

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the County Council held in the Westlands, 1 Westbourne Close, Yeovil BA20 2DD Wednesday 20 July 2022 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr S Ashton, Cllr S Aujla, Cllr J Bailey, Cllr J Baker, Cllr L Baker, Cllr M Barr, Cllr M Best, Cllr B Bolt, Cllr A Boyden, Cllr A Bradford, Cllr H Bruce, Cllr T Butt-Philip, Cllr S Carswell, Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr N Clark, Cllr B Clarke, Cllr P Clayton, Cllr S Coles, Cllr J Cook-Woodman, Cllr N Cottle, Cllr A Dance, Cllr D Darch, Cllr T Deakin, Cllr D Denton, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr A Dingwall, Cllr L Duddridge, Cllr M Dunk, Cllr S Dyke, Cllr C Ellis, Cllr B Ferguson, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr D Fothergill, Cllr A Govier, Cllr T Grimes, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr Pauline Ham, Cllr Philip Ham, Cllr S Hart, Cllr M Healey, Cllr A Hendry, Cllr R Henley, Cllr M Hewitson, Cllr E Hobbs, Cllr H Hobhouse, Cllr A Kendall, Cllr J Kenton, Cllr T Kerley, Cllr M Kravis, Cllr M Lewis, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr T Lock, Cllr M Lovell, Cllr H Munt, Cllr T Munt, Cllr M Murphy, Cllr G Oakes, Cllr S Osborne, Cllr O Patrick, Cllr K Pearce, Cllr E Pearlstone, Cllr D Perry, Cllr E Potts-Jones, Cllr T Power, Cllr H Prior-Sankey, Cllr S Pugsley, Cllr F Purbrick, Cllr W Read, Cllr L Redman, Cllr B Revans, Cllr M Rigby, Cllr T Robbins, Cllr D Rodrigues, Cllr D Ruddle, Cllr P Seib, Cllr H Shearer, Cllr G Slocombe, Cllr B Smedley, Cllr F Smith-Roberts, Cllr F Smith, Cllr J Snell, A Soughton, Cllr M Stanton, Cllr A Sully, Cllr C Sully, Cllr L Trimnell, Cllr M Wale, Cllr R Wilkins, Cllr A Wiltshire, Cllr D Woan and Cllr R Woods

14 **Apologies for Absence** - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Cllr M Caswell, Cllr S Collins, Cllr H Farbahi, Cllr B Height, Cllr V Keitch, Cllr D Mansell, Cllr M Martin, Cllr S Wakefield
Virtual attendance: Cllr N Cavill, Cllr H Davies, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr D Johnson, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr H Kay, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr C Payne, Cllr G Wren, Cllr R Wyke

15 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

The Chair of Council 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.

16 **Minutes from the meeting held on Wednesday 25 May 2022 and 15 June 2022** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2022 and 15 June 2022 were accepted as a true and accurate record and were signed by the Chair of the meeting subject to the following amendments being made to HotSW LEP membership:

- Cllr Dave Woan to replace Cllr Nick Cottle

17 **Chairs Announcements** – Agenda Item 4

The Chair of Council referred to the events detailed on the Chair's Information Sheet No. 1 circulated and published with the agenda.

In Memorium

The Chair of Council paid tribute to the former Chair of Council Nigel Taylor and to former County Councillor Nigel Woollcombe-Adams:

Former Chair of Council Nigel Taylor

Whether it was in his Royal Protection duties, as an internationally renowned explosives expert, for his cave rescue work or as Chair of the County Council, Nigel Taylor was a man of many talents and endless ability but always humble in his achievements.

Many in the County Council will recall Nigel visiting every office in County Hall and many other locations across the County each Christmas time, others will remember his Civic awards evenings, and few will ever forget his courage in returning to Chair the February 2022 Full Council meeting, although his short-term prognosis was clear and the future looked bleak for him.

His humour, his civility and his love of people carried endeared him to those he met. Throughout his varied career he truly believed in public service and the contribution that he could make to improving people's lives.

