

SWT Executive - 10 February 2020

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)

Councillors Chris Booth, Ross Henley, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Peter Pilkington, Mike Rigby and Francesca Smith

Officers: Emily Collacott, Hannah Cook, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Mark Leeman, Catrin Mathias, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas, Scott Weetch and Joe Wharton

Also Present: Councillors Ian Aldridge, Simon Coles, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Anthony Trollope-Bellew and Gwil Wren

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

105. Apologies

An apology was received from Councillor B Allen.

106. 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 S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke
Cllr A Milne	All Items	Porlock	Personal	Spoke
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
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 G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke

107. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

108. **Executive Forward Plan**

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

The Leader advised the Executive that due to the number of items scheduled for the March meeting, that a second date might be required. Further details would be distributed to the Committee.

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.

109. **Performance Report (For Information Only)**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried the figures given on Freedom of Information requests and whether they had increased.
Officers advised that the Council received approximately 15 requests per week, some of which were complex. They hoped that once the results were published on the website via the disclosure log that the amount of requests received would reduce.
- Councillors discussed the amber result given on Planning Appeals and that there was more work to be done with training and they hoped to be back to a green result soon.
- Councillors requested further information on planning appeals as the report had given retrospective figures up until the end of November 2019 and it was now February 2020.
A written answer would be distributed to Councillors.
- Councillors were disappointed with the amber given on Housing Repair but they were aware that officers were working hard with tenants to improve that.
- The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources supported the progress made with the Council's performance but acknowledged there was still work to be done.

Resolved that the Executive considered the performance report.

110. **General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2020/21 (fees and charges)**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors queried the use of Band D for the average and because 65% of the properties within Somerset were below a Band D, queried whether it impacted on the figures for the larger Somerset West and Taunton area. *Officers clarified that every Council was funded differently for its services. Band D was used to give a consistent approximate for all the band values and that the uplift remained the same as the former Taunton Deane and West Somerset areas.*
- Councillors queried that the chart on New Homes Bonus showed that it would end in 2021/22 and whether any legacy payments would be received. *Officers advised that information was not known yet although the Government had said they would provide next year's increment but after that nothing had been confirmed.*
- Councillors queried the contingency fund and whether £50,000 was the average amount kept. *Officers advised that from a financial health point of view, £300,000 was a standard amount kept plus £50,000 for any small unforeseen circumstances.*
- The Chair of Scrutiny gave some feedback from the Scrutiny Committee, who broadly supported the budget.
- The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change gave further details of the work detailed as part of the climate change budget information, which would be included in the agenda for Full Council on 19 February 2020.
- Councillors were pleased with the small increase in Council Tax and highlighted what a big difference that could make to the Council's services.
- Councillors thanked the officers for their hard work on the budget.
- The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources was proud to be able to support and provide services within the first budget for the new administration.

Resolved that:-

- 1) Executive noted the S151 Officers Statement on the robustness of the budget and adequacy of reserves as set out in section 21;
- 2) Executive recommended Full Council approved the Draft Revenue Budget expenditure, savings and income targets, subject to any final adjustments as may be required for new information prior to Full Council (such as the NNDR1 final estimates and the Final Finance Settlement);
- 3) Executive recommended to Full Council a basic band D council tax of £164.63, comprising £162.88 for services and £1.75 on behalf of the Somerset Rivers Authority;
- 4) Executive recommended Full Council approved the new capital schemes of the General Fund Capital Programme Budget of £12.015m for 2020/21, as set out in Appendix A and Table 10;
- 5) Executive approved a virement from the Capital Project for Transformation and Office 365 to the project for the Change Programme in the 2019/20 budget of £774k; and
- 6) Executive recommended Full Council approved the reallocation of £3.5m from the BRR Smoothing Reserve to the Investment Risk Reserve.

111. **Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies 2020/21**

Resolved that:-

- 1) Executive considered comments and/or recommendations from the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee, and approved the Treasury Strategy contained within the consolidated report;
- 2) Executive considered comments and/or recommendations from the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee, and recommended that Full Council approves the Capital and Investment Strategies and Minimum Revenue Provision policy; and
- 3) Executive noted and supported the requirement for a review of the Constitution for completeness and further clarity on responsibilities for all aspects of the strategies included within this report.

