

SWT Full Council - 13 April 2021

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Simon Coles, Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Sue Buller, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, 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, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Andy Milne, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Peter Pilkington, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Phil Stone, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Terry Venner, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Dawn Adey, James Barraah, Lesley Dolan, Paul Fitzgerald, James Hassett, Alison North, Andrew Pritchard, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas and Jo Comer

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

158. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors P Bolton, N Cavill, C Morgan and S Nicholls.

159. 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 Barr	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Blaker	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Trustee		
Cllr A Govier	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
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 M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Milne	All Items	Porlock	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 P Pilkington	All Items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	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 N Thwaites	All Items	Dulverton	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 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

160. **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

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

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

A minutes silence was held in memory of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

The Chair of the Council advised Councillors that the legal notice period had been given and confirmed that they were able to proceed with the meeting.

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

The Leader of the Council reminded Councillors to attend one of the Climate Change training sessions that were being held during the week.

She also requested that Councillors submit a response to the public consultation on Local Government Reform and asked them to encourage their friends and family to submit a response by 19 April 2021.

163. **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 procedure rule 13 questions had been received.

164. **Consultation on Local Government Reform - Response to One Somerset Proposal**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors requested clarification on recommendation 2 and the decision to bring the report to Full Council.
The Monitoring Officer gave clarification on the process and advised that it was an Executive Decision, as per the Constitution, however, the Leader thought it was fair to bring the report to Full Council for debate.
- Councillor M Blaker proposed an amendment to the wording for recommendation 2, which was duly seconded by Councillor R Habgood, as follows:-
 - It is proposed that following Full Council's decision on whether or not to endorse the **submission of the** response, the Leader of the Council will make the Executive Decision to submit the consultation response to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government by the deadline of 19 April 2021.
- The Leader ACCEPTED the amended wording and it became part of the substantive MOTION.

- Councillors were glad that they had been given the chance to debate the report.
- Councillors queried whether they had been given a copy of the critique on Somerset County Council's submission to compare that of Somerset West and Taunton Council's (SWT) submission.
The Leader advised that she understood the Councillor's query, however, the debate was on SWT's submission and they should not be distracted by comparing the two.
- Councillors understood the logic for a Unitary Council, which was to avoid duplication and to bring forward savings, however, they believed that it was the wrong time to be considering moving towards a Unitary Council.
- Councillors queried how long it had taken to compile the response and at what cost.
The Leader advised that conversations on submitting a response were initially held around New Year, but PA Consultants had been requested to start approximately 4 weeks ago. Officers would report back with the cost of the work.
- Councillors agreed it was an odd way to evaluate the two proposals and that they should have been evaluated independently.
- Councillors were glad that the recommendations were only to support the submission of the response as they did not support all of the content.
- Councillors stated that we needed to take on any criticisms and work together whichever proposal was chosen.
- Councillors stated that the unitary debate had been ongoing for several years and that they were not sure why Central Government had allowed for SWT to be created if they were going to propose the creation of a Unitary Authority 2 years later.
- Concern was raised as there had been no proof given that a Unitary Authority would provide savings or improved services.
- Councillors agreed that they needed to get the proposal right for the future of the district and its residents.
- Councillors were glad that the response was being submitted as they were not sure that One Somerset was a long term proposal.
- Councillors believed the Stronger Somerset proposal would mean that services could be locally controlled.
The Leader thanked all for their comments and stated that we needed to reform our ways of working to support local residents and services.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 1) Endorsed the submission of the response to the consultation, including the PA Consultancy professional experts critique attached as Appendix A and the Ipsos Mori Poll at Appendix B, on proposals for reform of local government in Somerset, specifically in respect of the One Somerset proposal.
- 2) Noted that the decision to submit the consultation response required an Executive decision to be made before final submission. Whilst this is legally an Executive decision, it was felt important that this was debated by Full Council to ensure transparency and openness. It was proposed that following Full Council's decision on whether or not to endorse the submission of the consultation response, the Leader of the Council would

make the Executive Decision to submit the consultation response to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government by the deadline of 19 April 2021.

(The Meeting ended at 7.20 pm)