

Public Agenda Pack



Minutes of a Meeting of the Full Council held in the Hollinsworth Hall, Canalside Conference Centre, Marsh Lane, Huntworth, Bridgwater TA6 6LQ, on Wednesday, 22 May 2024 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Mike Best (Chair)

Cllr Lee Baker (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Steve Ashton

Cllr John Bailey

Cllr Brian Bolt

Cllr Hilary Bruce

Cllr Simon Carswell

Cllr Norman Cavill

Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Cllr Peter Clayton

Cllr Shane Collins

Cllr Dixie Darch

Cllr Dawn Denton

Cllr Michael Dunk

Cllr Habib Farbahi

Cllr Bob Filmer

Cllr Tony Grimes

Cllr Pauline Ham

Cllr Mark Healey

Cllr Alistair Hendry

Cllr Mike Hewitson

Cllr John Hunt

Cllr Andy Kendall

Cllr Marcus Kravis

Cllr Liz Leyshon

Cllr Martin Lovell

Cllr Matthew Martin

Cllr Harry Munt

Cllr Mike Murphy

Cllr Sue Osborne

Cllr Suria Aujla

Cllr Marcus Barr

Cllr Alan Bradford

Cllr Theo Butt Philip

Cllr Mike Caswell

Cllr Nicola Clark

Cllr Barry Clarke

Cllr Simon Coles

Cllr Adam Dance

Cllr Hugh Davies

Cllr Lance Duddridge

Cllr Caroline Ellis

Cllr Ben Ferguson

Cllr David Fothergill

Cllr Andy Hadley

Cllr Philip Ham

Cllr Bente Height

Cllr Ross Henley

Cllr Henry Hobhouse

Cllr Dawn Johnson

Cllr Jenny Kenton

Cllr Christine Lawrence

Cllr Tony Lock

Cllr Dave Mansell

Cllr Kevin Messenger

Cllr Tessa Munt

Cllr Graham Oakes

Cllr Stephen Page

Cllr Connor Payne
Cllr Emily Pearlstone
Cllr Evie Potts-Jones
Cllr Faye Purbrick
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Bill Revans
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr Fran Smith
Cllr Andy Soughton
Cllr Claire Sully
Cllr Lucy Trimnell
Cllr Martin Wale
Cllr David Woan
Cllr Gwil Wren

Cllr Oliver Patrick
Cllr Derek Perry
Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey
Cllr Wes Read
Cllr Rob Reed
Cllr Tony Robbins
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts
Cllr Mike Stanton
Cllr Andy Sully
Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr Richard Wilkins
Cllr Rosemary Woods
Cllr Ros Wyke

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Jason Baker
Cllr Gill Slocombe

Cllr Val Keitch
Cllr Brian Smedley

1 Election of Chair of the Council - Agenda Item 1

Councillor Lee Baker, Vice Chair of Council, invited nominations for the election of Chair of Council, to serve until the Annual General Meeting of Somerset Council in May 2025.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed, which was duly seconded by Councillor John Hunt, that Councillor Mike Best be elected as Chair of Council to serve until the next Annual General Meeting in May 2025.

The Chair then read and signed the formal Declaration of Acceptance of Office and received the Chain of Office:

"I, Mike Best, having been elected to the Office of Chair of Somerset Council, declare that I take that Office upon myself and will duly and faithfully fulfil the duties of it according to the best of my judgment and ability. I will now sign that declaration."

2 Election of Vice Chair of the Council - Agenda Item 2

Councillor Mike Best, Chair of Council invited nominations for the election of Vice Chair of Council, to serve until the Annual General Meeting of Somerset Council in

May 2025.

Councillor Mike Best proposed, which was duly seconded by Councillor David Fothergill that Councillor Lee Baker be elected as Vice Chair of Council to serve until the next Annual General Meeting in May 2025.

The Vice Chair then read and signed the formal Declaration of Acceptance of Office and received the Chain of Office from the Chair:

"I, Lee Baker, having been elected to the Office of Vice Chair of Somerset Council, declare that I take that Office upon myself and will duly and faithfully fulfil the duties of it according to the best of my judgment and ability. I will now sign that declaration."

3 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 3

Apologies were received from Councillors Jason Baker, Adam Boyden, John Cook-Woodman, Nick Cottle, Tom Deakin, Martin Dimery, Andy Dingwall, Sarah Dyke, Andrew Govier, Susannah Hart, Edric Hobbs, Helen Kay, Val Keitch, Jenny Kenton, Frances Nicholson, Kathy Pearce, Tom Power, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Jo Roundell Greene, Peter Seib, Gill Slocombe, Brian Smedley and Jeny Snell.

Although apologies had been received, Councillors Baker, Keitch, Slocombe and Smedley attended the meeting online.

4 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 4

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council held on 23 April 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

5 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 5

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

SOMERSET COUNCILLOR	CITY, TOWN AND/OR PARISH COUNCIL
Steve Ashton	Crewkerne Town Council / Hinton St George Parish Council / West and Middle Chinnock Parish Council
Suria Aujla	Bridgwater Town Council
Lee Baker	Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council

Marcus Barr	Wellington Town Council
Mike Best	Crewkerne Town Council
Alan Bradford	North Petherton Town Council
Theo Butt Philip	Wells City Council
Simon Carswell	Street Parish Council
Norman Cavill	West Monkton Parish Council
Peter Clayton	Burnham Highbridge Town Council
Adam Dance	South Petherton Parish Council
Caroline Ellis	Taunton Town Council
Ben Ferguson	Axbridge Town Council
Bob Filmer	Brent Knoll Parish Council
Andrew Govier	Wellington Town Council
Pauline Ham	Axbridge Town Council
Philip Ham	Coleford Parish Council
Alastair Hendry	Burnham on Sea and Highbridge Town Council
Ross Henley	Wellington Town Council
John Hunt	Bishop's Hull Parish Council
Andy Kendall	Yeovil Town Council
Tim Kerley	Somerton Town Council
Marcus Kravis	Minehead Town Council
Tony Lock	Yeovil Town Council
Martin Lovell	Shepton Mallet Town Council
Mike Murphy	Burnham Highbridge Town Council
Graham Oakes	Yeovil Town Council / Yeovil Without Parish Council
Sue Osborne	Ilminster Town Council
Evie Potts-Jones	Yeovil Town Council
Wes Read	Yeovil Town Council
Leigh Redman	Bridgwater Town Council
Tony Robbins	Wells City Council
Diogo Rodrigues	Bridgwater Town Council
Peter Seib	Brympton Parish Council / Chilthorne Domer Parish Council
Heather Shearer	Street Parish Council
Federica Smith-Roberts	Taunton Town Council
Andy Soughton	Yeovil Town Council
Richard Wilkins	Curry Rivel Parish Council
Dave Woan	Yeovil Town Council
Ros Wyke	Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council