Nigel was elected as the County Councillor for Cheddar in 2017 and served 4 years as Chair of Council (2018-2022), as well as being a longstanding member of the Regulation Committee. Nigel also served as a Mendip District Councillor for 8 years including time as Member and Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services.

Cllr Bill Revans and Cllr David Fothergill paid their tribute to Nigel Taylor.

Former County Councillor Nigel Woollcombe-Adams

Nigel was elected in 2013 and during his 4 years as a County Councillor served as Chair of the Constitution Committee, Vice-Chair of the Regulation Committee and sat on the Place Scrutiny Committee. Nigel was also a longstanding District Councillor in Mendip.

Cllr Philip Ham and Cllr Heather Shearer paid tribute to Nigel Woollcombe-Adams.

Members of Council stood and observed a minute silence for Nigel Taylor, former Chair of Council and former County Councillor Nigel Woollcombe-Adams.

Chief Executive

The Chair of Council formally thanked the outgoing Somerset County Council (SCC) Chief Executive, Patrick Flaherty, for his years of service to the Council, highlighting the work achieved in the Authority and across Somerset.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, paid tribute to the outgoing SCC Chief Executive, Pat Flaherty, praising his work, contribution and support to improving the lives of people in Somerset.

The Leader of the Opposition, Cllr David Fothergill, and group leaders, Cllr Leigh Redman, Cllr Martin Dimery and Cllr John Hunt offered their thanks and appreciation to Pat Flaherty for his work and support.

The outgoing SCC Chief Executive, Pat Flaherty, reflected on his time at SCC and thanked everyone for their support during his tenure.

18 Public Question Time – Agenda Item 5

Public questions were received from Mr Nigel Behan, Mr David Redgewell, Ms Linda Snelling, Mr Ian Beckey and Mr Andrew Lee.

The questions and responses provided are attached to these minutes in Appendix A. In the absence of Mr Beckey, the questions were read out by the Monitoring Officer, Scott Woolridge, on his behalf.

19 Report of the Leader and Executive - Items for Decision - Agenda Item 6

This item was introduced by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans, which set out the Leader's and Executive's recommendations to the Council arising from their consideration of reports at the Executive meetings on 15 June 2022 and 11 July 2022. The Council had before it the following reports:

The Lead Member for Finance and Humans Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon presented the report, highlighting; that the report was considered at the Executive meeting on 11 July 2022, where the Executive endorsed Paper B and agreed for it to be reported to the County Council to consider and approve; that Paper A outlined the basis of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the new Somerset Council and also starts to set out the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the next five years; that the report highlights that the 2023/24 budget will be challenging given both the practical difficulties involved in the process and the national economic outlook; that the report details that although combining the finances of all five Somerset Authorities is at a very early stage, it is important to provide an initial view of the financial challenges ahead in order to plan a smooth transition from the existing five councils into the new unitary; the importance of ensuring that the new organisations expenditure is aligned to it's priorities, with an approach based upon not looking at 2023/24 in isolation but taking the first few years of the new unitary together and setting a solid financial foundation which the new council can then build from in the longer term; the MTFP forecast in February of a budget gap of £28.6m for 2023/24 and given the inflationary impacts upon the 5 councils budgets this has been updated to £44.5m; the details of the significant projected budget gap and the uncertainty in the national approach to funding local government including national and regional recovery post Covid-19 pandemic, social care funding, and inflationary pressures as well as preparing for the new Unitary Councils; and that Scrutiny consideration of the budget proposals would take place in October/November 2022 and January/February 2023.

The County Council discussed the proposals, and the following points were raised; the robustness of the budget, variances and the reflection of the current pressures; the reporting and understanding of the scale of the financial challenge; the review and work taking place on assets and borrowing; the strategy for current and future gaps and delivery of services in partnership across all the teams of all the Somerset Councils; and any potential increase in Council Tax and referendum limits.

