

MENDIP DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of Full Council held on Monday, 27 February 2023 in the Council Chamber, Mendip District Council, Cannards Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BT, commencing at 6.30 pm

COUNCILLORS IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Helen Sprawson-White (Chair of the Council)
Councillors Rob Ayres, Alison Barkshire (online), Eve Berry, Adam Boyden (online), Shannon Brooke (online), Simon Carswell, John Clarke, Shane Collins, Nick Cottle (Deputy Chair of the Council), Jon Cousins, Michael Dunk, Drew Gardner, Michael Gay, Peter Goater, John Greenhalgh, Philip Ham, Francis Hayden, Bente Height, Steve Henderson, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper, Edric Hobbs, Damon Hooton, Chris Inchley, Helen Kay, Garfield Kennedy, Tom Killen, Liz Leyshon, Barbi Lund, Lindsay MacDougall, Matt Martin, Terry Napper, Barry O'Leary, Richard Pinnock, Mike Pullin, Lois Rogers (online from item 8), Tom Ronan, Heather Shearer, Lucie Taylor-Hood, Alan Townsend, Laura Waters and Ros Wyke

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Tracy Aarons	Deputy Chief Executive
Richard Bates	Section 151 Officer
Helen Bowen	Democratic Services Officer
Stuart Brown	Chief Executive
David Clark	Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Claire Dicken	Democratic Services Supervisor
Jacob Hall	Climate Change and Resilience Officer
Ally Laing	Senior Media and Communications Officer
Claire Malcolmson	Head of Community Health Services
Julie Reader-Sullivan	Head of Planning & Growth Services
Nick Ryder	Democratic Services Officer
Sara Skirton	Head of Corporate Services
Haylee Wilkins	Head of Housing Services
Nataliya Wills	Community Health and Wellbeing Officer

Agenda Item	Subject	Actioned by
1	Welcome and Chair's Announcements The Chair welcomed everyone to the last meeting of Full Council of Mendip District Council. She advised that the meeting would follow the procedures set out in the Council's Hybrid Meeting Guidance.	

	<p>She went on to outline the announcements in the updates regarding the forthcoming IT Switchover, and the Finale Event.</p> <p>She said she spoke with a mix of pride and sadness. She said she felt it was a travesty that the wishes of the district councils and the residents had been dismissed so easily by the central government.</p> <p>She said there were concerns about a single unitary authority for Somerset; about the reduction in democracy and about the reduction in local representation.</p> <p>She hoped those Councillors who were standing down would remain involved in the communities.</p> <p>She said she was immensely proud to have been able to sit as Chair of the Council for four years. However, most of her pride was in the staff. Over the past four years, they had faced some of the biggest challenges ever. She thanked the staff for their hard work.</p> <p>Two thoughts for the day:</p> <p>“Life is like riding a bicycle; to keep your balance, you must keep moving” – Albert Einstein</p> <p>“Just don’t give up trying to do what you really want to do. Where there is love and inspiration, I don’t think you can go wrong” – Ella Fitzgerald</p>	
2	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Josh Burr, Ken Maddock, Janine Nash, Sam Phripp and Tanys Pullin,</p>	Claire Dicken
3	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>None.</p>	David Clark
4	<p>Recent Chairs Engagements</p> <p>The Chair said there had been few engagements in February. However, March promised to be very busy.</p>	
5	<p>Public Participation</p> <p>a) Items on the agenda: None</p>	

	<p>b) Items not on the agenda:</p> <p>1) Alan Miller had requested to speak. He said he represented a number of residents of Roman Way, Glastonbury. He said that some caravans had arrived recently at the bottom of Roman Way. He did not want to complain about them, rather he was concerned about the way money was being spent in dealing with the problem. For instance, he quoted £35,000 had been spent on rocks to prevent encampments in Roman Way. However, he suggested they could easily be moved by two people. He felt the money would have been better spent on providing somewhere for the travelling community with access to clean water and toilets. He was concerned about the problems associated with people living in caravans. For instance, he stated a number of caravans had been burned out, and tonnes of rubbish had had to be cleared and significant cost. He concluded by saying that continuing to spend money on trying to prevent the travelling community from parking was wasteful because the travelling community had nowhere to go.</p> <p>2) Jim Mochnacz was invited to speak. He said that he had two outstanding issues that needed to be resolved as soon as possible or passed to the new unitary authority. The first issue was how the funfair had arrived in the Cranhill Road Car Park, Street in May 2022 and he felt had been positioned too close to the houses. He also felt one of the rides was unsafe and uninsured.</p> <p>The second issue he raised referred to a complaint he had made about skimmed milk. He was unsatisfied at the way Mendip District Council had handled his complaint. He expressed hope the new unitary authority would learn best practice from other Councils.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the speakers for their contribution.</p>	
<p>6</p>	<p>Previous Minutes</p> <p>Councillor Barry O’Leary proposed that the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2023 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Laura Waters, put to the vote and declared to be carried unanimously.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2023 be approved as accurate records of those proceedings.</p>	<p>Claire Dicken</p>