6 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 6

Public questions were received from:-

- Sigurd Reimers – Climate
- David Redgewell – Public Transport
- Petition to save Yeovil Bus Station, toilets and waiting room from closure
- Rosa Kell – Public Transport
- Nigel Behan – Social Housing

The questions and responses provided are attached to the minutes in Annex A.

7 Chair's Announcements - Agenda Item 7

The Chair of Council, Councillor Mike Best, referred to the events detailed on the Chair's Information Sheet, circulated and published with the agenda.

Council observed a minute's silence in memory of former Sedgemoor District Councillor John Lang, who had sadly passed away. Councillors paid tribute to him at the meeting, including Councillors Alan Bradford and Bill Revans.

The Chair of Council welcomed the newly elected Councillor Rob Reed to his first meeting of Full Council.

The Chair of Council also highlighted the following:-

- Recent communications had been issued to the Town and Parish Councils regarding the Community Awards.
- There would be a special meeting of Full Council held on 18 June 2024 to debate the Implementation of the Gravity Enterprise Zone.
- The Chair of Council also advised that all future meetings of Full Council would commence at 1pm with exception of the budget meeting, which would start at 10am.

8 Octagon Theatre - Addition to Capital Programme - Agenda Item 8

The Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts, introduced the report on the Octagon Theatre and the addition to the Capital Programme which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting on 8 May 2024.

The report detailed the opportunity to bid for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport Grant that had been offered and was now progressing well against a smaller

refurbishment ambition. It was a requirement of the bid that the scheme was added back to the Council's Capital Programme.

The report also noted that as part of the wider devolution conversation with Yeovil Town Council, they had requested the asset and service transfer of the Octagon Theatre. This proposal would be considered by the Council's Asset Management Group.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Some councillors raised concern on supporting the recommendations, which related to fundraising, ticket levies and lack of information.
- Concern was raised that Somerset Council would bear the financial risk. *The Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture advised that the report was asking for the project to be added back into the Capital Programme and she gave further information on the finances.*
- Some councillors raised concern that Yeovil Town Council and the residents of Yeovil would be left paying for an asset that was used by the whole county.
- Councillors queried whether the details of the business case had been decided.
- Concern was raised on the viability of the theatre.
- Councillors queried how the project would appear in the budget due to concerns raised on safeguarding the budget.
- Councillors praised the Lead Member for their work on the project and congratulated Somerset Council for its great arts scene.
- Councillors requested that regular update reports were brought back to committee when the business case had been decided.
- Councillors were pleased to see what could be achieved with the right funding.

Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Andy Soughton.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to add the revised Octagon project to the Council Capital Programme, on the proviso that a build contract was not awarded and build work did not commence until a devolution deal had been finalised with Yeovil Town Council.

9 First year review of the Council's Constitution - Agenda Item 9

The Chair of the Constitution and Governance Committee, Councillor Ross Henley, introduced the report on the review of the Council's Constitution which the Constitution and Governance Committee considered and endorsed at its meeting on

17 April 2024.

The report detailed the phased review of key elements of the Constitution which had been carried out over a series of working group meetings led by elected members and supported by officers from Democratic Services, Legal Services, Licensing and Planning.

The key areas of focus for the review included:-

- Part B - Public Participation (Paper A)
- Part C - Council Procedures (Paper B)
- Parts D4 and D5 Licensing and Regulatory Committee Terms of Reference (Paper C)
- Part D8 Planning Committee Terms of Reference (Paper D)
- Part I2 Officer Scheme of Delegation (Paper E)
- Part I7 Financial Regulations (Paper F)

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors spoke about the working groups and how they had been established.
- Some councillors raised concern that the financial regulations had not been looked at as part of the working group review.
- Councillors thanked the Chair of the Constitution and Governance Committee for allowing an in depth debate of the review at the last committee meeting.

Councillor Dave Mansell proposed an amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Bob Filmer. The amendment had been brought forward based on the concerns raised on the process followed for the review, working groups and workshop:-

In Paper D, replace recommendations on Part D8 - Planning Committee Terms of Reference with the following new 2.1, 2):

- Refer the proposed changes to Part D8 - Planning Committee Terms of Reference to Constitution and Governance Committee for further review after requesting feedback on the proposed changes from Council Members.

This change deleted current 2.1, 1), 1. and deleted and replaced 2.1, 2).

During the discussion on the amendment, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors queried the 2-day consultation period for planning applications, which needed looking into again as part of the next review.
- Some councillors raised concern that the amendment was requesting changes that were contrary to what they wanted to achieve.
- Councillors highlighted that a review on the Planning Committee Terms of Reference had just been carried out and had included feedback from all the

Planning Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, the Lead Member and many of the Planning Officers.

- The Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets advised councillors on the huge amount of work that had been carried out as part of the review and the wide spectrum of people that had been involved. The results produced from the review still might not be perfect, but the Constitution and Governance Committee had requested that the Terms of Reference be reviewed again in 6 months' time.
- Councillors wanted to get the process correct for planning applications.
- Councillors talked through the planning process and that the 2-day period for consultation was enough time for councillors to give feedback.
- Councillors spoke on other areas of concern which included non-determination.
- Councillors from the Constitution and Governance Committee spoke on the process followed by the review and that there had been plenty of input given on the changes proposed within the report.
- The Monitoring Officer advised councillors who had been involved and invited to the working group meetings, workshop and the April meeting of the Constitution and Governance Committee and that there had been plenty of chances for input into the changes to the Constitution.

