

SWT Executive - 18 December 2019

- Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)
Councillors Benet Allen, Chris Booth, Ross Henley, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Peter Pilkington and Francesca Smith
- Officers: Marcus Prouse, Amy Tregellas, Jenny Collins, Gerry Mills, Lisa Redston, Joe Wharton, James Barraha, Paul Fitzgerald and Simon Lewis
- Also Present: Councillors Ian Aldridge, John Hassall, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Andrew Sully, Sarah Wakefield, Brenda Weston, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

71. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Mike Rigby.

72. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive

(Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20th November 2019 circulated with the agenda)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Executive held on 20th November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and were duly signed by the Leader.

73. Declarations of Interest

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-	All Items	SCC & Taunton	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Sankey		Charter Trustee		
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

The Leader of the Council declared a personal interest on behalf of all Members of the Executive that had received emails lobbying in relation to Item 10 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot.

74. **Public Participation**

A. Mr Shawn Rutter (No Taunton BID) asked the following questions in relation to Item 10 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

“Good evening, I’m speaking for No Taunton BID, representing the significant number of businesses opposed to the new Taunton BID proposal.

As I wrote in my letter to you last Saturday about the councils’ lack of openness and transparency over BID, it’s extremely disappointing that the agenda report for tonight has still not been made public, as it would have allowed a fair chance to make pertinent democratic representation for what will be discussed and decisions to be made by you today. But I sincerely hope that later this evening you will vote to not exclude the press and public from the BID discussion as it is not commercially sensitive.

If the council does allow the BID proposal to go to ballot, my letter of 22nd October made a strong case for the council to abstain from voting for it’s properties, given the overwhelming influence council votes would have. With average ballot turnout, this council’s vote would be 6% by voting number, and 12% by cumulative RV - and with this weeks’ questionable addition of the county council’s Brendon House, as the 4th largest RV property on the map now, if both councils vote they are forecast to have cast 18% of the RV vote.

The spirit of BID regulations is for BID to be a business-led initiative, for the businesses, decided on by the businesses; which is why the right thing for the Council to do would be to abstain from voting. If BID is to go ahead, the best chance of success will come from a true majority of business having embraced and wanting BID - and the only way we’ll know this, is a ballot without Council votes.

I suggest this council has some hard questions to ask itself when considering Taunton’s 4th BID ballot in 13 years, and I have 4 questions today:

1. The BID proposers have chosen not include East Reach, Station Road and most of Bridge Street, meaning businesses in these town centre areas would be starved of the extra investment and benefits BID are promising BID businesses. Is the Council happy with the limited scope of the map, which was decided on without appropriate consultation?
2. Is the council certain that BID is the best place management scheme for Taunton town centre? i.e. instead of a town centre partnership for example, which could be much wider reaching and inclusive for both more businesses and the community.
3. With regard to BID baseline agreements, for the 5 year duration of BID, will the Council be committing to legally binding baseline agreements for all statutory and discretionary services it currently provides into the proposed BID area?
4. Given Taunton's poor experience with BID previously, what lessons has the council learnt, and what measures will the council be taking to ensure the town won't be let down by BID again, if it goes to ballot and is voted in?

Finally, let's remember what your Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and Economic Development once said when referring to Minehead; he said "promoting and managing of the town should be done at the local authority level".

One couldn't agree with him more, and given the noticeable effort this new administration is currently making with Taunton, we really should continue along this path, in line your manifesto promise to create vibrant and economically secure town centres - instead of the council helping force in an extra unwanted business rate.

Thankyou."

Councillor Marcus Kravis, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Asset Management thanked Mr Rutter for his questions and responded that the businesses not included within the BID area were contacted and consulted after a decision was made on the BID area, and he understood there had been no appeals to date on the area. In regards to the second question he responded that BID's are a known approach in many districts throughout the country and are heavily legislated for, and would be if the BID was mandated. If successful, regulations do require a baseline agreement that would be reviewed annually. In terms of asking what lessons the Council has learnt, the question perhaps should be what lessons the BID team has learnt if the BID successful and what they will do, with the Council having a seat at the table as is usually the case, if it is successful. With regard to the quotation, the full quote I think I actually started with 'In an ideal world', and I would still stand by that statement.

The Monitoring Officer responded that the item was being held in confidential session due to the commercial sensitivity of it. Whilst Mr Rutter had suggested the Council should consider abstaining in the vote, the Council will make a

decision on which option it would choose (including abstention) for the ballot in confidential session so as not to prejudice the final result.

