

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the County Council held in the McMillian Theatre, Bridgwater on Wednesday 21 July 2021 at 10.00am.

Present: Cllr M Best, Cllr A Bown, Cllr M Caswell, Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr P Clayton, Cllr S Coles, Cllr A Dance, Cllr H Davies, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr D Fothergill, Cllr G Frascini, Cllr A Govier, Cllr A Groskop, Cllr D Hall, Cllr P Ham, Cllr M Healey, Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr James Hunt, Cllr D Huxtable, Cllr M Keating (Vice Chair), Cllr A Kendall, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr M Lewis, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr J Lock, Cllr T Lock, Cllr D Loveridge, Cllr T Munt, Cllr T Napper, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr G Noel, Cllr L Oliver, Cllr J Parham, Cllr C Paul, Cllr H Prior-Sankey, Cllr M Pullin, Cllr F Purbrick, Cllr L Redman, Cllr B Revans, Cllr M Rigby, Cllr J Thorne, Cllr W Wallace, Cllr J Williams, Cllr R Williams and Cllr J Woodman.

256 **Apologies for absence** – agenda item 1

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr N Bloomfield, Cllr A Broom, Cllr J Clarke, Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr D Ruddle, Cllr N Taylor, Cllr G Verdon and Cllr L Vjeh.

257 **Declarations of Interest** – agenda item 2

The Vice Chair reminded the meeting that details of all Members' interests in District, Town and Parish Councils could be viewed on the Council's Website and there was no need for members to individually declare these personal interests in those other councils at the meeting.

Cllr Caswell, Cllr Groskop, Cllr Huxtable, Cllr Kendall, Cllr Leyshon, Cllr Lewis, Cllr J Lock, Cllr H Prior-Sankey, Cllr W Wallace and Cllr J Williams all declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 9 as members of the local government pension scheme.

258 **Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 5 May 2021** - Agenda Item 3

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2021, after some minor amendments, were accepted as a true and accurate record and were signed by the Vice Chair of Council.

259 **Chair of Council's Announcements** - Agenda Item 4a

The Vice Chair of Council paid tribute to serving County Councillor Alan Wedderkopp who had recently died. Cllr Wedderkopp had been elected to the County Council in 2013 to represent the Comeytrove and Trull division. Cllr Coles, Cllr Fothergill and the Chief Executive also paid tribute. The Vice Chair asked Council to stand in silence as a mark of respect.

The Vice Chair then made a statement and a presentation on behalf of the Council to Mr Mike Prior who had recently retired as Superintendent from Avon and Somerset Constabulary after 27 years' service.

The Vice Chair then referred to events he had attended since the last meeting.

260 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4b

Notice was received of Public Questions/Statements/Petitions (under 5000 signatures) and Elected Member Questions regarding:

Closure of St Andrews Ward in Wells

1. From: Eva Bryczkowski

Response from Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Closure of St Andrews Ward in Wells

2. From: Emma King

Response from Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Scrutiny of the Council Pension Scheme

3. From Sigurd Reimers

Response from Mr Jason Vaughan, Council Section 151 Officer and Director of Finance

Possible Outcome/Shape of the Local Government reorganisation process in Somerset

4. From Nigel Behan who was not present, so a summary of the submission was read aloud by the Monitoring Officer

Response from Cllr Faye Purbrick Cabinet Member for Transformation and Local Government Reform

Rural travel for cyclists and pedestrians in Somerset

5. From: Susannah Clemence

Response from Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

Clearing multi-use paths in Glastonbury

6. From: Brian and Laura Sorensen who were not present, so a summary of the submission was read aloud by the Monitoring Officer. Cllr Munt, by leave,

directed the Council to read the submission from the Sorensen's as it was critical of actions and inactions by the Council. The Monitoring Officer highlighted to the Council that all the questions/statements received from members of the public had been published on the Council's website the day before the meeting and published in the Chair's schedule for all elected members to enable everyone to read them.

Response from Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

(Full details of the questions and responses given at the meeting and/or in writing following the meeting are set out in Appendix A to these Minutes).

261 **Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board** - Agenda Item 5

The Council considered a report from the Corporate Parenting Board and Cllr Mandy Chilcott provided a summary of the Board's report and recommendations on behalf of its independent Chair, Mrs Jill Johnson, OBE. A video, made by young members of Somerset in Care Council (SiCC) and Somerset Leaving Care Council (SLCC), was shown and Cllr Leigh Redman, Chair of the Policies for Children and Families Scrutiny Committee and Cllr Frances Nicholson Cabinet Member for Children and Families spoke in support of the work of the Board.

The Director of Children's Services thanked the Council for the commitment, support and challenge provided by elected members, and he noted the Board was seen nationally as an example of good practice, particularly its engagement with children and young people. Cllr Revans hoped that changes announced recently by the Government to 'Virtual Schools' would not dilute the focus and support of that service for children looked after. Cllr Jane Lock thought the Council needed more ambition for its children and young people, particularly those care leavers not in education, training or employment and she encouraged all elected members to undertake corporate parent training.