The vote was taken for the amendment, which was lost. Therefore Councillor Dave Mansell proposed a second amendment, which was seconded by Gwil Wren:-

Amendments to Paper D, Recommendation 2.1

Add 'with the following amendments' to end of 2.1, 1) 1. and then the text that follows.

The amended recommendation then read:

1) Agreed the proposed changes to the following parts of the Council's Constitution:

- I. Part D8 – Planning Committee Terms of Reference (see Appendices 4 and 5) along with the following amendments to the proposed changes:

After new 5.6 a, replace new 5.6 b-c (and original 8.6 b-e) with following new clauses:

- b) If the Officer recommendation was ultimately in agreement with views of the Local Unitary Councillor, the decision would be delegated to Officers.
- c) If the Officer recommendation was ultimately not in agreement with views of the Local Unitary Councillor, the application would be referred to the area-based Planning Committee for a decision, unless the Local Unitary Councillor withdrew their request within 5 working days of being sent the Officer report and recommendation.
- d) The Chair or Vice-Chair of the relevant area-based Planning Committee might consult the Local Unitary Councillor about their request for referral to Committee once they had been sent the Officer report and recommendation. Only the Local Unitary Councillor could withdraw their

referral request within 5 working days of being sent the Officer report and recommendation.

Amended Text

With these amendments the new proposed text for 5.6 will be as follows:

5.6 Local Unitary Councillor referral of planning applications to Planning Committee:

- a) Within 28 days of being notified of a Planning Application, the Local Unitary Councillor and/or a Local Unitary Councillor of an adjoining division could request referral of the application to the relevant Planning Committee by notifying the Planning Service, in writing, with material planning reasons.
- b) If the Officer recommendation was ultimately in agreement with views of the Local Unitary Councillor, the decision would be delegated to Officers.
- c) If the Officer recommendation was ultimately not in agreement with views of the Local Unitary Councillor, the application would be referred to the area-based Planning Committee for a decision, unless the Local Unitary Councillor withdrew their request within 5 working days of being sent the Officer report and recommendation.
- d) The Chair or Vice-Chair of the relevant area-based Planning Committee might consult the Local Unitary Councillor about their request for referral to Committee once they had been sent the Officer report and recommendation. Only the Local Unitary Councillor could withdraw their referral request within 5 working days of being sent the Officer report and recommendation.

During the discussion on the second amendment, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors requested clarification on the amendment and the proposed changes to the planning processes.

The vote was taken for the second amendment, which was lost.

Councillor Ross Henley proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Tim Kerley.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to:-

- i. Agree the proposed changes to Part B – Public Participation as shown in Paper A and the tracked changes in Appendix 1 of Paper A
- ii. Agree the proposed changes to Part C – Council Procedural Rules as shown in Paper B and the tracked changes in Appendix 1 of Paper B
- iii. Agree the proposed changes to Part D4-Licensing and Regulatory Committee Terms of Reference, Part D5 – Licensing sub-committee hearing procedure and specific delegations for the Licensing Functions as shown in Paper C and the tracked changes in Appendices 2, 5 and 7 of Paper C

- iv. Agree the proposed changes to Part D8 – Planning Committees Terms of Reference as shown in Paper D and the tracked changes in Appendices 4,5, 7 and 8 of Paper D. Note the further review work that Constitution and Governance Committee will undertake during 2024/25 as set out in Paper D.
- v. Agree the proposed changes to Part I2 – Officer Scheme of Delegation as shown in Paper E and the tracked changes in Appendices 1 and 2 of Paper E
- vi. Agree the proposed changes to Part I7 – Financial Regulations as shown in Appendix 1 of Paper F.

10 Appointments to Committees, Internal and Outside Boards and Panels and Calendar of Meetings - Agenda Item 10

The Monitoring Officer, David Clark, introduced the report which set out the proposed appointment of members to committee places, the proposed appointment of members to Outside Bodies and the proposed Calendar of Committee Meetings for the 2024-25 municipal year.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors requested a review be carried out on the Outside Bodies.
- Concern was raised on what reporting process was followed by the representations on the Outside Bodies.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor David Fothergill.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to:-

Paper A

- 1) Note the political balance of the Council and agree the proposed allocation of committee places as set out in this report and its appendices;
- 2) Agree the terms of reference, size and quorum arrangements for all committees as set out in the Council's Constitution, this report and its appendices;
- 3) Continue to endorse the recommendation of the political group leaders and agree to continue to set aside the political balance rules for the Standards Committee and the four area-based Planning Committees and instead allocate places for those committees on the basis set out in Appendix 3;
- 4) Approve the political group leaders' nominations for the appointment of Chairs, Vice-Chairs, members and co-opted members to the Council's committee and joint committees as set out in the Appointments Schedule (see Appendix 3);
- 5) Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the appropriate political group leader, to make in-year changes to committee and

joint committee appointments (excluding the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs) in accordance with the allocation of places to political groups by the Council and the wishes of the relevant political group leader.

Paper B

- 6) Agree the appointment of members to internal, partnership and outside bodies for 2024/25 until the next Annual General Meeting, as set out in Appendix 1.
- 7) Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the political group leaders, to make in-year changes to internal, partnership and outside bodies appointments in accordance with the wishes of the relevant political group leader.

Paper C

- 8) Approve the proposed calendar of meetings for Somerset Council from 22 May 2024 (set out in Appendix 1).
- 9) Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to finalise and make any changes to the proposed meeting dates, times, meeting arrangements and meeting venues in consultation with the Chairs of the relevant committees.

11 Somerset Council Redundancies Requiring Full Council Approval - Agenda Item 11

The Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey, introduced the report which detailed the proposed dismissals by reason of redundancy in relation to the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme and the restructuring of Partnerships and Localities and Strategic Asset Management as part of the Local Government Reorganisation.