	The Chair altered the order of the items as follows:	
8	<p>Update on Progress to Address the climate and Ecological Emergency</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Policy and Climate Change presented a report which stated a Climate and Ecological Emergency had been declared at Full Council in February 2019.</p> <p>In August 2021 Mendip District Council's Carbon Management Plan was approved, setting out Mendip's current emissions profile and our future pathway both within the council and across Mendip, including how the emissions reductions could be achieved within our own power.</p> <p>This report provided an update on the progress made between September 2022 and February 2023.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder thanked the members of the Scrutiny Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Group for their work.</p> <p>During the discussion that followed Members said they welcomed the progress which had been made.</p> <p>Members were particularly interested in the performance against the targets which had been set. Going forward, Members hoped the new authority would include RAG scores in future reports.</p> <p>Members commented that more could have been done if more resource had been allocated to tackling the emergency.</p> <p>In response to queries, the Portfolio Holder was pleased to report that all the Somerset Councils had performed well when compared to national targets.</p> <p>He went on to confirm the updated target the Council had set itself had been to get to 30% less carbon emission 2030.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder thanked individual Councillors including Councillor Gay and Councillor Dunk for their questions. He said, he and the Climate Change and Resilience Officer would be happy to answer them after the meeting. In the meantime, he was asking Full Council to note the progress report.</p>	Jacob Hall

	<p>The Leader of the Council said she had spoken to the Secretary of State personally about the issue of carbon emissions. In addition to this, Mendip District Council was a member of the UK100; a cross-party membership organisation that supported the most ambitious councils to go further and faster on their Net Zero and Clean Air targets.</p> <p>Members recognised the balance of reducing carbon emissions alongside allowing industry to continue.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>To note the work completed by the Council between September 2022 and February 2023 towards the objectives set out in the Council's Carbon Management Plan.</p>	
<p>9</p>	<p>Mental Health Champions Report</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder for Community Health and Services presented a report which stated that Mendip District Council had mental health awareness firmly embedded within its own corporate objectives as well as those of the Mendip Health and Wellbeing Board.</p> <p>The report was an update on the work around mental health and next steps in the context of the Local Government Reform, the changing landscape of Integrated Care Systems and the development of Local Community Networks.</p> <p>The report covered the period from December 2021 to November 2022 with plans to March 2023 when the role of Mental Health Champions comes to an end.</p> <p>In particular, work had been done on creating awareness, digital hoarding and first aid for mental health.</p> <p>The Portfolio Holder thanked the Mental Health Champions and the Officers for their hard work in progressing mental health awareness.</p> <p>In response to queries, the Portfolio Holder said she would be able to update Members about the move of the St Andrews Ward from Wells to Yeovil after the meeting.</p> <p>During the discussion that followed, Members said mental health was a constant issue. They were particularly interested in the work to help farmers. Members hoped the mental health support work would continue in the new authority.</p>	<p>Nataliya Wills</p>

	<p>RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note the progress which had been made; • To note that the role comes to an end on 1 April 2023; • To endorse the continued promotion and facilitation of events and activities, including room provision wherever possible in line with the latest Government guidance up to and including 31 March 2023. 	
<p>10</p>	<p>Motions to Council</p> <p>The Chair of Council advised that one Motion had been received.</p> <p>Motion 1 Proposed by Councillor Damon Hooton and seconded by Councillor Drew Gardner</p> <p>Council notes that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improving our democracy is an important end in itself, but it is also a necessary means to building a better country. 2. Within Europe, only the United Kingdom and authoritarian Belarus still use single-round First Past the Post (FPTP) system for Parliamentary and local Elections. 3. The FPTP voting system is fundamentally unfair, disproportionate and unrepresentative - in the December 2019 General Election it took just 38,264 votes to elect each Conservative MP, while it needed 336,038 votes to elect each Liberal Democrat and 865,715 votes to elect the lone Green MP. In the 'Greater Somerset' area, Conservative candidates won 53% of the vote but won 8 of the 9 constituencies. 4. First Past the Post creates too many safe seats where the outcome is a foregone conclusion, meaning that people can be taken for granted by politicians and parties, and are unable to properly hold their representatives to account. It can also deny voters a genuine choice as it forces many to vote tactically against their least favoured candidate instead of voting for their most favoured one. 5. Internationally, a form of Proportional Representation (PR) is used to elect parliaments in more than 80 countries. PR can ensure that all votes count and have equal value, that the seats won more closely match the votes cast. This would help to rebuild public trust in our democracy, by ensuring that all political views are represented in proportion to their level of public support, which better reflects the electorate's wishes. PR would also end minority rule - in 2019, 43.6% of the vote produced a Government with 56.2% of the seats and 100% of the power. 	<p>Stuart Brown</p>