Mr Rutter asked one supplementary question around the baseline was a really important factor. The question had not been answered on whether the baseline agreements would be legally binding. Last year in a survey 39% of Council's were not appearing in baseline agreements. There was a real big risk of loss of discretionary Council services that people were scared of. The only way to reassure people was to have legally binding agreements and Taunton BID did say they would be asking the Council for legally binding agreements, so will you provide?

Councillor Kravis responded that he thought he had said that there will be a baseline agreement that would be binding if agreed and this would be debated later.

B. Mr Nigel Pearce (President - Taunton Chamber of Commerce) made the following statement in relation to Item 10 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

Firstly I would just like to thank you on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce for your support to date and for allowing us the opportunity to speak. In representing the wider business community, some based in the town centre and some further afield such as Blackbrook. Although I have an office within the BID area I am an architect, it would therefore reasonable to ask 'What benefit am I going to get from the BID?' There is a lot of support from other businesses and the wider professional services. Their reasons for doing so include the need to attract good quality staff, and this can be a struggle in the town when we are in competition with Exeter and Bristol. It is not all about salary levels, and lifestyle and enjoyment can be a much higher issue on the Agenda. For many that means a good and thriving Town Centre, and a place their families can enjoy and use for more purposes than just shopping, making Taunton a really good place to live. So these companies do see the BID as an important factor in their ability to recruit and be successful. As an architect, I am not looking to expand greatly, so recruitment is an optional driver, but the employees of these companies and the companies themselves are my clients and that is why BID is important to me.

C. Mr Lee Tomkins (Independent Financial Adviser – Blackdown Financial Services) made the following statement in relation to Item 10 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

I am a businessman in town and actually have three businesses in the proposed BID area. I was involved in the last BID 2007-2012 and was deeply unimpressed. I was asked if I would get involved again this time round and my new line was that I wouldn't as I wasn't impressed with the Council back in the day. However, I've been convinced that you are a new Council now and hopefully you have learnt from those mistakes. So I'm supporting the BID, I think it's a worthy cause and if the BID and the Council work together they can make the town a great place. My experience of the people that I have met in the BID environment this time is there is some good people there and some good heads and some good

ideas. I think it is vitally important that there is communication between the Council and the BID.

D. Ms Mel Amor (Crystals Bath Place & Vice-Chair of Bath Place Traders Association) made the following statement in relation to Item 10 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

I urge you to vote for the BID because it is an opportunity for the business community of Taunton to form a strong group of passionate individuals who can make good decisions and implement new ideas to improve the town's atmosphere and overall visitor experience. Taunton is in need of an injection of well-planned regular events. Events which have been carefully constructed to maximise footfall and encourage more people to shop locally whilst fully enjoying themselves and to attract new visitors too. The more entertained and happy people we attract to the town the more the benefit to our businesses and our communities. I cannot see a better way of raising needed funds than to deliver such a vibrant programme events than the money collected through the BID. It means we are all contributing a fair amount into the fund to benefit from something we have all created together. Also, identifying a distinctive and unique selling point for the town as a whole is something I feel passionate about the BID achieving. Taunton needs to be known for something great so it can enable business to flourish and our culture and communities to grow. We have yet to fathom what defines Taunton, we need to create an identity that is strong and empowering for our town. In my view, the BID team is the best hope of working this out and ensuring Taunton becomes the best possible version of itself. We need to put our minds together, and by this I mean the business community and the Council to work together and consult each other on what really is actually best for the town's businesses, population and potential future visitors. We are the people on the ground. We have constant contact with those who shop, eat, spend and consume. We hear what the public are concerned about, what they are pleased about and enjoy and also general response to the Council's actions actually are. We are the people who know how things are impacting our businesses. The BID is an opportunity for us as businesses and the Council to unite and really put Taunton on the map. By you voting for the BID it means you are supporting our local business community and contributing to the success of the town in general. This relationship needs to strengthen and consultation needs to increase. The BID is how we can do that. By voting for the BID you will be ensuring we have the resources needed to improve our town effectively and efficiently.

