

COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the County Council held in the Canalside Conference Centre, Marsh Lane, Nr Bridgwater, TA6 6LQ, on Wednesday 1 March 2023 at 1.00 pm

Present: Cllr S Ashton, Cllr S Aujla, Cllr J Bailey, Cllr J Baker, Cllr Cllr L Baker, Cllr M Barr, Cllr M Best (Chair), Cllr B Bolt, Cllr A Bradford, Cllr H Bruce, Cllr T Butt Philip, Cllr S Carswell, Cllr M Caswell, Cllr N Cavill, Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr N Clark, Cllr B Clarke, Cllr S Coles, Cllr J Cook-Woodman, Cllr N Cottle, Cllr A Dance, Cllr D Darch, Cllr H Davies, Cllr T Deakin, Cllr D Denton, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr A Dingwall, Cllr L Duddridge, Cllr S Dyke, Cllr C Ellis, Cllr H Farbahi, Cllr B Ferguson, Cllr B Filmer, Cllr D Fothergill, Cllr T Grimes, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr Philip Ham, Cllr S Hart, Cllr M Healey, Cllr B Height, Cllr A Hendry, Cllr M Hewitson, Cllr E Hobbs, Cllr H Hobhouse, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr D Johnson, Cllr H Kay, Cllr V Keitch, Cllr A Kendall, Cllr J Kenton, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr M Lewis, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr T Lock, Cllr M Lovell, Cllr D Mansell, Cllr M Martin, Cllr H Munt, Cllr T Munt, Cllr M Murphy, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr G Oakes, Cllr S Osborne, Cllr O Patrick, Cllr C Payne, Cllr K Pearce, Cllr E Pearlstone, Cllr D Perry, Cllr E Potts-Jones, Cllr T Power, Cllr H Prior-Sankey (Vice-Chair), 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 J Roundell Greene, Cllr D Ruddle, Cllr H Shearer, Cllr G Slocombe, Cllr B Smedley, Cllr F Smith-Roberts, Cllr F Smith, Cllr A Soughton, Cllr A Sully, Cllr C Sully, Cllr L Trimnell, Cllr S Wakefield, Cllr R Wilkins, Cllr A Wiltshire, Cllr D Woan, Cllr R Woods and Cllr R Wyke

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

Apologies were received from Councillors: Cllr A Boyden, Cllr P Clayton, Cllr S Collins, Cllr M Dunk, Cllr A Govier, Cllr Pauline Ham, Cllr R Henley, Cllr T Kerley, Cllr M Kravis, Cllr P Seib, Cllr J Snell, Cllr M Stanton, Cllr M Wale and Cllr G Wren

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

The Acting Chair reminded the meeting that details of all Members' interests in 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.

There were no new other declarations of interest made.

3 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 3

Notice was received of public questions and statements from the following (full details of the questions and responses can be found in Appendix A):

- Adam Thomas - signs on the northern border of the County
- David Redgewell - Public Transport
- Sarah Little - Local Hunt and TTRO's
- Nigel Behan - Adult Social Care Budget

4 **Chair's Announcements** - Agenda Item 4

The Chair provided a summary of the key visits undertaken by himself and the Vice Chair and other civic matters since the last Council meeting.

5 **Report of the Leader and Executive - for decision - to follow** - Agenda Item 5

The report set out the Leader and Executive's recommendations to Council which arose from their consideration of the report at the Executive meeting held on 27 February 2023.

The report detailed the various governance arrangements that would need to be put in place for the ports and harbours for the New Somerset Council.

Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West and Taunton, and Somerset County Council had Ports and Harbours within their areas of responsibility:

- Sedgemoor District Council was the Statutory Harbour Authority (SHA) and Competent Harbour Authority (CHA) for the Port of Bridgwater (Did not include Bridgwater Docks)
- Somerset West and Taunton were the Statutory Harbour Authority (SHA) for Minehead and Watchet Harbours.
- Somerset County Council had statutory responsibility for Bridgwater Docks.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor David Fothergill.

