

Minutes of a Meeting of the Full Council held in the Hollinsworth Hall, Canalside Conference Centre, Marsh Lane, Huntworth, Bridgwater TA6 6LQ, on Wednesday, 17 July 2024 at 1.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Mike Best (Chair)
Cllr Lee Baker (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Steve Ashton
Cllr Brian Bolt
Cllr Hilary Bruce
Cllr Mike Caswell
Cllr Nicola Clark
Cllr Barry Clarke
Cllr Simon Coles
Cllr Nick Cottle
Cllr Hugh Davies
Cllr Martin Dimery
Cllr Lance Duddridge
Cllr Habib Farbahi
Cllr David Fothergill
Cllr Andy Hadley
Cllr Philip Ham
Cllr Alistair Hendry
Cllr Edric Hobbs
Cllr John Hunt
Cllr Andy Kendall
Cllr Tim Kerley
Cllr Christine Lawrence
Cllr Tony Lock
Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Kevin Messenger
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Oliver Patrick
Cllr Evie Potts-Jones
Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey
Cllr Faye Purbrick
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Diogo Rodrigues
Cllr Heather Shearer
Cllr Fran Smith
Cllr Jeny Snell
Cllr Mike Stanton
Cllr Andy Sully
Cllr Richard Wilkins
Cllr Rosemary Woods

Cllr Marcus Barr
Cllr Alan Bradford
Cllr Simon Carswell
Cllr Norman Cavill
Cllr Mandy Chilcott
Cllr Peter Clayton
Cllr John Cook-Woodman
Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Dawn Denton
Cllr Andy Dingwall
Cllr Michael Dunk
Cllr Bob Filmer
Cllr Tony Grimes
Cllr Pauline Ham
Cllr Mark Healey
Cllr Mike Hewitson
Cllr Henry Hobhouse
Cllr Dawn Johnson
Cllr Jenny Kenton
Cllr Marcus Kravis
Cllr Liz Leyshon
Cllr Martin Lovell
Cllr Matthew Martin
Cllr Mike Murphy
Cllr Sue Osborne
Cllr Kathy Pearce
Cllr Tom Power
Cllr Steven Pugsley
Cllr Wes Read
Cllr Bill Revans
Cllr Peter Seib
Cllr Gill Slocombe
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts
Cllr Andy Soughton
Cllr Claire Sully
Cllr Martin Wale
Cllr David Woan

22 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors Suria Aujla, John Bailey, Jason Baker, Adam Boyden, Theo Butt-Philip, Shane Collins, Adam Dance, Tom Deakin, Sarah Dyke, Caroline Ellis, Ben Ferguson, Andy Govier, Susannah Hart, Bente Height, Ross Henley, Helen Kay, Val Keitch, Harry Munt, Tessa Munt, Graham Oakes, Stephen Page, Connor Payne, Emily Pearlstone, Rob Reed, Mike Rigby, Tony Robbins, Jo Roundell Greene, Brian Smedley, Lucy Trimnell, Sarah Wakefield, Gwil Wren and Ros Wyke.

Although apologies had been received, Councillors Suria Aujla, John Bailey, Caroline Ellis and Tony Robbins attended the meeting online.

23 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council meetings held on 22 May 2024 and 18 June 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

24 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

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
Lee Baker	Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Council
Marcus Barr	Wellington Town Council
Mike Best	Crewkerne Town Council
Alan Bradford	North Petherton Town Council
Simon Carswell	Street Parish Council
Norman Cavill	West Monkton Parish Council
Peter Clayton	Burnham Highbridge Town Council
Nick Cottle	Glastonbury Town Council / St Edmunds Parish Council
Andy Dingwall	Westonzoyland Parish Council
Bob Filmer	Brent Knoll Parish Council
Pauline Ham	Axbridge Town Council
Philip Ham	Coleford Parish Council
Alastair Hendry	Burnham on Sea and Highbridge Town Council
Edric Hobbs	Shepton Mallet Town Council
John Hunt	Bishop's Hull Parish Council
Andy Kendall	Yeovil Town Council