E. Mr Colin Barrell (Chairman - Taunton Chamber of Commerce) made the following statement in relation to Item 10 – Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot:

Thank you for the opportunity to come and address you. I and the working group of around 15 individuals representing large national retailers such as Debenhams, Marks and Spencer, Primark; Small Independent businesses from the likes of Bath Place and the St. James Street area, pubs, charity shops, banks, building societies and estate agents. We've been engaging with them all our working group, we've given people opportunities to come to meetings,

individual one to ones, we've had newsletters and questionnaires go out to get information. One of those businesses we've consulted with is Somerset West and Taunton. You after all, are one of the biggest businesses in the town. You've got significant revenue income from your assets within the area of the proposed BID. It is my belief and that of the working group that we need to work in partnership for our mutual benefit and that of our residents, our employees and our visitors. If you know me and my track record both in business and the community, you will appreciate that as well as wanting a successful business for myself and my twenty eight employees, I'm also passionate about making Taunton an even better place to live and letting more people know about that. Taunton is crying out for all of us to work together and grasp the opportunity a BID can provide. The vast majority of the businesses are prepared to invest and I believe the Council will want to endorse the mandate to move forward by voting yes when the ballot does take place. We are constantly compared to other towns in the region. Most of them have got together and chosen to strengthen those partnerships between the businesses and their Councils by voting yes to a BID. You only need to look down the road to Minehead, Clevedon and Exeter pretty much everybody has got a BID. I urge you to vote yes to unlock the potential we all know exists. Just to finish off, anecdotally, I do a lot of meet and greet in my business, I've met in the last month people from Newton Abbott, Shepton Mallet, Sidmouth, Burnham-On-Sea, Tiverton, Barnstaple – the answers as to why they came to Taunton were many but it's a nice town, its compact, we've got great independents but a good smattering of national shops as well. Friendly people, we get a great welcome, we can now find the car parks because we have got good signage. The traffic is not as bad as Exeter and Bristol. But, you need to shout about it more, they're telling us that, it's a great secret that people don't know about. I believe a BID can do that, I hope you will help us to make that happen.

75. **Executive Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Executive Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

RESOLVED that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

76. **Amendment to Income and Arrears Management Policy**

Executive Councillor Ross Henley, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources introduced the report and moved the recommendations, which sought support for an amendment to the current Income and Arrears Management Policy to include a Council Tax write off for care leavers living within the area who receive Council Tax Support.

The proposal would remove any Council Tax liability where the care leaver –

- Is living with dependants
- Is living with other care leavers, and/or

- Has entitlement to Council Tax Support but their income is more than £75 a week

Where the care leaver is living with other adults SWT would look to apportion the write off to reduce the overall liability. The write off would apply up to the age of 25 and would end the day before their 26th birthday. The write off would only be applied after entitlement to other discounts, including Council Tax Support has been deducted from the liability. Somerset West and Taunton Council would be actively contacting our care leavers to encourage take up and we will consider backdated awards. SWT intended to apply the write off through our Income and Arrears Management Policy until we are able to consider including this in our Council Tax Support scheme for future years.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Kravis.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and asked questions which included:-

- It was raised as to how much the Council took into account young people's incomes?
- *This was taken into account for e.g. if getting a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) this covered 80% of Council Tax and this measure would cover the other 20%.*
- It was stated that this was wholeheartedly supported and was the right thing to do.

RESOLVED to;

1. Approve that for those persons which fall within the definition of a care leaver, living within the District and who qualify for Council Tax Support, will have their net Council Tax liability written off for the qualifying period, and;
2. Delegate authority to the Revenues Specialist to approve individual eligible write-offs in line with this Policy.

77. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the items numbered 8, 9 and 10 on the Agenda as the items contained exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 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.

The Monitoring Officer reminded all Councillors present of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct and the Constitution in respect of confidential reports and the information contained within. An email reminder would be sent to all Councillors.

78. **Taunton Bus Station**

Executive Councillor Kravis, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development introduced this confidential report.

RECOMMENDED to Council to agree the recommendations as written in the confidential report.

79. **Taunton Park and Ride**

Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts, Leader of the Council introduced the confidential report.

RESOLVED to;

1. Request officers to explore whether the procurement decision for the Park & Ride contract's operation beyond September 2020 written into the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) and Somerset County Council (SCC) can be extended from the current date of 31st January 2020 to the 20th February 2020 to allow the decision to be considered as part of the Budget.
2. Form a Cross-Party Working Group on democratic agreement of numbers to meet in January 2020 to consider the implications of notification of SCC procurement of the service, the potential options with the budget amount available and to report back to the Executive in advance of their next meeting on 22nd January 2020 and the Council on 27th January 2020.

80. **Taunton Business Improvement District Ballot**

Executive Councillor Marcus Kravis, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Asset Management introduced the confidential report.

RESOLVED to;

1. Consider the Council's position in relation to the ballot and recommended to Council a position from the available options.
2. Recommended to Council the approval of the three other confidential recommendations included within the report.

(The Meeting ended at 8.55 pm)