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

- 1) That the responsibility for the Council's functions as Statutory Harbour Authority and the role of Duty Holder should sit with the Executive Committee.
- 2) That appropriate training be provided to members of the Executive Committee in relation to their role of Duty Holder.
- 3) that the role of Designated Person for the new authority should be fulfilled by an independent third party and not by a council officer.

- 4) the appointment of the Bristol Port Company as the Designated Person (should they wish to continue in the role)
- 5) That the establishment of a Harbour Management Committee for the Ports and Harbours outlined in the report was approved.
- 6) That delegated authority be granted to the Service Director (Responsible for the Port Functions) to conduct a skills audit for the Harbour Management Committee as soon as reasonably practicable
- 7) That Ashford's solicitors be instructed to prepare the Harbour Management Committee Terms of Reference, Memorandum of Understanding and Harbour Revision Orders.
- 8) That delegated authority was granted to the Service Director (Responsible for the Port functions) to run the process for making appointments to the Harbour Management Committee and in consultation with the Service Director (Legal) to establish the Harbour Management Committee
- 9) The continuation of the Watchet Harbour Advisory Committee and other existing advisory groups.
- 10) That delegated authority be granted to the Service Director (Responsible for the Port Functions) to progress the proposed harbour revision orders and the draft proposals be submitted to the Harbour Management Committee and Executive once produced.

6 **Report of the Monitoring Officer** - Agenda Item 6

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which set out decisions that were required ahead of vesting day (1 April 2023) for the Somerset Council.

Paper 1 detailed the appointments of committees and the allocation of seats on committees to the political groups for the new Somerset Council.

The appointments of the Chair of the Council, Vice Chair of the Council and Leader of the Council were agreed at the Annual General Meeting on 25 May 2022. Appointments to the Chair and Vice-Chair roles for the new Council would need to be agreed at the Annual General Meeting in May 2023.

The County Council discussed the committee allocations and the following points were raised:-

- The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans proposed an amendment to the recommendations, to waive the political proportionality on the Standards Committee and the four area Planning Committees and instead allocate places on the basis set out in the Appointments Schedule in Appendix 1. The proposed amendment was

seconded by Councillor D Fothergill. Following debate the Council agreed the proposed amendment.

- The Leader of the Council thanked all the political group leaders for their support with the Appointments Schedule and nominating members to committees.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor David Fothergill.

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

- 1) Approve the Council Appointments Schedule to its committees and joint committees (Appendix 1).
- 2) Note that the Leader of the Council would approve appointments to the Health and Well-Being Board and the Heart of the South-West Joint Committee.
- 3) Agree the recommendation from the Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition to set aside the political proportionality rules for the four area-based Planning Committees and instead allocate places on the basis set out in Appendix 1. In addition to also agree the recommendation from the current Standards Committee to set aside the political proportionality rules for the new Standards Committee and instead allocate a place to an elected member from each of the five political groups.
- 4) Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to make amendments to committee appointments in Appendix 1 and agreed appointments to any vacancies that arose. Where changes to committee appointments were required then appointments would be made in accordance with the wishes of the relevant political group leader.
- 5) Agree Wednesday 24 May 2023 as the date for the Annual General Meeting for Somerset Council.

Paper 2 detailed the proposed calendar of meetings for Somerset Council from April 2023.

The County Council discussed the calendar and the following points were raised:

- The Leader of the Council advised of the changes made by the Monitoring Officer.
- The Deputy Leader of the Council thanked the officers for their work on the calendar.

- Councillors queried future dates and the frequency of meetings for Planning Committees and Local Community Networks.

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

- 1) Approve the proposed calendar of meetings for Somerset Council from April 2023 (attached in Appendix 1).
- 2) Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to finalise and make any changes to the proposed meeting dates, times, meeting arrangements and meeting venues in consultation with the Chairs of the relevant committees.

Paper 3 detailed the decisions that were required regarding the appointment of members to internal, partnership and outside bodies for 2023/24.

The County Council discussed the outside bodies and the following points were raised:

- The Deputy Leader of the Council highlighted the work involved in combining all the outside bodies from all five councils.
- The on-going review of outside body appointments.
- Councillor David Fothergill declared a personal interest on the item as his wife worked for the Heritage Trust which was mentioned in the report.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor David Fothergill.