6. PR is already used to elect the parliaments and assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in local council elections in Scotland and Northern Ireland. So why not in the UK Parliament and for local elections in England?
7. In addition this Council is deeply concerned that the requirement to provide Photo ID will present a significant barrier for thousands of residents in the constituencies of Wells and Somerton & Frome (the parliamentary constituencies representing Mendip) and the wider Somerset County to exercise their right to vote – and these barriers will disproportionately affect ethnic minority, low income, disabled, LGBTQ+, elderly and most especially young voters.
8. Council notes the acceptable forms of ID listed by the Government are weighted towards more affluent and older voters who are more likely to possess passports, driving licenses, older persons bus passes and senior PASS cards. Forms of photo ID most likely to be held by younger people (such as young persons' railcards) have been excluded.
9. Council believes the rushed and last-minute timeframe in which this legislation has been enacted will put an enormous strain on staff and resources at Mendip and its successor council to communicate the new rules to voters, provide Voter Authority Certificates to thousands of local residents and training polling station staff right when our local government is moving through a structural change to Unitary.

Councillor Damon Hooton therefore proposed a motion which had been circulated in the updating sheets.

During the discussion that followed Members noted there were a number of PR systems. Members were concerned that any motion should be clear as to which version of PR was being supported. And that this should be based on advice from experts in the field.

There were further discussions about the cost of introducing additional requirements for ID and whether elections needed further security. Members went on to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of PR and FPTP systems.

Councillor Drew Gardner requested a recorded vote. Councillor Nick Cottle seconded this request.

The motion was put to the vote. The following Councillors supported the motion:

Councillors Rob Ayres, Simon Carswell, John Clarke, Shane Collins, Nick Cottle, Jon Cousins, Michael Dunk, Drew

	<p>Gardner, Michael Gay, Peter Goater, Francis Hayden, Steve Henderson, Edric Hobbs, Damon Hooton, Chris Inchley, Helen Kay, Garfield Kennedy, Liz Leyshon, Barbi Lund, Lindsay MacDougall, Matt Martin, Barry O'Leary, Richard Pinnock, Tom Ronan, Heather Shearer, Helen Sprawson-White, Lucie Taylor-Hood, Laura Waters and Ros Wyke.</p> <p>The following Councillors voted against the motion:</p> <p>Councillors Eve Berry, John Greenhalgh, Philip Ham, Bente Height, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper, Tom Killen, Terry Napper and Alan Townsend</p> <p>The following Councillors abstained from voting:</p> <p>Councillor Mike Pullin</p> <p>The motion was therefore carried.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To write to H.M. Government calling for a change in our outdated electoral laws to enable Proportional Representation to be used for General and Local elections in England; and 2. To call upon Mendip's two MPs to push for a change to electoral law to enable Proportional Representation and to promote the matter for debate within Parliament. 3. To request that for future unitary Somerset Council elections, 50% of the members are elected from a list system using a PR voting method. 4. To instruct the Chief Executive and request the Leader of the Council and all other group leaders write to the Cabinet Office to express the Council's complete opposition about the damaging effect on democracy that mandatory Voter ID will have in UK elections and to demand that this section of the new legislation is repealed immediately. 5. To request that a short update note from electoral services is sent to all Members to outline the preparations we, and the successor authority, have in place to ensure all voters are fully aware of the new rules and to provide special Voting ID to those who do not possess an existing form of photo ID. 	
11	<p>Questions from the Public</p> <p>None</p>	<p>Andre Sestini</p>