The report also detailed the role of Council in relation to the dismissals and requested delegation to the Head of Paid Service to finalise details of the payments associated with the redundancies, in line with appropriate legislation and policies.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked officers for all their hard work and service over the years.
- Concern was raised on the levels of redundancy approved, especially for the Section 151 Officer and the downgrading of the post.
The Chief Executive advised that the Section 151 Officer would still form part of the senior management team and be part of any 'top table' discussions.
- Concern was raised on the approval of redundancy for the Section 151 Officer especially during a financial emergency.
The Chief Executive advised that the post being made redundant was the Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services, not the position of Section 151 Officer, as that was a statutory role.
- Councillors requested clarification on the pension strain part of the

redundancy payments.

- Councillors highlighted their regret of the Council being in the financial position to require staff redundancies.
- Concern was raised that the structure had not been sorted prior to redundancies being approved.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Liz Leyshon.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to:-

- 2.1 Approve the redundancy costs for 49 posts as set out in Appendix A, as Full Council approval was required for costs that exceed £100,000.
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to agree the final date of dismissal and the final redundancy packages, noting that such settlements would not exceed contractual redundancy pay or the payment required under statute to the Local Government Pension Scheme/NHS Pension Scheme.
- 2.3 Approve the dismissal and redundancy costs of the Executive Director Corporate and Resources (Section 151 Officer) by reason of redundancy (voluntary) as per the recommendation of the Special Members Panel.
- 2.4 Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to agree the final date of dismissal and the final redundancy package of the Executive Director Corporate and Resources (Section 151 Officer), noting that such settlement would not exceed contractual redundancy pay or the payment required under statute to the Local Government Pension Scheme

12 Scrutiny Review - Agenda Item 12

The Chair of Scrutiny Committee for Corporate and Resources, Councillor Bob Filmer, introduced the report on the Scrutiny Review which was considered and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee for Corporate and Resources at its meeting on 25 April 2024 and the Executive at its meeting on 8 May 2024.

The report detailed the work carried out throughout the review and highlighted certain areas of focus which included:-

- Committee member engagement
- Scrutiny agendas, reports and meeting cycle
- Scrutiny staff resource
- Improving the link between Scrutiny and Executive

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance thanked the Scrutiny Committees for all their hard work

especially the work carried out through the budget setting process.

- The Leader of the Council thanked councillors and officers for their work on the review.
- Councillors valued the work of the Scrutiny Committees and that they formed an essential part of the democratic pathway.
- Councillors queried whether the dedicated Scrutiny Resource would be retained throughout the restructure.

Councillor Bob Filmer proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Leigh Redman.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to approve that:-

- 1) The current structure of 5 scrutiny committees to remain in place, with a further scrutiny review to be conducted by the scrutiny chairs in late 2024/early 2025 following any potential service restructure.
- 2) The scrutiny manager was tasked with preparing a revised and improved scrutiny report template, which enabled clearer and more concise presentation of reports, a standard consistency of reports across all 5 scrutiny committees, a clearer link between committee recommendations onto the Executive/Executive Member(s) and ensuring service areas clearly demonstrated where scrutiny was able to add value.
- 3) That all 5 scrutiny committees adopted a consistent approach to dealing with information only items, in order that agendas were kept clear for items with specific recommendations and the opportunity for the committees to add value. This information also to include details of any delegated decisions the scrutiny chair had been consulted on.
- 4) To bolster the links between all 5 scrutiny committees and the Executive by ensuring clear communication between the parties and encourage increased opportunities for committee chairs to update the Executive on areas of focus and present any recommendations/proposals the committee have agreed. Also for the Democratic Services team to establish a central record of all formal scrutiny recommendations and the responses to them.
- 5) The scrutiny manager to liaise with the 5 Group Leaders in advance of the AGM Council meeting (May 2024) in order to provide detailed attendance information on each of the Committee's membership, to ensure committee membership and substitutes reflected maximum engagement and consistency.
- 6) The scrutiny manager to liaise with the 5 Group Leaders to ensure a consistent, timely and wherever possible consistent approach to scrutiny substitutes.
- 7) Elected committee membership to remain as 13 individual members.
- 8) To continue with the monthly meetings of the 5 Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs

and scrutiny manager.

- 9) To continue with the model of an Executive Director aligned to each Committee as the lead service officer and to encourage continued attendance from all relevant Executive Members.
- 10) To support the continuation of a dedicated scrutiny resource from the Democratic Services team, to allow for more effective and efficient scrutiny and increase scrutiny opportunities, whilst ensuring resilience within the officer cohort.

13 Annual Report of the five Scrutiny Committees - Agenda Item 13

The five Chairs of Scrutiny, Councillor Leigh Redman, Councillor Gwil Wren, Councillor Bob Filmer, Councillor Gill Slocombe and Councillor Henry Hobhouse, introduced each of their annual reports, which detailed the activity of each of the five Scrutiny Committees since vesting day.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Chair of each of the five Scrutiny Committees introduced their annual reports.
- The Lead Members thanked each of their associated Scrutiny Committee for their hard work over the past year.

The Council noted the report.

14 Key Decisions taken since the last Council Meeting - Agenda Item 14

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans, introduced the report which included a summary of the key decisions taken by the Leader and Executive.

The Council noted the report.

14a Annual Report of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Councillor Bill Revans, introduced his annual report.

Member Questions were received from:-

- Councillor Leigh Redman – Debate not Hate Update.

The questions and responses are attached to the minutes in Annex B.

The Council noted the report.

15 Annual Report of the Constitution and Governance Committee - Agenda Item 16

The Chair of the Constitution and Governance Committee, Councillor Ross Henley, introduced the annual report of the Constitution and Governance Committee.

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors on the Constitution and Governance Committee urged all councillors to keep up to date with the items being brought to committee to ensure they gave feedback into any future reviews.

The Council noted the report.

16 Annual Report of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel - Agenda Item 17

The Chair of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel, Councillor Heather Shearer, introduced the annual report of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were pleased with the annual report.
- Councillors highlighted that more resource was required in the former West Somerset Council area.
- Councillors highlighted some incidents and how good the response times had been.
- Councillors queried whether the new Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) would make any significant changes.

The Chair of the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel advised that the new PCC was aware that the resource was very Bristol focused, so would be looking to diversify.

The Council noted the report.

