

SWT Executive - 17 June 2020

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)

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

Officers: Dawn Adey, James Barrah, Chris Brown, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Andrew Low, Gerry Mills, Alison North, Andrew Pritchard, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell and Amy Tregellas

Also Present: Councillors Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, John Hunt, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Hazel Prior-Sankey, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive

(Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 May 2020 circulated with the agenda)

Councillor S Wakefield highlighted a typo in minute number 134 to be corrected.

Resolved that the minutes of the Executive held on 20 May 2020, with amendments, be confirmed as a correct record.

3. 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 N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke

Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke
Cllr P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
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 V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke

4. **Public Participation**

Mr David Redgewell, submitted the following statement on agenda item 6, Recommendation from the Scrutiny Committee:-

There is now an urgency to reopen the Taunton bus and coach station for social distancing measures.

Whilst we fully support the closure of East Reach for social distancing and pedestrian's facilities plus cycling, the Parade and East Reach are main bus departure points for the following:-

Wells bus station via Street and Glastonbury.

Bristol and Bath bus station via route 29.

Service 30 to Chard and Axminster.

Weymouth and Dorchester via Lyme Regis, and Bridport.

Service 99 to Chard.

54 to Yeovil bus station via Langport and Somerton.

21 service to Bridgwater, Highbridge, Burnham on Sea and Weston Super Mare.

Local buses service 6 and park and ride services.

We must keep bus accessibility to Taunton town centre.

We must get proper social distancing on the bus stands in the town centre.

We cannot stack buses in Castle Way and Tower Street.

We need to open the bus station yard and layout bus stands safely for social distancing by taking all the seats and taping some seats off and removing some

of seats the waiting room where people could queue safely with the door open and the tea stall open.

The lease money and departure charges can pay for the maintenance with government grants from the Department for Transport to improve bus station facilities or in the future upgrade the facilities.

A proper lease is required with First Group for the bus station.

Help with this could be sort from Sedgemoor District Council who run the Bridgwater bus station or South Somerset District Council who run the Yeovil bus station and Wincanton bus station or Mendip District Council who run the Wells bus station, Shepton Mallett interchange and Frome coach station.

It is very important that Taunton has a good public transport network and bus service and a modern town centre bus station. A further pick up point could also be located further down East Reach.

I hope you can make progress on closing the town centre to cars and keep buses and taxi services moving, as a single decker bus carries 10 passengers and a double decker 20 passengers at present.

Taunton bus station should be reopened and the Crescent become an access to the car park and a bus route.

This also allows buses to operate from the bus station and Castle Way stops and stop just after the traffic light junction at the top of East Reach with bus services to Wellington, Tiverton, Minehead and Dulverton. And National Express Coaches proper public transport interchange facilities are required at Taunton bus station.

Hope you can find an answer to the bus station and town centre bus stops.

ALEX CARTER FIRST GROUP MD wishes to lease the bus and coach station with National Express Coaches and other operators being able use the council run bus and coach station such as Hatch Green and Berry Coaches.

Taunton is a main south west region centre on the public transport network and the only major centre south west town or city without a bus and coach station.

Whilst we welcome the new bus rail interchange facilities at Taunton railway station, there are not enough bus stands and facilities for bus passengers and no staff accommodation. This design is mainly for departures to West Somerset and Minehead and the town centre.

Of course there is also a need for a community railway service between Bishop Lydeard and Watchet and Minehead as a train could carry 45 passengers on the route and the bus service at present just 11 under social distancing regulations and 20 passengers on a double decker.

So a community railway service on the West Somerset Railway would be very helpful in terms of social distancing.

There is also a need to improve passenger's facilities at Riverside for the National Express Coach service to Plymouth, Bristol, London and the North.

We welcome the scrutiny commission bus coach and public transport working party and the reopening of Wellington Railway station.

But the most important public transport issue in Taunton is to reopen the bus and coach station.

To improve air quality and pedestrianize the town centre.

Please bring to the attention of the cabinet meeting.

DAVID REDGEWELL, SOUTH WEST TRANSPORT NETWORK and Railfuture Severnside

The Portfolio Holders responded:-

The decision to close the bus station was not made by Somerset West and Taunton Council. We had made contact with the Bus Company and were meeting them this week. We would also, where we could, influence the use of the station as a transport interchange moving forward to provide practical destinations for public transport interchanges in the future.

5. **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.