Cllr Mandy Chilcott, seconded by Cllr Leigh Redman, moved and the Council

RESOLVED to:

- Recommend a focus on the inconsistency of Council Tax exemption across the county and the impact of this on Care Leavers.
- Support and promote a whole Council approach to create practical and specific offers to Care Leavers through our Local Offer and the Care Leaver Covenant.
- Support and promote a Care Leavers Guaranteed Interview Scheme for all care leavers of any age, where the essential criteria of the job are met.
- Extend its thanks to the Somerset Care Council's young people for all the hard work that they undertake.

(Following a motion by the Vice Chair of the Council, the meeting was adjourned between 11.35pm and 11.45am)

262 **Report of the Leader and Cabinet** – Agenda item 6

The Council considered a report by the Leader and Cabinet setting out recommendations arising from the Cabinet meeting held on 12 July 2021 regarding the Business Plan for the Council 2021- 2023 and the Treasury Management Outturn report 2021-2021.

Somerset County Council Business Plan 2021-2023

Cllr David Fothergill, Leader of the Council, made a speech introducing a refresh of the Council's Business Plan, to provide a greater focus to the Council's ambitions and vision and he noted that it had been considered by all 3 Scrutiny Committees and approved by the Cabinet.

The Plan would be publicly available and had been refreshed to make it more accessible to members of the public and he thanked all those who had contributed to its production, including the all-member event.

The Business Plan would set the direction of the Council for the next 18 months and subject to local government reform any new administration would produce a new Business Plan for a new Council.

The Leader of Council invited the Director for Corporate Affairs to speak to the report and he reflected on the work to create it and thanked all those who had contributed. Cllr Rod Williams spoke in support of the Business Plan, and drew the Council's attention to its strategic context and how it provided an overarching and coordinated direction to the many strategies and programmes that sat below it.

Cllr David Fothergill, seconded by Cllr Mandy Chilcott, moved the recommendation relating to the Somerset County Council Business Plan 2021-2023 (Paper A).

The Council **RESOLVED** to:

- Adopt the Business Plan for Somerset County Council until 2023.
- Note that the business plan was flexible enough to continue as the strategic direction for authority until April 2023, conscious of, but not dependent upon any potential vesting day because of a Local Government Reorganisation decision being made.

Treasury Management Outturn report 2020-2021

The Vice Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Resources to introduce the report and she began by noting it had been approved by the Cabinet at its last meeting. The report provided a full-year review of the Council's treasury functions for 2020-2021 and had been prepared in accordance with the CiPFA Treasury Management Code and the Prudential Code.

The Cabinet Member for Resources noted the report provided details on the outturn treasury management transactions in 2020-2021, and it contained details of capital financing, borrowing and investment activity and the risk implications of treasury decisions and transactions. She also confirmed that during 2020-2021, there had been no external borrowing.

A positive cashflow had enabled an increase to investments and the pooled fund investments had a yearly net income return of 3.5%. The policy of no new debt and increased investment in pooled funds had resulted in a favourable budget variance of more than £800K for 2020-2021.

Cllr Leyshon thanked Officers for their work in supporting elected members to understand often very complex issues and using plain English in finance reports. She would be interested in the future to monitor pooled funds, internal borrowing and how long that might continue, as well as the amount of cash held by the Council.

Cllr Mandy Chilcott, seconded by Cllr Liz Leyshon, moved the recommendation relating to the Treasury Management Outturn report 2020-2021 (Paper B).

The Council **RESOLVED** to:

receive and endorse the Treasury Management outturn report for 2020-2021.

263 **Report of the Leader and Cabinet** – Agenda item 7

The Council received a report by the Leader and Cabinet summarising key decisions which the Leader, other Cabinet Members and Officers had taken since the last Council meeting, including items of business discussed at Cabinet meetings on the 21st June and 12th July 2021.

Cllr David Fothergill and Cabinet Members responded to questions from members as set out below:

Cllr John Woodman agreed to provide a written response to a question from Cllr John Thorne about the setting of fares regarding a Park and Ride contract.

Cllr John Woodman agreed to provide a written response to a question from Cllr Mike Rigby about school transport assistance for parents, were changes to costs due to ensuring PSVAR compliance for some vehicles.

Cllr John Woodman agreed to provide a written response to a question from Cllr Mike Rigby about when the Taunton area would have a Highways Superintendent.

Cllr John Woodman agreed to provide a written response to a question from Cllr Leigh Redman about existing Council highway projects in the pipeline for multiple funding and how would any additional funds be used for the benefit of highways users in Somerset.

Cllr David Fothergill responded to a question from Cllr Hugh Davies and he confirmed there was provision in the Council's budget for a new round of small improvement schemes for elected members to make bids, most likely next Spring.