17 Questions from Councillors to the Executive - Agenda Item 18

The Chair of Council, Councillor Mike Best, invited questions from councillors for the Leader and the Executive.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

Lead Member for Transport and Digital

- Councillors requested an update on the rural broadband project and whether it was on track for completion in 2025.

Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change

- Councillors thanked the Lead Member for the work being carried out on tree planting and the information provided by officers.

Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets

- Councillors thanked the Lead Member for the work carried out on the town deal.

(The meeting ended at 7.00 pm)

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CHAIR

Annual Council – 22 May 2024 – Public and Member Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
Page 17	<p>Sigurd Reimers</p> <p>In February, Somerset Wildlife Trust published a position statement on the continuing problem of peat extraction#. This practice is responsible for approximately 5% of all human-produced emissions of greenhouse gases globally. Greenhouse gases are largely responsible for the devastating problem of global warming.</p> <p>Following their declaration of a climate and ecological emergency in 2021, Somerset Council and its predecessors have carried out some important work in this area. This is of course particularly important in a county like ours which is almost unique in still permitting the extraction of peat. Somerset (County) Council’s 2016 Mineral Plan, following on its 2013 document <i>Mineral Topics Paper 3: Peat Reserves and Supply</i>, now severely dated, started addressing the problem, but progress has been too slow. Although quality peat-free products have been available for years, the sale of peat continues, often indirectly: amateur gardening accounts for 66% of all sales of peat in this country. It is hoped that Parliament will have debated this issue on 17th May (Horticultural Peat (Prohibition of Sale) Bill), including a proposal to ban the sale of peat by the end of 2024.</p> <p>Question 1a – What steps is Somerset Council itself taking to bring this dangerous practice to an end?</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Councillor Dixie Darch</p> <p>Response from Lead Officer: Executive Director for Climate and Place, Mickey Green and Service Director for Climate, Environment and Sustainability, Kirsty Larkins</p>
Full written response to be distributed within 5	<p>We are working with key partners (DEFRA, NE, EA and FWAG) across Somerset to reduce peat extraction, but without changes to legislation and consumer practice it is difficult to completely eradicate. We believe peat extraction and its degradation needs to be tackled in a more holistic working with landowners and rural communities to keep ground wetter for longer, and reduce the demand for peat, and peat products, by offering alternative income generation through green initiatives.</p>

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<p>working days</p>	<p>There are several sites across Somerset that are trialling alternative land management methods to keep peat wetter for longer, whilst balancing this with the need to be able to farm.</p> <p>Somerset peat is recognised nationally as hugely important in reducing CO2 emissions and support biodiversity. The Council will continue to work towards the eradication of peat extraction with partners.</p>
<p>David Redgewell</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 18</p>	<p>Question 2a what progress is being made on purchase and Redevelopment of Yeovil bus and coach station and shopping centre Developments,</p> <p>In a report to last full council,</p> <p>The Executive member for Planning and Regeation councillor Ros wyke stated the shopping centre and Bus and coach station would be demolition with grant money from the Department for levelling up,</p> <p>As part of this scheme once the council has purchased the shopping centre from the Northern Ireland property Group, company,</p> <p>What plans does the council now have as owners of the shopping centre and Bus and coach station,</p> <p>To keep the waiting room and Toilets facilities open at the bus and coach station Including First Group plc offices and Drivers mess room and supervisor office, bus shelters repairs</p> <p>Keeping the kiosk open for passengers and looking at the future of the cafe</p> <p>It is very important the this Regional bus and coach station that services bus and coach Network across Yeovil and into Somerset and Dorset is kept open</p> <p>For bus network provided by First group plc South buses Division and First group plc Wales and West buses Division, South west coaches group</p> <p>Somerset council own bus company .</p> <p>Berry coaches part of megabus Scottish City link coaches network and Flixbus coaches network to Wincanton bus and coach station, Amebury and London Hammersmith and Taunton from coaches to Exeter, Plymouth Cornwall and North Devon,</p> <p>Rail link bus service to Yeovil pen mill station First group plc Great Western Railway company service to Dorchester west and Weymouth, For Bournemouth and Poole,</p> <p>Castle cary, Bruton Westbury, Frome, Trowbridge, Bradford on Avon, Bath spa, keynsham and Bristol Temple meads,</p> <p>Castle cary for London Paddington, Taunton, Exeter St David Plymouth North Road and Penzance or North Devon, and Torbay,</p>

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Yeovil Junction railway station First group plc MTR South Western Railway company, for Railway services to London Waterloo via Salisbury and services to Crewence, Axminster, Exeter Central and Exeter St Davids ,
So what is the present proposal for Yeovil bus and coach station and shopping centre under Somerset council ownership,

Question 2b,

With the purchase of Yeovil bus and coach station and Yeovil shopping centre, and the council proposal to demolish the. Shopping centres car park and bus and coach station,

What provision is in place by Somerset council to crate a Temporary bus and coach station, similar to the Temporary bus and coach station at built at Bath spa durring the shopping centre redevelopment that included waiting room facilities, Shelters Temporary public toilets including disabled facilities,

Staff accommodation for Drivers and supervisor and Kiosk/ cafe facilities and information points,

Question 2c,

With regards to the Somerset bus service improvement plan,

What discussion have the Somerset council had with the rest of the county of Somerset on the bus service Network including ,North Somerset council, and the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority and Banes council ,bus services improvement plan, with Devon County Council bus service improvement plan, Wiltshire Council and Swindon bus services improvement plans

But especially with new administration in Dorset and the importance of Yeovil and District bus and coach Network into Dorset with cross boundary bus services CR5 Yeovil bus and coach station to Sherborne Railway station

Sherborne Town centre and Dorchester,

Operated by South west coaches for Dorset Council,

service 58 58 a Yeovil bus and coach station Yeovil pen mill station, Sherborne Town Sherborne Railway station Templecombe

Wincanton bus and coach station,

Operated by First group plc South buses Division for Somerset and Dorset Councils,