The Chair adjourned the meeting from 11:22 – 11:32 am

Having been proposed by Cllr Liz Leyshon and seconded Cllr Bill Revans, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

Approve that the Director of Finance and Governance is delegated authority to set the council tax base and business rates base for Somerset Council.

Paper B - Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2021/22

The Lead Member for Finance and Humans Resources, Cllr Liz Leyshon, presented the report, highlighting that: the report was considered at the Executive meeting on 11 July 2022, at which the Executive endorsed Paper B and agreed for it to be reported to the County Council to consider and approve; that the Annual Treasury Management Outturn Report is a requirement of the CIPFA Treasury Management Code and covers the Treasury Management activity for 2021-22 and is prepared in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code and the Prudential Code; and that the report provided details of the outturn position on treasury management transactions in 2021-22, presented details of capital financing, borrowing and investment activity and confirmed compliance with treasury limits and Prudential Indicators or explains non-compliance.

Having been proposed by Cllr Liz Leyshon and seconded Cllr Bill Revans, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

Endorse the Treasury Management outturn report for 2021-22.

Paper C - The Children and Young People's Plan 2022-2024

The Lead Member for Children and Families, Cllr Tessa Munt, presented the report, highlighting that the report was considered at the Executive meeting on 11 July 2022. Cllr Munt: welcomed Chloe Walker to the meeting, explaining that Chloe reflects the excellent work of the young people that brought the plan to fruition; that the Somerset Children & Young People's Plan 2022-2024 sets out the ambition of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership to improve outcomes for all unborn babies, children and young people for the next eighteen months; that the Plan will influence strategic plans and commissioning decisions with an ambition to be effective in furthering and sustaining improvement of children's services in Somerset; that the Scrutiny Committee for Children and Families had been updated on the Plan during its design in 2021/2022 and their recommendations are incorporated into the Plan.

Having been proposed by Cllr Tessa Munt and seconded by Cllr Leigh Redman, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

Endorse the Somerset's Children & Young People's Plan 2022 – 2024.

This item was introduced by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans and set the recommendation of the Appointments Committee to appoint Mr Duncan Sharkey as the permanent Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service of Somerset County Council and the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service of Somerset Council with effect from 1 April 2023. The report further proposed interim arrangements for an acting Chief Executive pending the commencement of the new appointment.

7a - Appointment of a Chief Executive - Report of the Appointments Committee

Having been proposed by Cllr Bill Revans and seconded by Cllr David Fothergill, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

- **Accept the recommendation of the Appointments Committee and appoint Mr Duncan Sharkey as the permanent Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service of Somerset County Council and the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service of Somerset Council with effect from 1 April 2023**
- **Appoint on the basis of the terms and conditions agreed at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 15 June 2022 and on a spot salary for the post of £195,000 including Returning Officer Fees**

7b - Interim arrangements for the post of Chief Executive and designation of the Head of Paid Service

The County Council discussed the proposals, and the following points were raised: the current operational and strategic role, additional costs and pressures of the proposed Interim Chief Executive; protecting business as usual; and LGR service alignment measures.

In response, the Director of Customers, Digital and Workforce, Chris Squire recognised the short-term arrangements nature of the 'acting-up' arrangements, and noted that external recruitment was not considered.

Having been proposed by Cllr Bill Revans and seconded Cllr David Fothergill, the Council **RESOLVED**:

- **To delegate the powers of the Chief Executive to Paula Hewitt (Director of Economic & Community Infrastructure and Deputy Chief Executive) as the acting Chief Executive of Somerset County Council during the Interim Period**
- **To designate Paula Hewitt as the Council's Head of Paid Service for the Interim Period. To delegate to the current Chief Executive, the decision**

on the appointment and delegation of existing powers for an acting Deputy Chief Executive for the Interim period

21 **Report of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel - Special Responsibility Allowances for 2022/23 – Agenda Item 8**

The Council considered a report from the Monitoring Officer, Scott Wooldridge, the report set out the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (“the Panel”) following their review of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) within the Scheme of Member’s Allowances following the County Council elections, establishment of new committees and changes to executive appointments. It was noted: that their review has had the benefit of building upon their previous report in February 2022; has an awareness of the planned Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset in 2023; and that the Members Allowances Scheme 2023/24 for the new Somerset Council will be a matter for the County Council to consider.