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

- 1) approve the appointment of members to internal, partnerships and outside bodies for 2023/2024, as set out in Appendix 1
- 2) delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Leaders of the political groups, to make such nominations as may be required before and after vesting day to ensure directors were in place post vesting day in respect of the companies listed in Appendix 2
- 3) delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to make amendments to appointments in Appendix 1 and agreed appointments to any vacancies that arose.
- 4) request the Monitoring Officer to undertake a full review of outside body appointments during 2023/24 and to make any recommendations to the Council meeting in February 2024, following consultation with political group leaders and Executive Directors.

Paper 4 detailed the proposed appointment of Independent Persons for the new Somerset Council.

Councillor Bill Revans proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor David Fothergill.

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

- 1) Agree the appointment of the following people as Somerset Council's three Independent Persons up until the date of the Somerset Council elections in May 2027:
 - Sue Burton
 - Philip Knowles
 - Emily Macaulay
- 2) Consider the appointment of two Reserve Independent Persons until the Annual General Meeting in May 2024:
 - Lorraine Davey
 - Carole Lomas
- 3) Request that the Monitoring Officer undertake training and provide support to the Independent Persons.

7 Report of the Human Resources Committee - Agenda Item 7

The Deputy Leader of the Council introduced the report from the Human Resources Committee which considered the proposed Pay Policy Statement for the new Somerset Council for 2023/24.

Councillor Liz Leyshon proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Leigh Redman.

Having been duly proposed and seconded the Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Pay Policy Statement (PPS) for the Somerset Council for 2023- 24 (attached as Appendix A to this report).

8 Requisitioned items - Agenda Item 8

Councillor Leigh Redman introduced the motion noting: his pleasure in speaking in support of the motion alongside frustration at needing to bring to Council; his role as a County Councillor which now spanned three terms of office; how the world has changed during this time, social media had grown exponentially, the public took a greater interest in what councillors did, news reports became somewhat toxic, and one of the outcomes was that councillors and officers started to get an increase in unwarranted abuse; how no one

should feel intimidated or concerned doing what they had been elected to do, no one should feel intimidated for doing the job they were paid to do; and the inclusion of officers of the Council.

In summary Cllr Redman highlighted the points and actions included within the motion drawing Councils attention to the section *'Ensure that Somerset council had a clear reporting mechanism which councillors could use to monitor and record incidents of harassment and abuse of councillors and officers'* and requesting support the motion to send a clear message.

The County Council discussed the item and the following points were raised:

- Councillors thanked Councillor Redman for bringing the Motion forward and urged Council to support.
- Councillors were all aware of colleagues who had suffered abuse and agreed that all councillors and officers deserved to be treated with respect.
- Councillors highlighted cases of abuse that they had suffered.
- Councillors agreed that they wanted to make a difference in their local communities and felt that the negative behaviour needed to stop.
- Councillors wanted people to engage with politics in a positive manner.
- Councillors fully supported the Motion.

Councillor Leigh Redman proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Dawn Denton.

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

- 1) Note that increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse was having a detrimental impact on local democracy, and that prevention, support and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians must improve to ensure councillors felt safe and able to continue representing their residents.
- 2) Commit to challenge the normalisation of abuse against councillors and officers and upheld exemplary standards of public and political debate in all it did.
- 3) Sign up to the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign. The campaign aimed to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the response to and support those in public life facing abuse and intimidation.
- 4) In addition, the Council resolved to:
 - Write to the local Members of Parliament to ask them to support the campaign.

- Write to the Government to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of politicians at every level.
- Ensure that Somerset Council had a clear reporting mechanism which councillors could use to monitor and record incidents of harassment and abuse of councillors and officers.
- Regularly review the support available to councillors in relation to abuse and intimidation and councillor safety.
- Work with the local police to ensure there was a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors and their families and discuss the need to take a preventative approach that accounted for the specific risks that councillors faced, as they did with other high-risk individuals, like MP's.
- Take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers.

9 **Annual Report of the Standards Committee** - Agenda Item 9

The Chair of the Standards Committee introduced the annual report and thanked the committee and officers for their hard work which was echoed by the Leader of the Council. The report was received and noted by Council.