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 20</p>	<p>CR6 Yeovil bus and coach station to Yeovil pen mill, Sherborne Town centre, Sherborne Railway station, strumister Newton, and Blandford Forum, Operated by First group plc South buses Division for Dorset Council, Service CR4 Yeovil bus and coach station to crewrence Beaminster and Bridport bus and coach station, Operated by First group plc South buses Division for Dorset Council, This along with the importance of bus Depot facilities in Yeovil for maintenance of bus and coaches for Dorset and south Somerset council area by working together to improve the area bus and coach Network through the council bus service improvement plans and Western Gateway Transport Board and Peninsula Transport Board,</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p> <p>Response from Lead Officer: Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport, Mike O’Dowd-Jones</p>
<p>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</p>	<p>Response to 2a & 2b:</p> <p>The Council is committed to keeping Yeovil Bus Station operational as a vital part of a rejuvenated town centre. We will ensure the bus station remains a key transport hub in the county and are currently involved in commercial discussions with the owner with a view to buying the site. These talks are ongoing and have been for some time as part of Yeovil’s regeneration. Once we have secured ownership of the site, we will eventually look to remove some of the existing ageing buildings with a view to making long term improvements. We are currently considering the detail of the facilities that will be retained for the time being as part of a phased approach to redevelopment and will be discussing this with the bus operators.</p> <p>There will not be a need to create a temporary bus station as we will be keeping an operational facility throughout the forthcoming changes.</p> <p>We are pleased to confirm that we have reached an agreement to keep the waiting room open beyond 31 May with the support of the Somerset Bus Partnership and First Bus South West.</p>

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	<p>Response to question 2c:</p> <p>As part of the consultation process for the BSIP 2024 review, we have consulted the Bus Advisory Board which includes representatives from neighbouring Local Authorities. Officers have also attended the Enhanced Partnership Forums of these neighbouring authorities where their BSIP reviews were discussed.</p> <p>At this stage, the review contains very high-level ambition and is not a bidding document, as there is no new funding available. We anticipate a further BSIP submission next year, which may require more detailed proposals and we will ensure we discuss this with neighbouring authorities where appropriate.</p>
<p>Rosa Kell</p> <p>Page 21</p>	<p>Question 3a –</p> <p>The bus travelling public of Taunton, are being inconvenienced on a daily basis by the closure of the Bus Station at Castle Way. We are unable to understand how this site can be used for a vintage bus experience when passengers can safely board buses but this site is not available for daily bus travel.</p> <p>I therefore would like to ask the council if it can advise us bus passengers of their target date by which the Taunton Mobility Hub should be open?</p> <p>Question 3b</p> <p>Can we have confirmation that it will have a waiting room, refreshment area and WCs?</p> <p>Question 3c</p> <p>Has the DfT set any deadline by which the Taunton Mobility Hub must be open?</p> <p>Question 3d</p> <p>Is there any risk that further delay could result in the DfT funding for the Taunton Mobility Hub being withdrawn?</p> <p>We have asked other committees for updates and to date no satisfactory response has been received.</p> <p>Response from Lead Member for Transport and Digital, Councillor Richard Wilkins</p>

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	<p>Response from Lead Officer: Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport, Mike O’Dowd-Jones</p>
<p>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 22</p>	<p>3a) The bus station was originally closed due to a commercial decision by the operator ceasing use of the site. It was then bought by the former District Council and Somerset Council is now seeking to improve the site as a mobility hub and open it up to use again using BSIP funds. It was <u>not</u> closed due to safety issues, but we would like to change the layout within the new scheme to minimise reversing manouvres and improve pedestrian movement; so the revised design will have safety benefits. It is considered safe for a heritage bus to pick up from the site as a one-off or occasional trip as per the event that the NHS have organised. The Taunton Mobility Hub is in the development phase, so the details are still emerging as we work through the process. The work is due to be completed during 2025 and is subject to planning permission. The date for opening will be shared once it is known.</p> <p>3b) The aspiration is to include a range of facilities, but the exact details are still subject to design, planning permission and understanding the future affordability.</p> <p>3c) The DfT has not set any deadline regarding the opening of the mobility hub, we update them regularly.</p> <p>3d) There are risks with any infrastructure project, which are managed throughout the life of the project, there is no risk to the funding at this point.</p>
<p>Nigel Behan</p>	<p>Question 4a In a recent summary of a debate on the future of social housing posted on the LGA website Debate on the future of social housing, House of Commons it was noted:</p> <p>A generational step-change in council housebuilding is required to boost housing supply, help families struggling to meet housing costs, and tackle housing waiting lists.</p> <p>And</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over recent decades, construction of new homes has failed to keep pace with population growth, demographics and socio-demographic change, particularly due to the decline public house building. At the same time, the stock of social homes has significantly reduced as councils have struggled to replace homes lost through Right to Buy. The housing shortage has seen rents and property prices rise significantly faster than incomes, acutely impacting the lowest income and vulnerable

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families and individuals. Compared to the private rental sector and homes at affordable rent, social homes provide a genuinely affordable alternative and greater security of tenancy. For many people, social housing remains the only feasible option due to the widening gap between Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and market rents.

Councils are determined that all tenants should have the security of a safe and well-maintained home. Councils manage more than 1.6 million homes, carry out millions of repairs each year and invest billions in housing services. The majority of social housing landlords are responsible and provide high quality homes for people to live in, and councils are determined to ensure that poor conditions and repairs are swiftly and satisfactorily addressed.

Moreover:

Funding remains one of the key barriers local authorities face in delivering more social homes. The lifting of the HRA borrowing cap in 2018, which allows local authorities to borrow against expected rental income, has had a positive impact on planned levels of council house building. Councils stand ready to rapidly scale up investment in new builds and the existing housing stock when further funding is made available. However, to meet our ambitions for social housing, there are a range of policy and fiscal interventions that councils need from Government:

And

Access to affordable borrowing

To fund the supply of social housing we have long been calling for councils to have access to lower borrowing rates through the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). Government announced in the Spring Budget that they will bring forward a new discounted Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) policy margin to support local authorities borrowing for Housing Revenue Accounts and the delivery of social housing, which is positive and will help provide much needed additional support for vital council housebuilding projects.

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What will this Council practically do to increase (significantly) council house building across the former District Council areas In Somerset?