At Cllr David Fothergill's invitation, Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, presented his annual report that reflected on achievements and progress made during 2020/21 and he stated that despite it being an unprecedented and challenging time for all it had demonstrated why adult social care work was so vital and valuable. He welcomed the achievements and progress made on the collaborative work in the integrated health and care system, highlighted examples in his report of how service users had been supported and thanked all staff in the organisation for their hard work.

Cllr David Huxtable responded to a question from Cllr Tessa Munt about what would happen to people whose care package was handed back by commercial providers and care could not be provided. Cllr Huxtable thought there were only a small number of such cases and he stated he would be willing to discuss individual cases outside of the meeting.

Cllr David Huxtable responded to a question from Cllr Tessa Munt about the different amounts paid to carers in Somerset and although the care issue was a national problem couldn't the Council intervene to address the problem. Cllr Huxtable explained that he was not aware of and did not recognise the amounts of pay referred to and he stated he would be willing to discuss any individual cases outside of the meeting.

Cllr Clare Paul responded to a question from the Vice Chair about the elected member Improving Lives Grant and she would consider a new round for submissions.

Full details of the submitted questions and responses given at the meeting and/or in writing following the meeting are set out in Appendix A to these Minutes.

The Council received and noted this report.

264 **Annual Report of the Audit Committee** - Agenda item 8

The Council received and noted the report of the Audit Committee, which was presented by Cllr Mike Lewis, Chair of the Committee.

The report covered the Committee's work including providing details of the 9 meetings it had held since it last reported to Council, and he highlighted how it provided an independent and high level to support good governance and strong financial management. The Committee's work focused on its responsibilities for corporate governance, internal audit, external audit, risk management, anti-fraud and corruption, Treasury Management and consideration and approval of the annual Statement of Accounts for the Council and Pension Fund. He noted that the Committee was reporting that most governance functions and processes remain well-controlled and delivered, based on the improvement in the value for money rating from the external auditors, the unqualified opinion of the Statement of Accounts, the internal audit opinion, and the Annual Governance Statement. The Cabinet Member for Resources thanked the Chair and other members of the Audit Committee for their hard work as it was much valued.

265 **Annual Report of the Pensions Committee** - Agenda item 9

The Council received and noted the report of the Pensions Committee, which was presented by Cllr John Thorn, Chair of the Committee and contained details of the policies adopted by the Committee to set a framework for running the Fund, along with activity during and performance of the Fund for the year.

Cllr Thorn paid tribute to Cllr Graham Noel for his hard work as the Chair of the Pension Committee since 2013, which included the initial pooling of investments as part of the Brunel Pension Partnership. There was a question about the composition and frequency of meetings, and the Director of Finance explained that the Pensions Board had not met due to some positions remaining vacant, and the Pensions Committee had met regularly. Cllr Healey, by leave, explained in his capacity as Chair of the Pensions Board that he hoped a recent recruitment for Board members would allow meetings to be held. Cllr Noel, by leave, explained that the Pensions Committee had a diverse membership to ensure Fund members and employees were represented. Cllr Fothergill, by leave, thanked both Cllr Noel and Cllr Thorne for their work.

266 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee**
- Agenda Item 10

The Council received and noted a report by Scrutiny for Adults and Health Committee, which was presented by Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey, Chair of the Committee.

The report covered the work of the Committee since May and Cllr Prior-Sankey thanked her Vice Chair, Cllr Healey, and other members of the Committee and all those who continued to work across the care sector and NHS on behalf of Somerset residents. Cllr Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, stated his appreciation to Cllr Prior-Sankey and her Committee for all their work.

267 Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee – Agenda Item 11

The Council received and noted a report by Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee, which was presented by Cllr Leigh Redman, Chair of the Committee.

The report covered the work of the Committee since May, and he thanked his fellow Committee members and Officers for their support. He noted that the Committee was carrying some vacancies for co-opted Members and encouraged people to join the Committee. Cllr Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, stated her thanks to all Officers that supported the Committee, the Vice-Chair and members of the Committee and noted the dedication of the Chair of the Committee.

268 Report of the Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place Committee
Agenda Item 12

The Council received and noted a report by the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee, which was presented by Cllr Anna Groskop, Chair of the Committee.

The report covered the work of the Committee and its meeting since September 2020 to July 2021 and she encouraged greater interest and input from elected members into the Scrutiny function as this would be important in the coming years and she thanked everyone that had helped with the work of the Committee. Cllr Lewis, by leave, noted there was an issue with several closed foot bridges on national trails and he requested the Council to consider the impact of the closure of such bridges. Cllr Chilcott, Cabinet Member for Resources, stated her thanks to Cllr Groskop and her Committee for their scrutiny, particularly of the Council's financial reports, as their work was much valued.

269 Exclusion of the Press and Public – Agenda Item 13

The Council **RESOLVED** to pass a resolution under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting, on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, within the meaning of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

270 **Report of the Special Members Panel – Senior Leadership Team
Restructure** – Agenda Item 14

The Council **RESOLVED** to agree the recommendations in the report.

(The meeting ended at 1.40pm)

Chair of the Council