Following the presentation of the report, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Bill Revans was invited to respond, he began by thanking the Panel for their report and recommendations and advised the Council of the support and rejections of the proposals and the reasoning behind each.

Cllr Bill Revans proposed, and Cllr David Fothergill seconded an amendment that the Council to agree to maintain:

- i. the role of opposition spokesperson should retain the current SRA band for the role of opposition spokesperson
- ii. the SRAs for Associate Lead Members be set at Band 7 and instead retain these at Band 6.
- iii. the Chair and Vice Chair of the Constitution & Governance Committee be set at Bands 6 and 7 respectively and instead propose that these are set at Bands 5 and 6 respectively
- iv. the Leader of a political group receives an SRA where the membership of the political group is 3 or more.

Having been proposed by Cllr Bill Revans and seconded by David Fothergill, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

1. Welcome and thank the Panel for its report and recommendations set out in Appendix 1

2. Support and agree the Panel’s recommendations in respect of:

- i) the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny Policies and Environment Committee and the Joint Scrutiny Committee for Local Government Reorganisation be set at Bands 5 and 6 respectively**

ii) the Chair of the Standards Committee be set at Band 6
iii) that the Council supports the need for a fundamental review of the Members' Scheme of Allowances for 2023/24 and for this to be reported to the Council by February 2023. The Council supports the approach to the fundamental review being undertaken in three parts:

- 1. The Basic Allowance**
- 2. The SRAs**
- 3. Other allowances, such as travel, subsistence and carers**

With the BA being considered soonest. The role of co-opted members, including Independent Remuneration Panel members themselves, should also be considered and this could fit within either part 2 or part 3

3. Reject the Panel's recommendations in respect of:

i) the role of opposition spokesperson should no longer receive an SRA and instead retain the current SRA band for the role of opposition spokesperson.

Reason - it is felt that the level of time and commitment given by Opposition Spokespersons warrants an allowance in line with the Council's arrangements for several years and in view of the members involvement as part of the transition to the new Somerset Council.

ii) the SRAs for Associate Lead Members be set at Band 7 and instead retain these at Band 6.

Reason - it is felt the reduction to Band 7 does not adequately reflect the support and time that Associate Lead Members provide when compared to comparable roles and therefore to retain the SRA for these roles at Band 6 as previously agreed by the Council in February 2022.

iii) the Chair and Vice Chair of Constitution & Governance Committee be set at Bands 6 and 7 respectively and instead propose that these are set at Bands 5 and 6 respectively.

Reason - it is felt that the level of time and commitment given by these roles during the transition to the new Somerset Council should warrant SRAs of Band 5 and 6 respectively in line with the Chair and Vice Chair of Audit Committee.

iv) the Leader of a political group receives an SRA where the membership of the political group is 5 or more and instead agree

that the Leader of a political group receives an SRA where the membership of the political group is 3 or more.

Reason - it is felt that the minimum level should be set at 3 to reflect the Council's arrangements for several years and in view of all political group leaders with the transition to the new Somerset Council.

