

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Executive

Wednesday, 7 September 2022

New Council Chamber - Town Hall

Meeting Commenced: 6.00 pm

Meeting Concluded: 7.22 pm

Councillors:

Steve Bridger (Chairperson)
Mike Bell (Vice-Chairperson)

Mark Canniford
Ashley Cartman
Catherine Gibbons
Steve Hogg
Bridget Petty
Mike Solomon

Also in attendance: Councillors Peter Bryant, John Crockford-Hawley, Hugh Gregor, Stuart McQuillan and Terry Porter.

Officers in attendance: Amy Webb (Director of Corporate Services), Nicholas Brain (Assistant Director Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer), Richard Kent (Head of Planning, Place Directorate), Aaron Horner (Senior Projects Officer) and Michael Reep (Planning Policy Manager, Place Directorate).

Partaking via Microsoft Teams:

Councillors: Nigel Ashton, John Cato, Karin Haverson, Sandra Hearne, Richard Westwood

Officers: Sheila Smith (Director of Children's Services) and Hazel Brinton (Committee Services Manager)

EXE Chairperson's Welcome

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The Chairperson welcomed everyone to this face-to-face meeting of the Executive in the New Council Chamber.

Some councillors and officers would be joining the meeting remotely via Microsoft Teams but whilst able to partake they would not be "in attendance formally".

The meeting was being streamed live on the internet and a recorded version would be available to view within 48 hours on the North Somerset Council website.

EXE 15 Addresses by Members of the Public (ESO 6)

The Executive heard four addresses from members of the public as follows:

(1) Danica Priest, Long Ashton resident, on the Local Plan.

Ms Priest addressed the Executive and raised concerns around the impact on nature, eco-systems, habitat loss, the loss of open spaces and Green Belt with the inclusion of parts of the Green Belt in the proposed Local Plan.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Priest for her address and referred her comments for consideration later in the meeting under agenda item 11, subsequently brought forward to agenda item 9 (North Somerset Local Plan).

(2) Harvey Lilley, Long Ashton resident, on the Local Plan

Mr Lilley addressed the meeting on the impact of the inclusion of parts of the Green Belt in the Local Plan. He made reference to the negative impact on mental health and wildlife. He raised concerns around the government-set housing target for North Somerset which did not take local circumstances and constraints such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt into account. He spoke about the requirement for exceptional circumstances to enable building to be on Green Belt land which he believed did not apply in North Somerset's situation. He added that the Local Plan should cater for the needs of local people and that building on the Green Belt would not accord with North Somerset Council's declared Climate Emergency as green belt land was carbon captive.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Lilley for his address and referred his comments for consideration later in the meeting under agenda item 11, subsequently brought forward to agenda item 9 (North Somerset Local Plan).

(3) Cathy Fagg, resident of Long Ashton, on the Local Plan.

Ms Fagg addressed the Executive referring to the issue that whilst many residents of Long Ashton recognised the need for more housing, this should not be at the expense of Green Belt land which gave breathing space and a clear sense of identity. She queried why greenfield land should be built on before identified brownfield sites and added that the Green Belt served as a means for carbon capture, recreation and a support for mental health. She noted her concern at the response to the Local Plan consultation by one of the large developers.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Fagg for her address and referred her comments for consideration later in the meeting under agenda item 11, subsequently brought forward to agenda item 9 (North Somerset Local Plan).

(4) Sarah Ould, resident of Backwell, on the Local Plan

Ms Ould addressed the Executive and raised concerns on behalf of Backwell residents on the large number of new homes which were laid out in the proposed Local Plan and which would be a 70% increase in housing numbers in the village.

She made reference to the belief that the housing numbers for North Somerset were based on a defective algorithm which she felt the government was likely to change. She raised concerns over the requirement for a large investment in new infrastructure that new housing would bring including the need for a new road over land currently owned by Network Rail. She added that housing should be built over a number of years on small to medium sustainable sites.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Ould for her address and referred her comments for consideration later in the meeting under agenda item 11, subsequently brought forward to agenda item 9 (North Somerset Local Plan).

EXE Change to the Order of the Agenda

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The Chairperson gave notice that he would be changing the order of the agenda and taking items in the following order:

item 11, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

EXE Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (Standing Order 37)

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None declared.

EXE Minutes - 22 June 2022

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Resolved: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

EXE Non-Executive Councillors' Addresses

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At the invitation of the Chairperson, Councillor McQuillan addressed the Executive on the North Somerset Local Plan. He referred to the risks presented by the plan but also noted there were opportunities for change and opportunities to protect the impacted communities from the creeping urbanisation on the edge of Bristol. He suggested there appeared to be an opportunity to work with the government which seemed to be looking to change direction on the issue of housing numbers; an opportunity to work with a local MP on the issue of housing numbers; an opportunity to protect ecological corridors and to show that North Somerset Council is a council that listens to its residents.