6. **Recommendation from the Scrutiny Committee**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Chair of Scrutiny introduced the item to the Executive and gave some background information on why he had requested the item to be discussed at Scrutiny.
- Councillors requested some clarification on the details of the lease between Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) and First Bus Group (FBG).
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that FBG made the decision to close the bus station which was then followed by the sale to SWT. He was not aware that FBG had made contact to agree to lease back the land for their use. FBG had only agreed to a lease for layover use only.
- Concern was raised that Scrutiny had not been kept up to date on all the discussions had between SWT and FBG.
The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation was due to meet with officers from FBG later on in the week to discuss the options available and he would feed back any decisions made at the meeting.
- The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation advised that a Transport Strategy had been drawn up a few years ago but had never been adopted. He was aware that work was being carried out to update the Strategy and hoped the new version would be adopted in the near future.

Resolved that the Executive approved the following recommendations put forward by the Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on the 13 May 2020:-

- 1) The Executive opened discussions with First Group as a matter of urgency for the temporary emergency opening of the bus station with consideration of the Covid-19 situation; and
- 2) The Executive opened discussions with both First Group and Somerset County Council on the Bus Transport Strategy in Taunton and the wider district.

7. **Committee Governance Arrangements Report**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors shared the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources' excitement on the report and were keen to bring forward the project.
- Councillors thanked the Portfolio Holder for his work on the project and wanted to ensure that the best outcome for the Council was delivered for the future.
- Councillors were pleased to see that the Local Government Association had had some input into the options detailed within the report. This was a big project that needed to be carried out properly with a framework put in place to ensure that the discussions were transparent.
- Concern was raised on the staff resources available to carry out the work alongside the Community Governance Review which was due to be carried out at the same time.
- Councillors highlighted that this project was long overdue but stressed that all options needed to be investigated thoroughly and that the outcome needed to be what was best for the Council.
- Councillors were keen to hold the meetings within the public domain to encourage open and transparent debate.

Resolved that the Executive approved the following recommendations to Full Council:-

- a) An all Member 'away day' was arranged to consider the items listed at section 4.5;
- b) A cross party Members Working Group was established to investigate the options and to report back through the appropriate democratic pathway;
- c) The Terms of Reference for the Council Governance Arrangements Working Group (Appendix A) were approved; and
- d) Seven Councillors were selected to form the Working Group along with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources.

8. **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 9 (appendices only) 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.

9. **Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Pilot**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors commended the Portfolio Holder for Housing for bringing this report forward for climate friendly, affordable homes.

- Councillors were very excited for the project to be implemented and hoped that residents would be pleased to see this type of housing being built in the area.
- Councillors were pleased that Somerset West and Taunton Council was one of the first councils to implement such a project.
- Councillors highlighted that the project would guide developers on what type of work could be achieved in the future.
- Councillors were pleased with the locations detailed within the report and that it would help to regenerate some of the areas.
- Councillors requested a consultation plan was put into place and that Ward Councillors were involved in the plan.
- Councillors queried the type of properties that would be built and the life expectancy of the carbon saving.
The approach would look at the quality and life expectancy of the materials used. The procurement process included more detailed information.
- Councillors would like sites across the whole district to be used for the project.

Resolved that the Executive approved the following recommendations to Full Council:-

- a) Approved the development of up to fifty (50) Zero Carbon Affordable Homes;
- b) Allocated a Zero Carbon Affordable Homes Capital budget of £10.8m to deliver up to fifty (50) new homes which would include Right to Buy Receipts on all eligible units plus additional borrowing. This comprised a supplementary capital budget increase of £9.3m and a transfer of £1.5m from the social housing development budget within the existing approved capital programme;
- c) Supported the use of underused SWT garage sites and one temporary housing site for new zero carbon affordable homes;
- d) Delegated authority to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Assistant Director – Finance (Section 151 Officer), to sign off the plans for each site;
- e) Delegated authority to the Housing Portfolio Holder and Director of Housing and Section 151 Officer to determine the final funding profile for this scheme once the development plans of each individual site had been finalised to identify which elements qualified for RTB funding;
- f) Noted the use of affordable rents for new build HRA homes in line with the 2020 Rent Setting Policy. The affordable rents would be set to ensure scheme viability at between 60% and 80% of market rent; and
- g) Agreed to suspend investment and letting of garages on the identified sites and support the negotiation of alternative garage accommodation for garage tenants and garage owners, and where required the Director of Housing and Communities negotiated and completed the purchase of privately owned garages.

10. **Commercial Investment Portfolio Review**

Resolved that the Executive recommended that Full Council received and reviewed the delivery of the Commercial Strategy and performance of the

Investment Property Portfolio covering the period 17 December 2019 to 31 May 2020.

(The Meeting ended at 8.08 pm)

Draft