

Executive – 11 March 2015

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Cavill, Hunt, Mrs Stock-Williams and Mrs Warmington

Officers: Shirlene Adam (Director – Operations), Mark Antonelli (Principal Benefits Officer), Chris Hall (Assistant Director – Operational Delivery), Sam Shaikh (Parks Technical Assistant), Ian Timms (Assistant Director – Business Development), David Evans (Economic Development Manager), Dan Webb (Growth and Development Programme Manager) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager)

Also present: Councillors Coles and Morrell
Richard Holt and Andrew Knutt (both of the Creative Innovation Centre Community Interest Company)

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

19. Apologies

Councillors Mrs Adkins, Edwards and Mrs Herbert.

20. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 5 February 2015, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

21. Public Question Time

Councillor Morrell referred to a Conservative Election document from four years ago which referred to the lack of investment in High Street, Taunton. He acknowledged that some limited works had been undertaken but nothing in recent months. He asked what works were planned and budgeted both in the short and medium term?

Councillor Williams stated that £500,000 had been spent on High Street since the publication of the document referred to but, due to the recession, funds for further enhancement works had 'dried up'. He claimed High Street was better than it had been and that further works had not been forgotten about. He also made reference to the significant investment in the northern end of High Street by Rockspring which had very recently been announced. This would help the general atmosphere of this part of Taunton with regard to business confidence.

22. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hunt declared a personal interest as a Member of Somerset County Council.

23. **Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability Policy and Discretionary Housing Payment Policy**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the Council's approach to awarding Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) and Discretionary Reductions in Council Tax Liability. Revised policies in respect of both topics were appended to the report for the information of the Members of the Executive.

With regard to Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability, the Local Government Act 2012 had created two new discounts:-

- Local Council Tax Support Schemes under Sections 13A(1) (a) and (b); and
- 13A (1) (c) which was effectively the original 13A discounts that Taunton Deane could use to increase reductions already given under the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

The implications under 13A(1) (a) and (b) had already been considered and agreed by Full Council.

In March 2013, as a consequence of the Collection Fund (Council Tax Reductions) (England) Directions 2013, the Portfolio Holder had agreed to amendments to the Councils procedures for discretionary discounts for Council Tax liability.

As a consequence of a decision made by the Valuation Tribunal for England (VTE) last year, it had been necessary to further amend Taunton Deane's policy to ensure it complied with the VTE judgment.

The regulations covering Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) were the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001. This legislation had given the Council a very broad discretion. However, the Council had to make decisions in accordance with ordinary principles about good decision making and, in particular, Local Authorities had a duty to act fairly, reasonably and consistently.

Since April 2013, changes had been applied to Housing Benefit meaning that social sector accommodation had a size criteria applied, with any working age household deemed to be under occupying their home, receiving a reduced level of Housing Benefit. As a result of this and other changes, for example the Benefit Cap, the Government had increased its DHP funding to Local Authorities in anticipation of greater demand on their budgets.

The Government Guidance on DHPs had advised that the additional funding was intended to provide:-

- Short term, temporary relief to families;
- For those affected by social sector size criteria;
- Help for customers living in rural areas; and
- Priority customers in the following two groups:-
 - Disabled people living in significantly adapted accommodation

including any adaptations made for disabled children; and

- Foster carers whose housing benefit was reduced because of a bedroom being used by, or kept free for, foster children.
- Additional support to claimants impacted by the changes.

The Department for Work and Pensions had published a Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual, included a Local Authority Good Practice Guide and the Council had followed this in formulating a revised DHP Policy.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to agree that the revised policies for Discretionary Reduction in Council Tax Liability and Discretionary Housing Payments be applied from 1 April 2015.

24. **Creation of the Somerset Building Control Partnership**

Considered report previously circulated, which sought approval to create a Somerset Building Control Partnership comprising Mendip and Sedgemoor District Councils, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council.

The Building Control Service provided by Districts Councils was one of the Council functions that was in direct competition with the private sector (Approved Inspectors).

In recent years, services had found it more and more difficult to compete with the private sector providers of Building Control for the 'fee income' from Building Regulations applications. Local authorities also had to carry out other statutory Building Control responsibilities that the private sector was exempt from, and these did not bring in income to support them.