112. **Car Park Fees and Charges**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors understood that it was often difficult to raise charges for services, but that the parking charges had not been increased for a few years and that they wanted to fund other projects that could encourage traffic reduction and other climate related issues.
- Concern was raised on the blanket increase of 10% across the whole district and that there should be some sensitivity for the rural areas.
- Concern was raised on the proposed additional park and ride and that it would mean a drop in income from the car parks located in Taunton town centre.
Officers advised that it shouldn't affect the income from the car parks in the town centre and that it was to encourage a change in driver behaviour and to improve factors such as air quality.
- Councillors highlighted that the parking income was ring-fenced and could only be spent on parking maintenance and traffic management schemes, so investment in the park and ride was a good way to use the funds.
Officers confirmed that the income was ring-fenced and although the park and ride was owned by Somerset County Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council supported it and deemed it was a worthwhile service to the community.
- Concern was raised that a Parking Strategy was required and should be in place before any changes were made.
Officers advised that the fees needed to be increased due to the cost of the service increasing, hence why they could not wait for a strategy to be in place.

Resolved that the Executive recommended to Full Council:-

- 1) To raise car parking charges by 10% across the Somerset West and Taunton Council area; and
- 2) To use monies raised to support Council policies in respect of congestion relief and traffic management as permitted by relevant legislation.

113. **Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and Action Plan**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors highlighted the good work that had been carried out and that it appeared to have reduced the amount of rough sleepers on the streets.
- Councillors thanked officers for their work.
- The Portfolio Holder for Community invited other Councillors to join him on the rough sleeper count.
- Concern was raised that many of the issues were as a result of different initiatives introduced by Central Government, for example, Universal Credit.
- The Chair of Scrutiny gave feedback from the Scrutiny Committee and highlighted the support offered to veterans (housing was a high priority), production of low cost housing and that the document should link to the Local Plan and other strategies.
- Concern was raised on the number of people registered on Homefinder. *Officers advised that the Homefinder system was in need of cleansing and that reminder letters had not been sent out for a while due to staffing levels within the department, however, they were due to recruit a post that would assist with the work and should be done soon.*

Resolved that:-

- 1) The Executive recommended to Full Council the adoption of the proposed Somerset Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (2019-2023); and
- 2) That Executive provided any comment in relation to the supporting action plan for consideration by Homelessness Managers Group (the action plan to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis).

114. **Future of Local Government in Somerset Report**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were sad to see that Somerset County Council (SCC) had set out a proposal to move towards a unitary authority. They believed that Somerset was too big and that a unitary authority would not be able to cover the areas adequately.
- Councillors supported the option of the District Councils working collaboratively together as they currently did for services such as Waste, Legal and Building Control.
- Councillors highlighted that when SCC proposed a unitary authority back in 2007 and held a referendum, the result was approximately 80% of residents were against the move towards a unitary authority.
- Councillors wanted to work closely with the Somerset West and Taunton residents and to ensure that services were kept local.
- Councillors of the former Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils gave some background information on the proposals set out within the report.
- Councillors agreed that further discussions were needed on the options and that collaboratively working with the other districts was not a one off project and would be continuously evolved.

- Concern was raised that each Council was different and that some degree of caution would be necessary.
The Leader agreed and shared the concern on a unitary authority and that local services would be lost, such as work on Watchet harbour wall and Firepool, to name but a couple of projects within the area.
- The Leader was open to further discussions and that she, along with the other District Leaders, were looking into using models that Government were used to but that would also give the best result for the residents of Somerset.

Resolved that the Executive recommended to Full Council that:

- 1) A full business case be prepared, which fully explored Option 2 (Collaboration and Integration), being the preferred way forward at this time. This business case should come back to Executive in July 2020, along with clear recommendations and a delivery plan;
- 2) A joint Project Board be created, with the Leader of the Council being the representative from Somerset West and Taunton Council, to oversee the work during the next stage;
- 3) Option 2 – Collaboration and Integration, as Somerset West and Taunton Council's current preferred option for the future of local government in Somerset to take forward through community consultation and engagement; and
- 4) It noted that in the best interests of the communities and residents of the District, the Council would continue to work with colleagues across all tiers of local government and public service in Somerset.

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

Resolved that the press and the public be excluded from the meeting for the items numbered 12 and 13 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.

116. **Disposal of Land**

Resolved that the Executive approved the confidential recommendations included with this report.

117. **Park and Ride Procurement**

Resolved that the Executive approved the confidential recommendations included with this report.

(The Meeting ended at 8.45 pm)