The Chairperson thanked Councillor McQuillan for his address and referred his comments for consideration later in the meeting under agenda item 11 (North Somerset Local Plan).

At the invitation of the Chairperson, Councillor Porter addressed the Executive on the North Somerset Local Plan and requested that the final decision on it be referred to the Council.

The Chairperson thanked Councillor Porter for his address and referred his comments for consideration later in the meeting under agenda item 11 (North Somerset Local Plan).

EXE 20 Matters referred to the Executive and not dealt with elsewhere on this agenda

None.

EXE 21 West of England Sub-Region: items not dealt with elsewhere on this agenda

None.

EXE 22 Forward Plan dated 2 September 2022

Resolved: that the forward plan be noted.

EXE 23 Local Plan 2038 - Update following consultation on preferred options (Agenda Item 11)

At the invitation of the Chairperson, Councillor Canniford presented the report. He thanked officers, residents, businesses and developers for participating in the preferred options consultation and noted the speakers' contributions. He acknowledged that there were still difficult decisions and conversations to be had but that the council was taking note of the responses to the consultation.

He referred to the difficulties faced by the council with the housing number target which was based on 2014 data. Even considering demand and expansion requirements, the number was higher than local demand suggested based on 2018 data and which indicated a level of 15,000 new homes over the period covered by the plan.

After the consultation and subsequent conversations, he believed that more options need to be investigated but also advised members that it was essential to put the Local Plan in place with the correct levels of development to meet local demand. He added that whilst a number of strategic policies were easier to agree, agreement on the location policy was more challenging. He noted that the "sequential test" had highlighted the most sustainable sites and gave an evidence process to formulate a suite of locations. However, the housing number set by the government was a challenge given that North Somerset was a constrained location in terms of flood zones; the Green Belt; sensitive sites and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to consider.

He added that pressure was required on the government to obtain a more sustainable housing allocation for North Somerset and without a change to the number, there would be a huge pressure on sites.

With reference to the recommendations, Councillor Canniford proposed three amendments. He recommended that the report be referred to the Place Policy and Scrutiny Panel for further input; that officers develop a revised Local Plan taking into consideration the constrained nature of North Somerset and which identified developments of appropriate scale and location and offering protection to the Green Belt whilst taking legal advice on the implications for the Local Plan timetable and that a further report on the above come back to the Executive.

The Chairperson reiterated the advice that whilst officers were looking at options

for the Local Plan, all members were encouraged to engage with the process over the coming weeks.

In discussing the report, members were advised that already a great deal of time had been spent both formal and informal in attempting to accommodate the housing numbers and it was noted that the government was currently debating whether to continue with the algorithm for national housing allocations. It was acknowledged that there was a clear need for more affordable housing in attractive and sustainable locations but that no local plan would mean that there was no control over the location of developments. A note of caution was sounded over the expectation that the government would revise housing numbers for the district given the delays so far in doing so.

Members noted the difficulty of trying to balance conflicting demands between the need for more housing and growth and the desire of those wishing to protect sensitive sites and recognised the desire of local residents to protect the Green Belt from development. However, they recognised that residents did want more housing albeit within certain conditions including not allowing it to be built at any cost to the environment.

Concern was voiced that there were no risk-free options and that an arbitrary algorithm had allocated a housing number to North Somerset which was far in excess of local need particularly given the constrained character of North Somerset. It was also noted however, that there was concern over possible unintended consequences of following a constrained approach including the removal of the Green Belt options in that the plan may then become developer led. Reference was made to the imperative that a local plan for North Somerset was adopted as soon as possible otherwise there may be a danger of having to accept development on behalf of other authorities in the Combined Authority Area.

Following detailed discussion, it was

Resolved:

1. that the Executive refers the report to the Place Policy & Scrutiny Panel to seek further input, if possible, by 30 September 2022, and
2. that the Executive requests that officers proceed to develop a revised Local Plan that recognises the constrained nature of North Somerset and identifies an appropriate scale and location of development to offer greater protection to the Green Belt and other sensitive sites, and seek legal advice including advice on implications for the Local Plan timetable and anticipated national reforms, further evidence gathering, potentially including further consultation, in order to prepare the strongest possible pre-submission draft plan, and
3. that the Executive requests a further report to inform the Executive on the Policy & Scrutiny input and officers' advice and progress.

Reason for the decision:

As set out in the report and discussed above.

Alternative options considered:

As set out in the report.