10 **Annual Report of the Constitution and Governance Committee** - Agenda Item 10

The Chair of the Constitution and Governance Committee introduced the annual report and thanked the committee and officers for their hard work which was echoed by the Leader of the Council. The report was received and noted by Council.

11 **Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee** - Agenda Item 11

The Chair of the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee introduced the report and thanked the committee and officers for their hard work which was echoed by the Lead Member and the Leader of the Opposition. The report was received and noted by Council.

12 **Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee** - Agenda Item 12

The Chair of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee introduced the report and thanked the committee and officers for their hard

work which was echoed by the Lead Member. The report was received and noted by Council.

13 **Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Environment Committee** - Agenda Item 13

The Chair of the Scrutiny for Policies and Environment Committee introduced the report and thanked the committee and officers for their hard work which was echoed by the Lead Member. The report was received and noted by Council.

14 **Report of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee** - Agenda Item 14

The Vice Chair of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee introduced the report and thanked the committee and officers for their hard work which was echoed by the Deputy Leader of the Council. The report was received and noted by Council.

15 **15a. Reflections from Members / 15b. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implementation Update**

Agenda Item 15B

The Chair invited Alyn Jones, the LGR Programme Director, to introduce the report which provided an update on work over the previous year to implement a unitary council for Somerset, and summarised activity that was under way to prepare for transition and transformation after Vesting Day on 1 April 2023.

It was noted that the LGR Programme in Somerset remained a significant and complex endeavour, involving staff and elected representatives across all 5 Somerset Councils. The programme had been implemented during a challenging time for the UK economy, ongoing pressures in local government as well as dealing with the enduring impact of Covid-19.

The Council discussed the LGR Update and the following points were raised:

- The Chief Executive stated that it had been a privilege working alongside officers and councillors over the past few months.
- The Lead Member for Local Government Reorganisation and Prosperity thanked the previous administration for their continued interest and support in the project. She also thanked all the officers for their hard work and was impressed with how the project had been delivered.

Having been duly proposed and seconded the Council **RESOLVED** to note

the report outlining the implementation to date, planned progress towards Vesting Day, and the plans under development for transition and transformation by the new Council.

Agenda Item 15a

At the invitation of the Chair of Council, the Leader of the Opposition proceeded to reflect on Somerset County Council and his role as a Councillor:

- The time which had elapsed since the journey towards unitary council transformation began.
- That Somerset County Council (SCC) was established in 1888 and had operated throughout two world wars and seen the introduction of the Exmoor National Park Authority in 1954, HPA in 1963 and the M5 in 1975.
- Sadly, throughout that time there had been many councillors and employees that had passed away.
- In the 133 years, 7 months and 8 days since SCC had been formed, we had seen 7 Monarchs, 78 Prime Ministers, 31 Chairmen, 1 Chairwoman and many elected members.
- He was delighted and proud of the work that had been achieved.
- He thanked all the councillors and officers for their work over the years and highlighted ‘Sumorsaete Ealle’.

At the invitation of the Chair of Council, the Leader of the Council proceeded to reflect on Somerset County Council and his role as a Councillor:

- He thanked all the councillors and officers for the work achieved to get the New Council established, he was proud to be the Leader of the Council.
- Somerset had a rich history, and the final meeting of SCC was part of that history.
- He wondered what the Cheddar Man would have thought of all the events whilst he sat in his cave all those years ago.
- He highlighted a moment in time in 47AD and the introduction of roads, which had proved to be a popular discussion point for SCC.
- He further talked through different eras and the introduction of shires and area boundaries, which had brought the establishment of local councils.
- The final meeting of SCC was historic and offered many opportunities for the future.
- That the delivery of Local Government Reorganisation was made possible through the five councils working together to create one council for Somerset.

- He stated that the next four years would be a challenge but that he wanted to be ambitious for the new Council and achieve what was best for Somerset.

The Chair of the Council thanked both councillors for their words and looked forward to seeing councillors at the first Annual General Meeting of the Somerset Council in May 2023.

(The meeting ended at 2.45 pm)

CHAIRMAN