

Executive – 9 June 2016

- Present:** Councillor Edwards (Vice-Chairman) (In the Chair)
Councillors Berry, Mrs Herbert, Parrish and Mrs Warmington
- Officers:** Shirlene Adam (Director - Operations), Ian Timms (Assistant Director – Business Development), Dean Emery (Principal Revenues and Debt Recovery Officer) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager)
- Also present:** Councillors Aldridge and Coles
Anne Elder, Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee
Paul Warren of Parsons Brinckerhoff and Sunita Mills, Somerset County Council

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

24. Apologies

The Chairman (Councillor Williams) and Councillors Beale and Habgood.

25. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 21 April 2016, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

26. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mrs Herbert declared a personal interest as an employee of the Department of Work and Pensions. Councillor Parrish declared a personal interest as the District Councils' representative on the Somerset Pensions Committee.

27. Delivery of Electronic Car Park Signage and Pay on Foot Systems to Key Car Parks

Considered report previously circulated, which introduced a proposed new approach to car park signage in Taunton.

This proposal had been developed in close collaboration with Somerset County Council (SCC) and its principal contractor Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB). It had three key components which were:-

- A comprehensive signage package for Taunton incorporating electronic parking signage (VMS – Variable Message Signage) which would improve the flow of traffic to key car parks, create an early warning system for events and enable improved traffic flow management;

- Improvements to seven key car parks by the installation of pay on foot systems which would enable customers to pay on exit from car parks. This would replace the current pay and display approach used in these car parks; and
- Connecting the electronic signage and the pay on foot systems together for key car parks together to create a comprehensive and informative way-finding system for motorists. This would provide real time data on space availability at key points on the highway network.

The report contained two significant appendices. The first was a comprehensive Signing Strategy which had been commissioned to examine how effective the existing signage package was in serving the needs of Taunton. The strategy focussed on three significant component parts of the network which were mentioned in the Council's Corporate Strategy - the park and ride provision, car park signage and tourist (brown) signage.

Although this network was maintained and managed by SCC, the introduction of new electronic way-finding to Taunton Deane owned car parks and changes to the associated signage package had been instigated by the Council which would be the major funder of this infrastructure. Noted that the proposals were a defined project within the Council's growth programme which supported delivery of the Council's Growth Agenda.

The second appendix comprehensively examined the provision of electronic signage and the improvements created by installing pay on foot parking systems at seven key car parks in Taunton.

It was expected that further car parks would be improved by installing pay on foot systems over the next few years through future budget allocations.

The broad benefits of this investment included:-

- (1) A reduced time in finding a space. The signage would reduce unnecessary circulation to car parks and minimise queuing at car parks through influencing driver behaviour;
- (2) Improving user experience as pay on foot would remove the time limitation created by pay and display car parks. The inference was that people would spend more money into the economy whilst shopping; and
- (3) The installation of these systems had seen revenue rise in other towns generated by the car parks. This was in the order of 15-20 % so would enable the Council to invest further in car park improvements.

Further reported on the likely costs of implementing the electronic car park signage and pay on foot systems, as follows:-

Capital Costs and Funding

The estimated capital costs were shown below:-

	£
Total costing	
Variable Message Signage (VMS)	486,283
Pay on Foot (POF)	555,927
Fees, Contingency	157,790
Total Capital Budget Requirement	1,200,000
Funded by	£
Approved in current 2016/2017 Capital Programme (a)	400,000
Revenue Budget Contributions – (b)	450,000
From New Homes Bonus – (c)	350,000

- (a) There was a capital approval in the 2016/2017 Capital Programme for “Major Transport Schemes” which was to be funded from the New Homes Bonus.
- (b) With regard to car parking fees, Full Council had agreed in December 2015 to earmark £450,000 over the 2016/2017 to 2018/2019 financial years to fund “Projects”. Approval was sought to fund £450,000 of the VMS expenditure from the New Homes Bonus reserve initially, but for this to be replenished over the three year period by these earmarked “Projects” funds within the approved Revenue Budget.
- (c) Full Council had also agreed in December 2015, the profiled expenditure for “Major Transport Schemes” which indicated £800,000 in 2017/2018. Approval was also sought to bring forward into 2016/2017 £350,000 of this outlined spend to be allocated to this project.

