

SWT Full Council - 10 September 2020

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Paul Bolton, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Dave Durdan, Kelly Durdan, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, John Hassall, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Phil Stone, Andrew Sully, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Terry Venner, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Dawn Adey, James Barraah, Nick Bryant, Lesley Dolan, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Luke Muir, Clare Rendell and Amy Tregellas

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

31. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors H Davies, M Lithgow, A Milne and N Thwaites.

32. Declarations of Interest

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

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr L Baker	All Items	Cheddon Fitzpaine & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Blaker	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr P Bolton	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Govier	All Items	SCC &	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Wellington		
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Palmer	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Venner	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Wedderkopp	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Wedderkopp	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

The following Councillors further declared a personal interest as they were a member of the Facebook Group Unitary Somerset – Your Views:-
L Baker, M Blaker, C Booth, K Durdan, C Ellis, E Firmin, R Habgood, A Hadley, J Hassall, J Hunt, L Lisgo, F Smith, F Smith-Roberts, A Sully, L Whetlor and G Wren.

33. **Public Participation - To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions, statements or petitions from the public in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 14,15 and 16**

Mr Chris Mann spoke on agenda number 7, Stronger Somerset Business Case:- He was pleased that the four Somerset district councils were not opposed to a unitary authority because council tax was so expensive in comparison with income tax.

Firstly, because two tier caused misallocation of income and priorities between district and county that would not happen under a single unitary council. Whilst Somerset County Council had struggled with funding essential social and child care, Somerset West and Taunton seemed to have plenty of money for diverse projects.

Secondly, because the cumulative savings were huge. If councillors had voted for a unitary authority in 2007, they could have saved their citizens £200m in total annual savings plus £89m by not approving the defensive Southwest One, the unnecessary Ignite transformation and recent property renovation and speculation.

Devolving some services to parish and town councils if they wanted it would bring new clarity, focus, democracy and authority to the area where people actually live, especially to 30,000 Taunton citizens who didn't have a town council.

The four district councils proposed Stronger Somerset with two unitary councils. Each would then need staff to run all the important care and highway services now provided by our single county council. Stronger Somerset proposed a new additional Joint Enabling Service and an Integrated Delivery Service to combine two unitaries in a connected Somerset.

A single unitary Somerset council with 560,000 citizens would be better than two unitaries in matching the health system area critical to support an ageing population and thereby avoided the need for time-consuming negotiations across two authorities. One authority avoided unbalance and a larger concentration of deprivation in the west, and would also most reduce costs by properly utilising the massive improvements in communications and technology over the last 50 years. With one management team and 100 councillors, a single unitary had a big advantage over two unitaries of twice the annual transition savings, nearly four times the estimated five year savings and the shortest payback time. Of course, One Somerset also gave the strongest voice for Somerset.

The Leader of the Council thanked Mr Mann for his comments.

34. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Chair of the Council**

The Chair of the Council reminded Full Council of the procedural rules they needed to follow during the meeting and that they should be courteous to one another during the debate.

35. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council advised Full Council of some events that were taking place over the weekend that they might wish to attend and support. She also thanked officers for their continued hard work.

36. **To receive only in relation to the business for which the Extraordinary Meeting has been called any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13**

No questions were received in relation to Procedure Rule 13.

37. **Stronger Somerset- Business Case**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Chair of Scrutiny gave feedback from the discussions had at the Scrutiny Committee. This included comments that the New Council would need to be reformed for the community, concerns were raised on devolution of responsibilities to the Town and Parish Councils and the impact on their precepts and also concern on staffing levels. Overall the Scrutiny Committee gave their support for the Stronger Somerset campaign.
- Councillors highlighted that they believed the Stronger Somerset business case was a good representation and they also agreed with the East/West split. They wanted modern democracy and inclusion for all councillors.
- Councillors hoped that the Stronger Somerset business case was heard by Central Government.
- Councillors wanted to ensure that there was a good level of public involvement in the consultation period.
- Concern was raised on some of the service areas currently covered by Somerset County Council (SCC) and that further detail was required, especially for Education, Young People and Adult Social Services and Health Services.
- Councillors wanted to ensure that the Town/Parish Councils were encouraged to take part in the webinars and the consultation.
- Concern was raised that the timing was not great for the unitary debate, considering there was a global pandemic and that Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) had only been in operation for a year.
- Councillors went on to thank all the officers of SWT for their hard work over the past 18 months, through the creation of SWT and also through the challenges of the Covid Pandemic.
- Concern was raised on the disruption for the community and that a big part of the problem was the lack of funding provided by Central Government for local services.
- Councillors suggested that one unitary council would be too large for the area and that the local services would be cut.
- Councillors hoped that Central Government would decide on what was best for the community.

- Concern was raised on the amount of councillors and the allocation of those across the New Council area.
- Further concern was raised on how councillors would provide support for the remote areas of the New Council.
- Some Councillors highlighted that the unitary debate had been ongoing for many years and that it was good to have discussions on the different options.
- Councillors highlighted that they did not want to lose focus on the work being carried out on Climate Change.
- The Leader thanked all Councillors for their comments and support for the business case and gave her reassurance on the many points raised during the debate and wanted to ensure that the Town/Parish Councils were involved and that the best outcome was achieved for the community of Somerset.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- a) Approved the Business Case for the reform of local government including the creation of two unitary Councils within Somerset;
- b) Delegated authority to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, in consultation with the other Somerset District Leaders and Chief Executives, to make minor amendments to the Business Case as necessary and/or appropriate, ahead of its submission to the Secretary of State;
- c) Supported the continuing consultation with local stakeholders, above and beyond any programme of consultation that might be required by the Government in due course; and
- d) Noted that in the best interests of the communities and residents of Somerset West and Taunton, the Council would continue to work with colleagues across all tiers of local government and public service in Somerset.

(The Meeting ended at 8.05 pm)