The reduction in income was leaving most individual local authority Building Control Services with a choice between having a very small team with little resilience, or operating the service at a financial loss which then needed to be subsidised by the General Fund of the authority. This picture was being seen across the country and the Government had confirmed that its view was that the most effective way forward to alleviate the situation was for single local authority Building Control Teams to form partnerships.

A comprehensive Business Case had been developed by the four partner organisations having considered:-

- The prevailing economic and competition challenges facing Building Control;
- The requirement to maintain a resilient and competent service;
- The increasing move to form partnerships to deliver successful Building Control services;

- Options for governance of a partnership;
- Comparisons of workloads, application numbers, staffing numbers and income/budgets between the four partners;
- The ability to generate significant savings from forming a single business unit, by reducing management posts and staff numbers, and reducing office overheads and other support service charges; and
- The creation of a new partnership staffing structure, based on workloads and introducing new and more efficient ways of working.

Reported that the key business reasons for forming the partnership were:-

- (1) To secure a sustainable Building Control Service.
- (2) To reduce costs to each partner Council.
- (3) To improve competitiveness with the private (and public) sector providers of Building Control Services – to win more business and maximise income.
- (4) To increase resilience and customer service levels – a bigger core service team rather than four small teams.
- (5) To improve professional development opportunities, to make it easier to attract and retain good quality staff.

The Business Case projected a salary saving of £238,000 between the four partners in the first full year of the partnership, but redundancy costs would be incurred as part of the set-up. This scale of saving presented a sound financial business reason for pursuing the project, but significant further savings could be expected from:-

- The creation of a single IT system, rather than four separate systems;
- Rationalising support service charges from four organisations into one;
- Reducing the need for office space across four organisations;
- The reduced head count created additional savings in terms of computer licences, equipment, travel and other overheads;
- Improved systems;
- Improved efficiency and deployment of staff from managing Building Control as a single team across four Districts; and
- Expansion of the partnership to include other Councils and other ancillary services in the future to increase income.

The proposed governance would be through a 'Joint Committee' model as used for the Somerset Waste Partnership and the South West Audit Partnership. This involved pooling budgets and resources into a single service managed by a Joint Management Team with a Joint Steering Committee established under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Joint Committee would oversee the performance, budgetary control and strategic direction of the partnership with a Portfolio Holder and senior manager

from each partner organisation forming the Committee. A detailed Inter Authority Agreement would be agreed between the Councils.

Sedgemoor District Council was proposed to act as the host/administering authority for the Partnership. This meant that the staff from the other Councils would transfer to Sedgemoor District Council under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE). Sedgemoor would be employing the staff, and progressively, would provide the majority of the support services such as HR, Payroll, office space, IT, financial management as part of the Sedgemoor District Council accounts, Audit and potentially Legal and Democratic Services.

The total Building Control fee income across the four Councils was £850,000 in 2013/2014, with approximately £200,000 in charges for statutory work.

Noted that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had considered this matter at its meeting on 19 February 2014. Members were supportive of the proposed Building Control Partnership.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to:-

- (a) Approve the creation of a Somerset Building Control Partnership as outlined in the Business Case, and subject to the approval of the other proposed partner Councils;
- (b) Approve the creation of a 'Joint Committee' to oversee the strategic direction, performance and budget of the partnership;
- (c) Agree that the Portfolio Holder and Assistant Director - Operational Delivery be nominated to represent the Council on the Joint Committee; and
- (d) Agree that Authority be delegated to the Section 151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Assistant Director - Operational Delivery, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to finalise legal agreements, partnership budgets and cost/income sharing arrangements, shared redundancy payments and detailed governance arrangements.

25. Funding request from the Creative Innovation Centre Community Interest Company

Reference Minute No. 4/2015, reported that further information relating to the Business Plan previously submitted by the Creative Innovation Centre Community Interest Company (CICCIC) had now been received.

The CICCIC was a non-profit organisation that encouraged the participation and development of businesses and the creative industries; for practitioners, groups, individuals, businesses, start-ups and the local community. Through knowledge exchange, music, art, heritage and performance its events and workshops focused on the diversity and growth of enterprise, community and culture.

Therefore whilst currently based in Paul Street, Taunton the organisation itself provided wide support to the diverse businesses within the creative industries. This support was complemented by support for cultural activities both on site and across the community.