**EXE
24 Month 4 Budget Monitor**

The Chairperson invited Councillor Cartman to present the item and agreed to take agenda item 9 and 10 together.

Councillor Cartman noted the extreme pressure the council's budget, both in year and for the following year, was under. He added that this was due to the external pressures of rising inflation, increasing energy costs and increasing demand pressure on services. He informed members that the current in year shortfall was £5m rising to £17m for the following year. Whilst a budget gap would normally be expected for next year at this time in the budgeting process, the gap was 2-3 times larger than usual.

Councillor Cartman noted that all executive members were aware of the pressures and agree that early and decisive action was needed. He added that an interim budget may have to be presented in November.

The Director of Corporate Services agreed that in year and future pressures may mean that decisions regarding services may need to be taken in November.

Members noted that an additional pressure on the budget may come from a re-working of the Local Plan.

Resolved:

- i. That the Executive noted the projected revenue and capital budget forecasts as detailed within the report and also the issues and assumptions that underpinned the forecasts,
- ii. That the Executive approved the in-year amendments to the revenue and capital budgets as detailed in Appendices 1A and 4 to the report,
- iii. That the Executive noted the financial risks being assessed by the council, which may have an impact on future monitoring reports,
- iv. That the Executive supported the proposal to submit a report to Council in November to consider any changes that may be required to the approved revenue budget for the current financial year, to ensure that it can deliver against the core responsibility of being able to deliver a balanced budget by the year-end.

Reasons for the decision:

As set out in the report and discussed above.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

As set out in the report and discussed above.

EXE 25 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and Revenue Budget 2023/24

Councillor Cartman presented the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023-27 report which provided an update to the assumptions underpinning the council's medium term financial plan covering 2023-27.

All the finance reports were discussed together en bloc (see minute no. EXE 24 above for the debate relating to these reports).

Resolved:

- i. That the Executive noted the updated range of budget projections within the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) as detailed within the report,
- ii. That the Executive noted the process, next steps and timescales for finalising the MTFP for the period 2023 to 2027, and also for setting the revenue budget for the 2023/24 financial year.

Reasons for the decision:

As set out in the report and discussed above.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

As set out in the report and discussed above.

EXE 26 Portishead Neighbourhood Plan

The Chairperson invited Councillor Canniford to present the report. Councillor Canniford advised members that the plan was the seventh in North Somerset to have reached the examination stage but the first to apply as a town. It had been prepared by the local community in Portishead under the authority of Portishead Town Council and once "made" would carry the same weight as plans and policies prepared by North Somerset Council.

He noted that whilst the plan had been prepared alongside the current Corporate Strategy, the town council intended reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan once the Local Plan had been adopted.

Next step would be for the plan to be referred to an independent examiner who would be appointed by the council in agreement with the town council and for it to proceed to a six week consultation period.

Members noted the huge amount of work and commitment that had gone into preparing the Neighbourhood Plan and welcomed the use of the United Nations Sustainable Goals as a framework for policy development.

Resolved:

- i. that the Executive resolved that the Portishead Neighbourhood Plan met the necessary conditions in accordance with Schedule 4B of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act (as amended) and that it could proceed to examination

following the requisite six-week period of public consultation.

- ii. That the Executive member for Placemaking and Economy be given the authority to agree North Somerset Council's comments on the submitted Plan, and that these be passed to the examiner.

EXE 27 West of England Joint Committee Membership and Future Working Arrangements

The Assistant Director Legal and Governance informed members that he had not been able to finalise the necessary report due to absence over the summer of colleagues in other organisations and therefore asked Executive members to defer the item.

Resolved: that the item be deferred to a later date.

EXE 28 Q1 Performance Management Update

At the invitation of the Chairperson, the Director of Corporate Services introduced the report. She informed members that it was the first once to come to the Executive and had been published as part of the meeting papers. The report reflected information that was on the council's website and would be updated quarterly alongside the council's business planning framework. The report was in response by a request by the external auditors that the information be in the public domain and demonstrated where the council was in terms of progress against corporate actions and how the council recorded and monitored risk.

In discussing the report, members noted that it supported the council's desire to be open with residents highlighting as it did both "red" and "green" areas and demonstrated the council's desire to work through its "to do" list. It was noted that there was still work to do in making access to information and papers easier for members of the public.

Resolved: that the Executive noted the contents of the report.

EXE 29 Oral reports of Executive Councillors

The Chairperson noted thanks on behalf of the Executive to Aaron Horner who had supported the livestreaming of the meetings of the Executive and the Council over the past year. He wished him luck with his future Ph.D. studies.

The Chairperson also noted that there was a new government in place and new Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Simon Clarke.

EXE 30 Urgent business permitted by the Local Government Act 1972 (if any)

None.

Chairman