Jenny Kenton	Chard 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
Sue Osborne	Ilminster Town Council
Kathy Pearce	Bridgwater Town Council
Evie Potts-Jones	Yeovil Town Council
Tom Power	Wincanton Town Council
Wes Read	Yeovil Town Council
Leigh Redman	Bridgwater Town Council
Diogo Rodrigues	Bridgwater Town Council
Peter Seib	Brympton Parish Council / Chilthorne Domer Parish Council
Heather Shearer	Street Parish Council
Gill Slocombe	Bridgwater Town Council
Federica Smith-Roberts	Taunton Town Council
Jeny Snell	Yeovil Town Council / Brympton Parish Council
Andy Soughton	Yeovil Town Council
Richard Wilkins	Curry Rivel Parish Council
Dave Woan	Yeovil Town Council

25 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Public questions were received from:-

- Chris Waddilove – Culture Strategy
- David Redgewell – Transport
- Emery Taylor – Transport

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

26 Chair's Announcements - Agenda Item 5

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 Somerset County Councillor Philip Eavis, who had sadly passed away. Councillors paid tribute to him at the meeting, including Councillors Martin Lovell and Bill Revans.

The Chair of Council also highlighted the following:-

- He congratulated the 3 local unitary councillors who had recently been elected as Members of Parliament.

- He thanked Ollie Lindsell, ICT Reactive Support Team Leader, for his years of service to the Council and all his support at the Full Council meetings and wished him good luck with his new job at the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority.
- The Chair of Council wished Alderman Tim Taylor a very happy 80th birthday.

27 Annual Treasury Year-End Report 2023/24 - Report of the Leader and Executive - Item for Decision - Agenda Item 6

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon, introduced the report which the Executive considered and endorsed at its meeting on 15 July 2024.

The report provided a summary of the treasury management activity of Somerset Council for the financial year 2023-24, which was compliant with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003.

The report highlighted details of the debt portfolio at the start of the year, which included information on the loans between the legacy councils and the overall position as at 31 March 2024.

The report further detailed the inherited investment portfolio from the 5 legacy councils, which had reduced by the end of the year and that the average return on investments was slightly below the benchmark rates.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors acknowledged that the report was an interesting read.
- Councillors were pleased to see a way forward with the treasury management.
- Councillors queried the comments made on the financial emergency and the position other authorities were in with regards to lending to Somerset Council. *The Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services advised that at the time the financial emergency was called, other authorities had been advised not to lend to Somerset Council, however, that advice had now been removed.*
- Councillors queried whether we retained any interest for the balances held for other authorities. *The Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services advised that the Council had arrangements to hold money but that the interest was passed back to the relevant authority.*
- Councillors thanked the officers for their work on the report.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Mandy Chilcott.

Having been duly proposed and seconded, the Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Annual Treasury Year-End Report 2023/24 as being in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management.

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance and the Opposition Spokesperson for Resources and Performance both thanked the

Executive Director for Resources and Corporate Services for his service to the Council and his role in local government over the past 33 years. Councillors wished him well in his future endeavours.

28 Appointment and empowerment of Interim Chief Financial Officer (Section 151 Officer) - Report of the Chief Executive - Agenda Item 7

The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications, Councillor Bill Revans, introduced the report which proposed that the Interim Chief Financial Officer be appointed as the statutory designated Section 151 Officer of the Council.

The proposed appointment was being brought forward to provide appropriate expertise and resilience for the Council following the Council's approval on 22 May 2024 for the voluntary redundancy and subsequent deletion of the Executive Director Corporate and Resources role (designated as the Council's current Section 151 Officer).

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Leader of the Opposition thanked the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive for the cross-party work carried out for the recruitment of the post.
- Some concerns were raised as part of the recruitment process which had not been resolved, however, councillors understood that the Council was required to appoint a Section 151 Officer.
- Councillors raised concern on the cost of an interim post and that it was not ideal timing to appoint to an interim post for a Section 151 Officer.
The Chief Executive advised Council that officers were working on the restructure of the council to create savings which would form part of the permeant recruitment of the role.
- Councillors requested assurance that due diligence had been carried out and queried whether there had only been one candidate.
The Chief Executive advised that there had been four candidates and each candidate had taken part in a technical assessment along with the standard interview process.
- The Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources and Performance highlighted that the financial forecast was in a better place and she was impressed with the hard work carried out by officers on the savings which enabled the council to provide safe, legal and caring services.