The funding request received was for a total of £60,000 to support the CICCIC over a three year period. This had been broken down into £20,000 per annum and would support a range of activities and projects in each of the financial years.

The Executive, whilst very supportive of the CICCIC, was of the view that at this stage financial support should be limited to one year rather than the three years requested. It was noted that this investment, if approved, would enable the CICCIC to 'lever in' further funds of over £250,000 into the local economy.

Noted that the application had previously also been considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee where Members were generally supportive as to providing a degree of funding subject to the CICCIC supplying further financial information.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to:-

- (a) Approve a grant of £20,000 be made to the Creative Innovation Centre Community Interest Company (CICCIC), Taunton from General Reserves with the purpose of supporting the development of local businesses in the Creative Industries sector; and
- (b) Agree that the award of a grant to the company would be subject to the following conditions:-
 1. The Company entered a Service Level Agreement with the Council to deliver the outlined services for the year 2015/2016;
 2. The Company furnished the Council with a report into the size and extent of the Creative Industries sector in Taunton Deane, and the support needs of that sector; and
 3. The Company's accounts were submitted on completion of the Service Level Agreement to a suitably qualified, independent advisor to validate the use of the funding.

26. **Establishment of Somerset Growth Board**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the establishment of a Somerset Growth Board.

The Somerset Growth Plan had been developed by the six local authorities, business representative organisation and other key stakeholders including the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Somerset's Further Education sector.

The Growth Plan set out Somerset's plans to promote growth between now and 2020 and for laying the foundations for long term sustainable economic growth for

years after this. It had been developed to attract and guide investment into Somerset, to overcome barriers and maximise sustainable employment and housing growth from local opportunities, benefitting Somerset's communities, businesses and residents.

The LEP's first Growth Deal had demonstrated the success of working in partnership to agree initial priorities for Somerset and the ability to effectively influence the LEP's negotiations with Government to secure investment. Somerset would see around £36,000,000 of investment from the Growth Deal 1 - £18,000,000 of which would be allocated in 2015/2016.

The climate for securing investment, both within the local LEP and across all the LEPs nationally was very competitive and Somerset needed to position itself effectively to maximise success in the future.

The Terms of Reference for the Growth Board had been endorsed by Somerset County Council on 14 November 2014 and were detailed in the Appendix to the report. The Growth Board would be the way in which the Somerset growth agenda would be integrated into the LEP and would give impetus to the Growth Plan.

The key purpose of the Growth Board would be to take strategic ownership of the Growth Plan, ensuring that Somerset's priorities were communicated with key partners, such as the LEP, and provide local accountability for its delivery. The Growth Board would act in an advisory capacity to the six Somerset Councils and the LEP and present recommendations from the board to individual councils for approval.

A key function of the Board would be to ensure that Somerset was in a position to respond to calls for projects should additional funding be made available. It was suggested that Somerset should have a 'pipeline', for the LEP of prioritised projects supported by evidenced business cases.

To ensure the Growth Board could effectively attract and guide investment it would need sufficient executive support. In addition, a monitoring evaluation framework needed to be developed to provide appropriate performance reporting allowing the Board to identify where further effort needed to be made to achieve the strategic targets.

Reported that there were currently no identified resources to provide this executive support to the Growth Board. To ensure its effectiveness it was suggested that each of the six Somerset councils co-fund this support and each commit to a three year financial contribution as set out in the table below:-

Local Authority	Annual Contribution
Somerset County Council (cash)	5,000
Somerset County Council (in-kind)	4,500
Mendip District Council	3,071
Sedgemoor District Council	3,277

South Somerset District Council	4,570
Taunton Deane Borough Council	3,125
West Somerset District Council	957
TOTAL	24,500

Taunton Deane Borough Council had been requested to make an annual contribution of £3,125 over the next three years to support the core costs of the Growth Board – however, it was recommended that the Council should only make this contribution initially on a one year basis (for 2015/2016). This would be funded from the anticipated over recovery of Planning income in 2014/2015.

Resolved that:-

- (1) The Somerset Chief Executive's and Leader's Group proposal to establish a Somerset Growth Board be endorsed; and
- (2) The proposal to transfer the sum of £3,125 to an earmarked reserve in 2014/2015 to provide a funding contribution to Growth Board core costs for 2015/2016 be supported.

27. **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 6.50 p.m.)