4. (a) Support the Panel's recommendation in respect of the formation of an Independent Remuneration Panel for Somerset Council but with an amendment to reflect the Council's intention to accelerate the formation of the Panel by Autumn 2022:

"Council undertakes the necessary work to ensure that an Independent Remuneration Panel is in place for the new unitary council by autumn 2022 and that in terms of membership the Council considers:

- a) people who reside in Somerset and drawn from the existing panels operative in the county at present;**
- b) a wide geographical spread of members from across the county;**
- and**
- c) a minimum membership of five**

(b) Authorise the Monitoring Officer to undertake all necessary actions to implement recommendations above including the recruitment and appointment of panel members to the new Independent Remuneration Panel

22 **Requisitioned Items** – Agenda Item 10

Declaration of an Ecological Emergency

The Council considered this requisitioned item, presented by the Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Sarah Dyke, relating to declaring an ecological emergency to set out a path to ensure that biodiversity is improved, environments are enriched and the destruction of habitats is resisted. The motion builds on the Council's 2019 declaration of a Climate Emergency and the subsequent pledge to become a carbon neutral Council by 2030.

The County Council discussed the proposals, and the following points were raised: the complex future planning and regulation permissions decisions; the process of discussion, actions, deliverables and policies through the Scrutiny Committees and engagement and involvement of partners; the process for the development of policy in the Council; the work of the Somerset Ecology service; the lack of biodiversity due to increased population and house building; the importance of separating ecology and carbon issues; the demand for new

affordable houses in Somerset and the balance of where and houses are built whilst protecting the ecology and environment; the success of the climate emergency Community fund and a suggestion to create a similar fund to empower local communities to tackle the ecological challenges at a local level.

During discussion, Cllr Faye Purbrick proposed and Cllr Diogo Rodriguez seconded three suggested amendments to this item:

1. Section 'Full Council acknowledges and notes' to add an additional point 6: *'That Somerset County Council is already ranked by Climate Emergency UK as the UK's top County Council on tackling climate change and recognises the work done by County Council in recent years to achieve this'.*
2. Section 'Full Council believes that' change word '*governments*' to '*individuals*'
3. Section 'In support of this motion the Council therefore resolves' remove bullet points 1-9 and replace with:

- *That the current cross-county Climate Emergency Strategy (signed off in 2020) be updated to reflect further evidence and scientific data across all areas, including ecological challenges. With specific attention to section 7.5 The Natural Environment Sector and appendix 10 that focusses on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and the actions and measurements required in this area'.*
- *To consider local evidence specific to district areas, such as that provided in the State of Nature Report (SERC) which demonstrates the seriousness of the ecological decline in the Sedgemoor area that is driving their Ecological Emergency Declaration today, and to incorporate these matters into the next iteration of the Climate Emergency Strategy*
- *To introduce a fully funded Somerset Ecological Emergency Community Fund enabling community organisations and city, town and parish councils to deliver community projects that share the Council's Ecological Emergency Strategy, in the same vein as the previous Climate Emergency Community fund.*
- *To pay particular attention to impact assessments regarding pesticide use their elimination and moving to a peat free Somerset.*
- *To redouble current efforts to work in conjunction with district partners and stakeholders on all of the above and with specific attention to our response to the phosphates mitigation challenge.*

The Council proceeded to individually vote on the three proposed amendments. Amendment 1 was accepted and amendments 2 and 2 were rejected.

The Monitoring Officer, Scott Woolridge reminded County Council Members that to help with debate, any significant amendments to the papers should be advised of and published by noon on the Monday before a full Council meeting.

Having been proposed by Cllr Sarah Dyke and seconded Cllr Tessa Munt, the Council proceeded to vote on the item as amended. The Council **RESOLVED**:

Full Council acknowledges and notes:

1. That in February 2019, this council declared a climate emergency.
2. In May 2019, the UN Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) raised the alarm about the urgency of the ecological emergency the world faces.
3. That the Climate Emergency Strategy "Towards a Climate Resilient Somerset," adopted by this Council in 2020, recognises the impact on the environment and nature within the Natural Environment theme and has already set out a number of actions to tackle the impact of Climate Change on the Natural Environment.
4. That the sustainability of societies, economies and the environment are co-dependant and intrinsically linked and depend on preserving our natural environment and biodiversity. It follows therefore that the climate and ecological emergencies are also linked, both being the result of overexploitation of the earth's natural resources and poor land management. These practices have led to species extinction, loss of habitat and the connectivity of habitats, the decline of pollinators that are crucial to our food supply, and the loss of and decline in the health and quantity of soil. However, there are other causes of the ecological emergency beyond climate change, including other forms of pollution, urbanisation, hydrological change, the proliferation of invasive species and poor practices in agriculture, woodland management and fishing.
5. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the significant relationship between people and nature and the important effect of access to nature on the health and wellbeing of our people.
6. That Somerset County Council is already ranked by Climate Emergency UK as the UK's top County Council on tackling climate change and recognises the work done by County Council in recent years to achieve this.