The Council currently had £4,200,000 in the New Homes Bonus Reserve which had yet to be committed to specific projects. The requested funds via New Homes Bonus was therefore available and in keeping with the proposed spending themes.

Revenue Implications

Intrinsic to this Business Case there were IT interface revenue costs of approximately £36,000 per annum. Approval was therefore sought to set aside these funds from the anticipated additional parking revenues generated annually to address this budget pressure. The cost would be mitigated by the additional income but would need to be factored into the Medium Term Financial Plan projections along with the funding through income generation.

Replacement Cost

Within the Business Case the projected replacement cost of the system had been factored in before arriving at the “Net Present Value” of the estimated cash flows over a 15 year period. In order to ensure the funds were available to fund this replacement, approval was sought to earmark sufficient funds from each year’s parking income and to hold this in an earmarked reserve. The current projected cost would be £972,000 and the projected increase in forecast income of £300,000 per annum would be more than adequate to make this affordable.

This proposal clearly represented a significant investment for Taunton and was also one which was supported widely by the business community, including the Taunton Chamber of Commerce and Destination Taunton. The aim would be to complete delivery of this investment by the end of 2017.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to approve:-

- (i) An increase to the Major Transport Schemes Capital Budget of £800,000, from £400,000 to £1,200,000;
- (ii) The earmarking of parking income to the value of approximately £36,000 to fund the annual revenue expense of the IT interface, when these costs had been formalised through the procurement process; and
- (iii) The setting aside on an annual basis an appropriate sum of approximately £70,000 from parking surpluses to fund the replacement system in 15 years' time which was currently estimated to be £972,000 in total.

28. **Corporate Debt Policy**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Council's Corporate Debt Policy which had been adopted in 2012.

In line with good practice, the policy had recently been reviewed to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

The Corporate Debt Policy and appendices – copies of which had been circulated to the Members of the Executive – covered the management of all debts owed to the Council. This included the billing/invoicing, collection, enforcement and write offs for the five income streams of Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Rents, Housing Benefit Overpayments and all other debts (known as Sundry Debts).

It was essential that all monies owed to the Council were actively pursued. The Policy therefore reflected a range of measures to help customers pay sums due, therefore maximising the level of resources available to support service delivery.

The Policy followed the debt recovery principles set out below:-

- **Proportionality:** establishing an appropriate balance between the potential loss of income to the Council, recovery costs and any emerging Council or third party costs relating to welfare, care or housing support;
- **Consistency:** the Council aimed to achieve consistency in the advice it gave, the use of its powers and the recovery procedures adopted. The Council would take account of the social circumstances of the debtor, their payment history and ability to pay in pursuing sums due;
- **Transparency:** ensuring people understood what was expected of them and what they should expect from the Council. Taunton Deane aimed to take early recovery action before debts became unmanageable for the customer. Although customers, citizens and businesses had a responsibility to pay for

the services they received and the charges and rents they were liable for, there might be circumstances where customers were suffering hardship and needed advice in paying sums due. The Council was committed to providing appropriate support and would engage with relevant welfare and debt agencies.

- **Offset:** where a customer owed money to the Council but this was less than any funds due from the Council, this would be offset against what was owed and the net balance settled. Where the sum involved was greater than any funds due to the customer, these funds would be used to reduce the amount owed and the customer contacted about arrangements to repay the outstanding balance.
- **Appropriate Costs/Fees:** where legislation permitted, the Council would seek to apply and recover from the debtor any costs/fees/charges that were legitimately due to the Council or its agents.

Noted that a small proportion of the Council's overall income might not be collectable due to matters outside its control. Where a debt was assessed to be irrecoverable it would be subject to a write off process that was in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations.

A range of indicators had been developed to monitor performance against agreed targets and to ensure the Corporate Debt Policy achieved its objectives. These would continue be included in the Council's performance reporting updates.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to adopt the revised Corporate Debt Policy.

29. **Executive Forward Plan**

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

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7.07 p.m.)