Question 4b In [Reforms and resistance: how tenants can influence housing policy](#) it was stated:

“Yet, after many years of relatively little activity there has been a noticeable growth in grassroots resistance on housing issues. Much of the academic work on housing does not portray tenants as active agents who can influence or even change their living conditions. The analysis tends to focus on the nature, history and potential impact of particular policies and processes in housing. But historically, grassroots campaigning has had a significant influence on the nature of housing at both local and national levels. Furthermore in the current environment housing campaigns are being sparked by the failing policies of successive governments.

An example of this reform-resistance dynamic is the campaigning, over the past two decades, by [Defend Council Housing](#) (DCH). DCH was formed when campaigners who had been opposing the emerging large-scale voluntary stock transfers of council housing to housing associations, recognised the need to fight at both the estate (local) level and the national government level. Over the intervening period, DCH has had a greater impact than is often recognised, supporting tenants to secure anti-transfer (privatisation) votes in approximately a quarter of all proposals in England. These votes resulted in very real benefits with council tenants retaining their accountable, secure tenancies. At a national level, the early DCH successes forced the New Labour government to develop an alternative policy of [Arm’s Length Management Organisations](#).

There were campaigns in Somerset to retain the council housing stock successful in Taunton Deane (and almost in South Somerset) where council tenants were actively involved in “retaining their accountable, secure tenancies.”

How does this council intend to involve service users, citizens, residents, electors (and council tenants) meaningfully in moving “.....towards a housing system that is based on the need for secure, decent shelter – not the priorities of finance or the market”?

Response from Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture, Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts

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	<p>Response from Lead Officer: Executive Director for Community Services, Chris Hall and Service Director for Housing, Chris Brown</p>
<p>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Page 25</p>	<p>4a –</p> <p>The council share concerns on the shortage of affordable housing nationally and in the county. Over the past seven years compared to the previous seven years, the number of properties let by housing associations and the council through the Homefinder Countywide choice-based allocation system has decreased by over 752 homes per annum. This is from c 2,898 units per year 2010-2016 to c2146 between 2017-2023 yet demand for affordable housing has increased significantly both on homefinder and through direct approaches to the housing options service. There are a constant c10,000 households seeking affordable homes in the county yet insufficient private rented accommodation and social housing through housing associations and the council. The dual pressure of fewer affordable homes available to let and increasing demand is both a national, regional, and local challenge and I would agree that this is a housing crisis.</p> <p>The environment for housebuilding in Somerset, particularly affordable houses, is challenging as build costs have risen at an even steeper rate than many other costs. Affordable home coming through the planning process are being squeezed or reduced as viability assessments as well as competing s106 contributions for areas such as education and highways must be considered alongside affordable homes. We have seen new climate change and ecology requirements introduced through the planning system which has stalled many developments and/or reduced the viability of schemes further squeezing the numbers of s106 affordable homes able to be achieved through the planning system.</p> <p>The demand for private rented homes is so great in the county that there are very few landlords advertising homes within the Local Housing Allowance level. The local housing allowance sets a ceiling for subsidy towards private rented sector tenants accommodation costs. The inability of households to secure affordable accommodation in the private rented sector is contributing to the increased number of households on the Homefinder system and those looking for affordable housing with the council or housing associations.</p>

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There are many registered providers (RP) and smaller organisations including community land trusts working hard throughout the county to try and building their own schemes or purchasing the s106 affordable units from developers. The council work with many of these developers through the planning process and through our Housing Enabling Team. Our aim is to support these organisations delivery not only new affordable units but also the size and type of homes people require in the county.

As a landlord the Council does not have many homes in the South, East and most Westerly parts of the County as stock was transferred to registered providers a number of years ago increasing the importance of good partnerships with housing landlords to manage affordable home provision. Timely support to help Registered Providers helps deliver general need and specialist housing, low-cost home ownership opportunities as well as homes for rented at affordable rents. This is something the Council is committed to do.

The Council housing stock of 9700 homes are mainly in the West and North of the county although the council as landlord is stretching to other parts of the county on a small scale. Fifty-Four new build Net Zero affordable homes are about to complete in Minehead this summer and the council has been able to purchase homes in Yeovil and Martock over the past year. The Housing Revenue Account of the council is the ring-fenced account which is used to fund the landlord service and new council homes. The housing revenue accounts income is primarily from tenants' rents however the council can use a share of the Right to Buy sales receipts and other grants to reduce the costs of new build and acquisitions to the Councils landlord service. Over the past three years we have seen this proportion of Right to Buy Receipt we are able to use for acquisitions and new build homes increasing from 30%-50% which is helpful. However, the landlord service is not unfettered in its ability to grow its stock as the Housing Revenue Account must have sufficient funds in its business plan to cover the costs of its services and any borrowing for new homes. The Council as landlord has many responsibilities with keeping tenants safe in their homes at the top of the list. Other key aspects of our service include keeping homes in a good state of repair, achieve the decent homes standard and the statutory milestone requirements to achieve net zero (at an affordable cost to the tenant). The landlord is subject to increasing legislation including the new consumer standards and regulatory framework which rightly means the council as landlord must seek to deliver a quality service to tenants in a way tenants as a whole value.

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There is therefore a priority when setting the business plan to ensure the landlord first considers its need to provide quality services in safe, decent homes and increasingly energy efficient homes. These pressures equally apply to Registered Providers, and we have seen a national trend in social landlords reducing their development programmes in order to concentrate on core services and achieving energy efficiency standards.

Due to the one-off subsidy 2023/2024 was a good year for new council homes with 100 new homes and exceptionally low number of homes lost (17) the council increased its new homes by 83. On average the housing revenue account predicts to lose c50 homes through the Right to Buy and some homes are lost through regeneration work. The Housing Revenue Account business plan has 448 new build homes in its approved programme over the next 5 years, but we can see that this represents a small net gain when we consider the Right to Buy and regeneration losses. We recognise these number will not be sufficient to meet demand and we need to fund as many opportunities to work with other providers to maximise affordable housing in the county and encourage greater funding for building new affordable homes. The ability to develop and acquire more council homes is dependent on sufficient headroom in the Housing Revenue Account business plan or one-off subsidies which the council can bid for from time to time. An example of a one-off subsidy would be the Local Authority Housing Fund which has seen 31 homes acquired by the Council in 2023/2024 with a bid for an additional 33 more homes submitted to government for delivery 2024/2026. The council's landlord service like all developers is subject to the material and labour inflation experienced by all developers when building homes plus the same need to address climate change and ecological requirements.