Full Council believes that:

- All governments have a duty to limit the negative impacts of human behaviour on our ecology and recognises that Local Government cannot and should not wait for national government to act.
- It is important for the residents of Somerset that its Councils commit to tackling these negative impacts as quickly as possible.
- Taking positive action to reverse the damage on our natural habitats and protect and sustain the habitats of our precious flora and fauna can also deliver economic benefits by way of new jobs, economic savings, market opportunities and contribute significantly to an improved health and well-being of our communities.

In support of this motion the Council therefore resolved:

1. That in addition to the work already underway, it will take on the responsibility as Lead Partner in the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) (this has already been agreed with Natural England), with partners in the established Local Nature Partnership and deliver a Strategy with a set of clear actions to bring about a reversal of the negative impacts on the natural environment and biodiversity and to develop strategies to mitigate against the possibility of further decline or damage on the habitats, flora and fauna of Somerset.
2. To incorporate the details of the Ecological Emergency, the desired outcomes and any identified actions, including those within the LNRS into the next iteration of the Climate Emergency Strategy.
3. To ensure “tackling the climate and nature emergencies” policies are at the heart of everything this council does and is embedded it into all Council decision making processes.
4. To add ecological impact implications assessment alongside those for climate and sustainability in committee and council reports.
5. In collaboration with the 4 District Councils, the Council will use existing and emerging planning policy and development management to ensure biodiversity is improved, environments enriched and the destruction of habitats is resisted when development occurs.
6. Work similarly with the 4 Districts Councils to develop the Councils response to the phosphates issue affecting the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site catchment area.
7. That Somerset County Council is already ranked by Climate emergency UK as the UK’s top County Council in tackling climate change and recognised the work done by County Council in recent years to achieve this.
8. To encourage residents, businesses and landowners to reduce pesticide use, and seek to become a pesticide-free council.
9. To encourage residents, businesses and landowners to eliminate peat use, and seek to become a peat-free council.
10. To work with emerging government guidance and across the Planning System with the Planning Authorities to develop the Council’s approach and policies around the Ecological Emergency and will implement, measure and monitor the Biodiversity net gain approach in order to maximise the benefits from development.

Cost of living emergency

The Council considered this requisitioned item, presented by the Lead Member for Communities, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, relating to the cost-of-living crisis, the challenges Somerset residents faced, and the call to Government for assistance and support.

Cllr David Fothergill proposed, and Cllr Mandy Chilcott seconded an number of amendments, suggesting these replace those in the published papers. The County Council discussed the recommendations and proposals, and the following points were raised: the process of motions and requisition items; challenges relating to Council Tax and precepts; the reserves held by the authority; the budget working group and the work on the current financial year; the direction-specific spending initiatives; the important voice of Somerset residents and representation to Government; the extra financial commitments of the amendment and the purpose of amendments.

Cllr Bill Revans raised a point of order asking for advice on Standing Order 14 16.2 budget amendments.

The Deputy 151 Officer, Donna Parham, responded that the Authority's financial position is not to make a decision outside of the medium-term financial plan.

The Chair adjourned the meeting from 12:10 – 12:20 pm.

The Monitoring Officer, Scott Woolridge, clarified: that a number of the proposed amendments relate to Executive functions and, therefore those matters should be referred to the Executive to consider prior to full Council; and that the proportionally representative cross-party working group as proposed by Cllr Fothergill and seconded by Cllr Chilcott could be considered as part of this proposed amendment.