<p>12</p>	<p>Questions from Members</p> <p>Question from Councillor Helen Kay:</p> <p>Further to our motion at September 2022 Full Council asking that planners request information from Wessex Water about sewage capacity and the likelihood of exceeding acceptable levels of discharge into our rivers, and to report the information in planning reports, it appears that this question is NOT being asked. It appears that only the statutory questions are being asked and reported.</p> <p>While I understand the situation is quite complex and there are different requirements for different sorts of applications, the idea of a full council motion was to put down some markers for good practice to take into the new authority.</p> <p>Further, while I understand there is no duty for such information to be provided until AFTER planning permission is granted for speculative planning applications, in my view this is putting the cart before the horse and needs to change.</p> <p>Therefore, I must ask:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why was a motion from Full Council not followed through? 2. Is there a special process for doing this which I should be aware of, to ensure any motions passed at the new authority are carried through? 3. Could Planning Officers moving to the new authority please now be briefed to ask this question and report the answers for all new applications and reports for the new Area East Somerset Planning committee? This will require them to act only as communicators, not specialists. <p>Responses:</p> <p>Why was a motion from Full Council not followed through?</p> <p>Considerable work has been taking place to standardise practice and systems to ensure that the new Somerset Council has a properly functioning planning service from Vesting Day. There has also been a heavy focus on progressing discussions on phosphate solutions which Members have, understandably, been keen to see in place. Unfortunately, this has meant that we have struggled with capacity to bring the actions from Full Council forward in the way that we would like, for which we would apologise. However, Officers did approach Wessex Water to establish their position and they confirmed that they would not be able to provide a response to every application.</p>	<p>Stuart Brown</p>
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Is there a special process for doing this which I should be aware of, to ensure any motions passed at the new authority are carried through?

Council motions must be considered in any Local Authority and in accordance with the constitution and policies of the elected body concerned. The protocol for handling motions in the unitary would therefore need to be raised with Somerset Council directly.

Could Planning Officers moving to the new authority please now be briefed to ask this question and report the answers for all new applications and reports for the new Area East Somerset Planning committee? This will require them to act only as communicators, not specialists

Unfortunately, Mendip District Council is not able to direct the actions of the future Somerset Council and so the reporting to the new Area East Somerset Planning Committee will have to follow the procedure decided by the new Council.

Officers do recognise Member and public concern on sewage overflows and river pollution and the new Executive director of Climate and Place has been made aware of these issues and is being briefed on phosphate and sewage matters impacting on Somerset. This will include receiving a briefing on the recently published Wessex Water Investment Plan for 2025-2030. A joint Nutrient Member and senior officer Task and Finish Group was also set up in November 2022 to review actions which will evolve to include co-ordination of issues relating to phosphates and pollution at a catchment level. Mendip Planning Officers will also continue to engage with Wessex Water on the information that can be provided for individual applications and local investment during the outstanding life of the council.

Councillor Kay thanked the Officers for their response. However, she said she was still concerned about the issues and would raise them at the new council.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Projects said she had been pleased to learn that Mendip District Council had always been represented on Bristol Water and Wessex Water. She hoped the new council would continue to include these companies on its Outside Bodies arrangement.

7

Leader's Update and Reflecting on Mendip District Council

Councillor Tom Killen, Leader of the Conservative Group at Mendip, was invited to speak. He said the last four years had been a snapshot of the work of the Council. He outlined some of the momentous decisions and achievements over the last 50 years. He said the Council had been exemplar and innovative. Amongst its achievements it had revitalised its towns and made local government more efficient. He said he was grateful to the Members and Officers who had served over the years. He said the communities would continue and East Somerset should continue to thrive. He said the new Council must listen to the Local Community Networks which would be set up in this part of the county. He wished the new Council and its staff well for the future.

Councillor Michael Gay, Leader of the Green Group at Mendip, was invited to speak. He said that the Green Members respected the past and looked forward to being part of the future. He said the Council had met its challenges, such as COVID-19, very well. He thanked his colleagues in his group and those who had worked across party lines. He said, looking forwards, he had hoped the new Council would consider the committee system. He said the gap between rich and poor should be made smaller so that everyone could live well.

Councillor Chris Inchley, one of the Independent Members, was invited to speak. He was concerned that politics was increasingly held in low esteem. He felt local authority was very important and he thanked his colleagues for the grace he had been shown. He reminisced about people who had helped him and served the Council over the years. He said that organisations were often subject to restructure, and this was always a time for concern. He was proud of his role as Chair of Scrutiny, and he was particularly proud of the way the Council worked together to get through recent challenges.

Councillor Ros Wyke, Leader of Mendip District Council, said it was with both regret, to have to note the passing of the Mendip District Council into the history books, and recognition that this had not been of our making or had the full support of local people. It had been a central government initiative. Local government continued to change and the new Unitary Council in Taunton would have the responsibility to ensure that all residents were well served in the future.