4b -

The landlord service is the more advanced in involving tenants (service users) in the monitoring of services and influencing the policies and priorities of the service. Council homes whether they are managed in the North by Homes in Sedgemoor or in the West by the In-house Council service are working with tenants engaged in operational matters such as landlord safety and compliance, standard of properties, energy efficiency, communication and also have bodies of tenants at the strategic level considering policy and performance. Members of our Tenants Strategic Group has just completed their three year term and over

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thirty tenants have applied to be selected (by other tenants). We would like to thank all those tenants who give up their time to ensure oversight and influence of the in house and Homes in Sedgemoor services.

The government has introduced greater regulation for all registered providers including council landlords based around a number of consumer standards. The consumer standards set out clear expectations for social landlords to involve customers with decision making as well as set out expectations of service in relation to safety, decency, engagement, managing and learning from complaints, understanding of tenants needs, governance and a lot more. These consumer standards help landlords including the council maintain a focus on the customer experience and collect customer satisfaction through a standard approach using ‘Tenant Satisfaction Measures’. The government have accompanied the consumer standards with a new regulatory regime which will complement other external oversight of social landlords such as the housing ombudsman. The council looks forward to engaging with tenants and other stakeholders on options for the housing service to reflect Somerset Council as a landlord of nearly 10,000 homes.

The Council’s housing options (homeless service), Displaced Persons service, and its adaptations service carry out surveys and collect customer feedback to improve service. The enabling service work with groups delivering or aspiring to deliver community led housing as well as larger social landlords, who in turn are influenced by their tenants and or their members. The council will continue to seek ways to work with customers receiving our service and members of the public and partners who would like to influence our services.

Annexe B – Member Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question

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Page 29	<p>Cllr Leigh Redman</p> <p>Debate not hate update.</p> <p>I would like to ask a question of the CEO and Leader of council.</p> <p>A year or so ago this council supported my motion unanimously, Debate not Hate is too me an important part of my political role, as leader of a small group on a big council being able to compromise and work cross party is essential in order to get things done for the people I represent and everyone in Somerset. My heart was filled with joy when this LGA promoted issue was agreed unanimously.</p> <p>When I put the motion, I made reference to an aspiration that the motion would be council wide, looking inward and out, I have to admit that after the last 2 full council meetings, I was not assured that all members were on board with the heart of the motion, I was shocked to see members leaning across their tables to shout across the floor on more than one occasion. Not a good impression for anyone looking in.</p> <p>Question 1a</p> <p>Can council have an update on steps taken and actions implemented following the motion please?</p> <p>Thank you and Stay safe,</p> <p>Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans</p> <p>Response from Lead Officer: Chief Executive, Duncan Sharkey</p>
<p>Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days</p>	<p>Thank you Councillor Redman for your question and for bring the Debate not Hate motion forward in the first instance.</p> <p>A number of activities have been undertaken in the last year to support developing the aspirations of the Motion.</p> <p>Communications – The Council publicised its commitment to Debate Not Hate with a press release and photos following the passing of the motion in March 2023. This was also shared on social media channels, with more than 9,000 views and 500 engagements. Then in June a statement signed by all party leaders was promoted proactively and again shared on social media with a further 4,000 views and 1,000 engagements.</p>

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Democratic Services – The motion that Cllr Redman proposed was agreed by Somerset County Council at its meeting on 1 March 2023 in readiness for the new Somerset Council. The full motion can be viewed on the Council’s website in the minutes of that meeting. In support of the motion, in partnership with Health & Safety Team, during 2023/24 we developed and issued a Personal Safety Handbook for elected members.

Monitoring Officer/Code of Conduct – *Signposting Members to the LGA resources regarding Civility in Public Life. Assisting Members with responding to difficult and challenging customers. Advising Members on the opportunity for any of their interests to be considered sensitive and thereby withheld from publication, sharing associated correspondence from the minister of Local Government. Making contact with and signposting members to the recently appointed Police SPOC.*

Group Leaders – *we have ongoing discussions where issues arise, particularly if between members, consideration of critical issues and overall changes to the way people engage with Councillors and those who disagree with them.*

Councillor Redman specifically mentioned behaviour in Council meetings. Cllr Best as Chair of Council has been clear with members that he wants meetings to be run efficiently and appropriately in a way that allows robust debate but ensures that all councillors can express their views, if they wish. How the motion was ‘Debate not Hate’ and we want to see high quality debates in Council – it’s not about everyone agreeing with each other.

Some of the issues - I know Councillor Best is actively discussing with Officers how to advance these issues – would appear to be:

- Do Members understand the difference between debate and conversation. Council meetings aren’t conversations, you express your views, informed by the Officer advice, listen to other Councillors opinion and vote to determine the Council’s position.
- All remarks in meetings should addressed to the Chair, that is who members are talking to, not each other.

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- During motions Members shouldn't be using speeches for fact finding. The evidence the debate is based on should be in the papers and any other information should be sought in advance.
- Members in a debate should be respectfully listening to each others views and expressing their own. The way to disagree with a view is to express your own view and vote accordingly. It is not necessary or required to 'argue' against others points as might be necessary in other fora as we have a voting mechanism to determine the outcome.
- The flow of debate should be Proposer to explain the recommendations, seconder (who may reserve their right to speak), Members who wish to express a view, Secunder (if they reserved their rights and haven't already spoken) and then the Proposer to sum up the debate. Obviously, amendments and points of order can interrupt this flow, but Members should expect to speak once and once only and should not expect people to answer the questions they pose in the debate – they should be taken as rhetorical or dealt with before the meeting.

None of this should stop members expressing their views and contributing but that shouldn't be done in ways that stop other members enjoying the same rights.

The Chair of Council plans to write to all members in the near future about the expected standards for behaviour at meetings.

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