The Monitoring Officer proceeded to detail the proposed amendment to add the recommendation: 'Establishing a proportionally representative cross-party working Group to recommend to the Executive and November Full Council other practical steps that this Council can take to alleviate the impact of the cost of living on the most vulnerable'.

The Chair further advised that the following points as proposed by Cllr Fothergill and seconded by Cllr Chilcott would be referred to the next available Executive Meeting for consideration:

(County Council – 25 May 2022)

- Immediately making £1 million available from reserves to further assist Citizens Advice, Food Banks and other relevant agencies to offer practical support for those who are suffering most from the crisis
- Withdrawing the recently implemented £40 increase to SEND transport and post-16 education travel
- Immediately introducing the LibDem manifesto 'Liberteen' bus pass commitment to subsidise young peoples travel around the County
- Immediately restoring the Health and Wellbeing fund of £5,000 per Councillor from reserves to enable individual County Councillors to target localised areas of suffering particularly in their deprived communities
- Recognising that by harmonising to the lowest District Council tax level as part of the LGR process no further financial strain will be placed on individuals and will support those already under pressure

The proposer, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, and the seconder, Cllr Nicola Clark of the original recommendations, agreed to accept the amendment regarding the formation of a Cost of Living Working Group, which was incorporated into the substantive motion.

Having been proposed by Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts and seconded by Cllr Nicola Clark, the Council **RESOLVED** to declare a 'Cost of Living Emergency' and call on the Government to:

- Immediately reduce the standard rate of VAT from 20 per cent to 17.5 per cent for one year, saving the average household in Somerset a further £600 this year.
- Immediately re-introduce the pensions triple lock to support Somerset's pensioners.
- Immediately restore the Universal Credit supplement of £20, which was cancelled by the Government in September 2021.
- Council instructs the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to express the Council's demands for VAT to be cut to 17.5%, for the re-introduction of the pensions triple-lock and for the £20 Universal Credit supplement to be restored.
- Finally, Council joins other local councils in calling for a local Cost-of Living Emergency Summit, with stakeholders, including Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Local Trades Unions, and Chambers of Commerce and will invite local MPs to attend this hybrid meeting.

- Establishing a proportionally representative cross-party working Group to recommend to the Executive and November Full Council other practical steps that this Council can take to alleviate the impact of the cost of living on the most vulnerable.

- It was further agreed that the following points be referred to the next available Executive Meeting for consideration:

- Immediately making £1 million available from reserves to further assist Citizens Advice, Food Banks and other relevant agencies to offer practical support for those who are suffering most from the crisis
- Withdrawing the recently implemented £40 increase to SEND transport and post-16 education travel
- Immediately introducing the LibDem manifesto 'Liberteen' bus pass commitment to subsidise young peoples travel around the County
- Immediately restoring the Health and Wellbeing fund of £5,000 per Councillor from reserves to enable individual County Councillors to target localised areas of suffering particularly in their deprived communities
- Recognising that by harmonising to the lowest District Council tax level as part of the LGR process no further financial strain will be placed on individuals and will support those already under pressure

Cost of living crisis

The Council considered this requisitioned item, presented by Cllr Leigh Redman which related to: the ongoing cost-of-living crisis; the impact of soaring household fuel costs; and identifying those in need to fully support them.

The County Council discussed the proposals, and the following points were raised: the language used within the report; increased demand at foodbanks; properties which were not eligible for support under the energy price-cap scheme; and the disproportionate impact on rural properties given reliance on heating oil and liquefied petroleum gas.

Having been proposed by Cllr Leigh Redman and seconded by Cllr Kathy Pearce, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

To address inequalities, the Council will:

- Write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer condemning the decision to exclude vulnerable people from meaningful support with the cost-of-living crisis and demanding that they immediately act to address this inequality and ensure

that arrangements for paying the rebate to the excluded groups are put into place.

