Council owned the freehold interest of the land and property known as Flook House. Details of the property were submitted, along with a location plan that showed the surrounding area of land. Flook House was located behind some public toilets and public gardens, which did have some drawbacks.

As there were medium to long term prospects for the possible redevelopment of the building, it was considered appropriate to focus on the short to medium term (five years) only.

Five alternative use options were reported, along with the advantages, disadvantages and cost implications for each option. These options included the further letting of the building.

In the view of the Council's Economic Development Specialist, Taunton had recently seen strong demand for office space for small businesses, particularly in the town centre, where it was offered on easy in / easy out terms. In addition, local commercial agents had advised that in order to achieve lettings as much parking as possible should be included.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee had considered this matter at its meeting on 16 December 2010 and had recommended the Executive to help the Third Sector wherever possible and that the possibility of using the circle in front of Flook House as car parking should be explored.

Resolved that:-

- (1) efforts be made to secure commercial tenants for a twelve month period and, if unable to secure tenants, to return the matter to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee for further consideration of the other options;
- (2) parking for Flook House be located within the adjoining car park to the west of the property; and
- (3) if additional parking was required above that available in the car park referred to in (2) above, consideration be given to providing this along the lines discussed at the meeting.

(The meeting ended at 8.02 pm.)