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

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

- 1) Appoint and designate the statutory role of Section 151 Officer to Maria G. Christofi, the Interim Chief Financial Officer, with effect from 1 September 2024 until a permanent Section 151 postholder was appointed.
- 2) Agree, subject to the agreement of the Council to (1) above, to amend the Constitution, Financial Regulations and the Officer Scheme of Delegation and empower the Interim Chief Financial Officer to undertake all of the statutory functions of a Section 151 Officer and take all decisions related to the role.

29 Report of the five Scrutiny Committees - Agenda Item 8

The five Chairs (or Vice Chair in the absence of the Chair) of Somerset Council's Scrutiny Committees, Councillor Leigh Redman, Councillor Dawn Johnson, Councillor Bob Filmer, Councillor Gill Slocombe and Councillor Martin Dimery, introduced each of their reports, which detailed the activity of each of the five Scrutiny Committees since the previous meeting of Full Council.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee for Children and Families thanked all councillors who attended the Route 1 Advocacy stand before the Full Council meeting.
- The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee for Adults and Health highlighted that the committee had a very busy work programme and welcomed all councillors to attend their meetings.
- The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee for Corporate and Resources highlighted the changes brought in by the Property Rationalisation Project and for all councillors to take note of the changes to the meeting calendar.
- Councillors highlighted the importance of the scrutiny function in the democratic pathway.

The Council noted the report.

30 Key Decisions taken since the last Council Meeting - Agenda Item 9

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 between 11 May and 15 July 2024.

The Council noted the report

30a Annual Report of the Deputy Leader of the Council and the Lead Member for Resources and Performance

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Performance, Councillor Liz Leyshon, introduced her annual report.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Lead Member for Resources and Performance highlighted some points within the report, especially to note the change from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) back to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- Councillors thanked the Lead Member for her report and suggested adding some graphics to break up the text in her next annual report.
- Councillors echoed the comments made within the report and praised the Democratic Services Team for their hard work in supporting councillors and all the work involved in ensuring the council's committee meetings ran smoothly.

The Council noted the report.

30b **Annual Report of the Lead Member for Children, Families and Education**

The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education, Councillor Heather Shearer, introduced her annual report.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education highlighted some points within the report, especially the importance of the corporate parenting role and the work of the Scrutiny Committee.
- Councillors queried whether the school organisational plans were being published and wanted assurance that this happened regularly.
- Councillors queried what work was being carried out to assist with cases of child poverty and homelessness.
The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education advised that work was being carried out with the Homelessness Team and Assets Team to help improve the situation.
- Councillors raised concerns on the standard of housing within the area.
- Councillors highlighted that the debate proved that the county's children were important to them.
- Councillors praised the officers for the service provided.
- Councillors thanked the Lead Member and the previous Lead Member for their hard work on the portfolio.

The Council noted the report.

31 **Annual Report of the Audit Committee - Agenda Item 12**

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Councillor Mike Hewitson, introduced the annual report of the Audit Committee.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked the Chair of the Audit Committee for his work on the committee and his comprehensive report.
- Councillors highlighted the broad spectrum of work that was debated by the committee.

The Council noted the report.

32 **Questions from Councillors to the Executive - Agenda Item 13**

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

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Governance and Communications

- Councillors requested an update on the voter numbers for the General Election in July 2024, focusing on postal and proxy voter registration.
- Councillors raised concern that the timescales for Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were not being met.

- Councillors requested that a review be carried out on the FOI process.
- Councillors raised concern on the waiting times for the main phone line to the Council.
- Councillors raised concern that the Parish Councils were receiving invoices for payment of the council tax precepts with very little notice to make payment, which caused some issues due to the frequency of their parish meetings.

Lead Member for Communities, Housing and Culture

- Councillors queried whether there was land designated for use by gypsy/traveller sites and who funded the sites.
- Councillors raised concerns on the increase in harbour fees and requested that clearer communications were used when publicising the fees and charges.
- Councillors requested clarification on public liability insurance and whether it had been withdrawn, which would impact the community groups who used it for activities such as beach cleans.
- Councillors queried why a recently approved Public Space Protection Order had not been advertised.

Lead Member for Transport and Digital

- Councillors queried whether the council had ways to improve the routes used for diversions when there were road closures on the motorways or A roads in the area.
- Councillors queried whether the 'Fingerpost Project' had been withdrawn as they had struggled to find any information on the Council's website.

(The meeting ended at 3.05 pm)

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CHAIR