- Write to Somerset MPs asking them to lobby the government to increase cost of living help payments available to sick and disabled people with immediate effect.
- Build on LGR and work with District partners to produce and publicise an information leaflet for private sector landlords in Somerset who charge for household fuel as part of rent urging them to pass on the rebate to their tenants especially those in shared houses or HMOs.

Local Community Networks

The Council considered this requisitioned item, presented by Cllr David Fothergill relating to role of Town, Parish and City Councils and the development and delivery Local Community Networks.

The County Council discussed the proposals, and the following points were raised: the community engagement and the timetable for consultation; and the funding and responsibilities of LCNs.

Having been proposed by Cllr David Fothergill and seconded by Cllr Faye Purbrick, the Council **RESOLVED** to:

Recognised the vitally important role of Town, Parish and City Councils, and accordingly:

- Work with them to develop and deliver fully funded Local Community Networks to support our Communities.
- Bring forward comprehensive and consulted-on plans for establishing LCN's to the November 2022 Full Council for approval.

23 **Report of the Leader and Executive - Items for Information** – Agenda Item 11

The Council received a report by the Leader and Executive summarising the key decisions taken by the Leader, Executive Lead Members and officers between 5 May 2022 and 8 July 2022, together with the items of business discussed at the Executive meetings on 15 June 2022 and 11 July 2022.

Cllr Bill Revans and Executive Lead Members responded to questions from Members.

The following points were raised: the potential to increase in the staff mileage rate paid for compulsory use; the record temperatures experienced and measures to manage extreme weather situations; impact of monkeypox within the County; health budgets; the number of Ukrainian refugees within Somerset; Covid infection rates in the County; the continued importance of infection control measures; protecting care home residents from the risk of Covid and whether the accessibility for visitors will be restricted; the impact of Covid on school attendance across the county and whether there are any plans to address; member queries to key decisions and associated response times; the potential for asset transfers of County Council owned land to City, Town and Parish Councils; and the Council's Small Improvement Schemes budget including the continuation of approved schemes and an associated member briefing request

The Council noted the report.

24 **Annual Report of the Audit Committee** – Agenda Item 9

The Council received and noted a report by the Audit Committee, which informed members of the work of the Audit Committee from April 2021 and to the end of March 2022 and noted the Committee's opinion on the standard of governance, risk management and internal audit in place within the County Council.

The Council noted the report.

25 **Annual Report of Pensions Committee** – Agenda Item 12

The Council received and noted the report of the Pensions Committee, which provided a summary of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Fund and the details of the policies adopted by the Pensions Committee to set a framework for the running of the fund. The report also detailed the Committee's activity during the financial year and details of the fund's financial performance for the year.

The Council noted the report.

26 **Annual Report of the Health and Wellbeing Board** - Agenda Item 13

The Council received and noted the report of the Health and Well-being Board, the report covered the Board's work from 27 September 2021 to 13 June 2022.

The Council noted the report.

27 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee -**
Agenda Item 14

The Council received and noted a report by the Scrutiny Committee for Policies, Adults and Health, which provided a summary progress report and outcomes of the work of meetings held from July 2021.

The Council noted the report.

28 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families**
Committee – Agenda Item 15

The Council received and noted a report by the Scrutiny Committee for Policies, Children and Families, which provided a summary progress report and outcomes of the work of meetings held from July 2021 to the end of the Municipal Year.

The Council noted the report.

29 **Annual Report of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee -**Agenda
Item 16

The Council received and noted a report by the Scrutiny Committee for Policies and Place, which provided a summary progress report and outcomes of the work of meetings held from 7 September 2021 to 15 March 2022.

The Council noted the report.

30 **Any other urgent items of business –** Item 17

The Council endorsed the Chair of Council's proposal to convene an

(County Council – 25 May 2022)

Extraordinary Full Council Meeting on 5 October 2022 to consider the Taunton Community Governance Review.

(The meeting ended at 2.25pm)

CHAIR