Over the last 48 years Mendip Council had seen many changes in our governments and in our residents and

communities and their needs. The Council had changed to reflect the new services and opportunities. From the modern building we now meet in, to the many online services. Yet the need to ensure it met the residents' needs, and small things make a difference, Mendip, unlike so many councils, always stayed open to the public between Christmas and New Year.

There was much to celebrate over the last 48 years, many memories and successes. Individuals, both Officers and Members, who had contributed to our success story. Each Member would be receiving a legacy document the media team had worked hard to produce. In addition, at our finale event there would be photos and other memorabilia.

We can also recognise and celebrate our administration of the last four years, that has been fairer, more inclusive and environmental focused, even with the challenges of two elections in the first six months, COVID-19 within 10 months, and off and on for another two years, together with the unitary distractions.

We coped with an inherited Local Plan and its ramifications. Cllr Wyke said she could mention a long list of achievements from reduction in air pollution to the Special Planning Guidance on green spaces. 86 EV chargers had been installed across the district's car parks and ensured all our single glazed windows were replaced as part decarbonising our council estate. Also, the fields in trust in Glastonbury.

Glastonbury Town Deal had been awarded £24m; that's more per head of population than anywhere else in country. They had worked with a range of agencies to improve the historic traveller and van dwellers situation.

Talking of Glastonbury, or more accurately Pilton, the astonishing success of this much-loved festival. The largest in Europe, the size of Swindon, setting up on a green field site had been as much down to the planning, oversight and partnership working of Mendip staff than to any headliner or, indeed, Michael Eavis.

We have, despite COVID-19, placed emphasis on tourism and supported the wider business community. We supported our residents in numerous ways during the pandemic.

Wells Bishop's Barn and Recreation Ground, the Frome Boyles Cross, Egford Park and Broadway were among the assets returned to the local communities. We also supported a roll out of Changing Places to support the community.

	<p>Despite alarmist warnings we demonstrated that a Liberal Democrat council could run a financial competent council and indeed found further money to support Citizens Advice following the County Council withdrawing funding. We also started to financially support the Arts after more than 10 years. We continued the investments for return and ensured our capital was based on fixed long-term low-interest loans. We have worked to reduce the level of outsourcing and make the Council more efficient, effective with focus on serving our population.</p> <p>We have supported Parish Councils with the Parish Forum and a range of partner agencies through the local Health and Wellbeing Board, lottery, grants and funds to support our communities and councils.</p> <p>Housing: while the housing stock has been transferred to a Housing Association nearly 20 years ago, we take pride in proactively addressing homelessness and rough sleeping to ensure a limited number are in need in this area. We've also worked on supporting the green energy initiatives.</p> <p>Cllr Wyke said she personally took pleasure in many successes, especially seeing the cycle path formally open next month connecting east and west Shepton and seeing it go under a HRE bridge.</p> <p>And what of the future; many of our successes are going to be adopted by the new council. For instance, the innovative Mendip Business Hub which was scheduled to be rolled out across the county.</p> <p>But one of our strongest legacies will be our staff. Again and again, she heard the senior managers say just how good individuals are and what a credit to the organisation for the smallest Council in Somerset we are definitely making a difference.</p> <p>Cllr Wyke thanked the staff and Members, current and former. She said we had achieved much for our community and left it in a better place. Now we must look to the future and retain our focus on serving the people of Mendip.</p>	
10	<p>Urgent Business</p> <p>There were no official items of Urgent Business.</p>	

	<p>The Chair took the opportunity to invite any other Member who wanted to speak about the work of Mendip District Council speak.</p> <p>Councillor Damon Hooton said he had become the longest serving Member of the Council. He reminisced about his time at the Council. He said we did well to remember those who had died during their service; Stephen Robinson, Danny Unwin and Nigel Woollcombe-Adams.</p> <p>Councillor Drew Gardner said it was important for people to get involved in politics. He said there was still a lot to do. He said current issues included increasing police numbers.</p> <p>Councillor Mike Pullin thanked those staff who had been particularly helpful.</p> <p>Councillor Edric Hobbs said he was very proud to have served on Mendip District Council. He recommended the role to everyone listening. He was particularly pleased to have been part of the development of the multi-user footpaths. He stated he would be busy in the new unitary authority.</p> <p>To mark the end of the last meeting of the Council and to remember those who had died, Members observed one minute of silence.</p>	
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The meeting closed at approximately 8.45 pm