

South Somerset District Council

Decisions taken by the South Somerset District Council on Thursday 16 July 2020

Agenda Item No	Topic	Decision
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Part A – Items considered in public

A6	The Future of Local Government in Somerset: "One Somerset" Business Case for a single unitary council	<p>RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed the following response to Somerset County Council's "One Somerset" Business Case:-</p> <p><u>That South Somerset District Council recommends that Option (c) of the report is adopted, with commentary that follows</u></p> <p><i>Option c. Agree that [SSDC] does not support the business case overall, with supplementary commentary on the reasons why it does not support the business case; where it feels more work or clarification is required; and any aspects of the business case it does support.</i></p> <p><u>Commentary</u></p> <p>Summary statement:</p> <p>"SSDC believes that this is a solution put forward by a discredited authority based on examples of change, with inadequate evidence and a high risk of bad outcomes for resident communities."</p> <p><u>The reasons why SSDC does not support the business case; and where more work or clarification is required</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The proposed unitary authority is based on failed examples of local government which have lost vital local services and democratic accountability. SSDC cannot support a risky experiment that might suffer a similar fate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Currently, residents, businesses and communities are supported by high-performing councils that have demonstrated sound financial management and digital transformation, and the mandate to deliver valuable discretionary services (such as town centre regeneration, the
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		<p>and swimming pools). The county administration has focussed on tax cuts not needs, reduced budgets to the point of service failure (transport, social care, special educational needs, disabilities) and abandoning other service areas, relying on others to fund them (e.g. health services). This business case extends that approach over key services delivered by District Councils which are valued by business and residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 'One Somerset' business case relies on evidence from other single county unitary authorities including neighbouring Wiltshire, and recent unitaries where it is too early to measure success. Wiltshire is reported to be on the verge of issuing a S114 bankruptcy notice. Wiltshire's Local Council Networks (Area Boards) have been a conspicuous failure with no funding, autonomy and officer resource, and very limited devolution to parish and town councils. Local Council Networks on this model will in no measure replace the quality of service of the District Councils. Dorset has failed to devolve services to parishes, and a state of paralysis has followed the implementation of single unitary authorities, that cannot be afforded in the aftermath of Brexit and Covid-19. - Alternative options to the single unitary are given only superficial analysis. - The business case fails to recognise the transformation necessary in the delivery of social care. <p>2. A single Somerset unitary is <u>too big</u> for effective local democracy in Somerset, and will lead to a substantial democratic deficit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If two tiers of local government are to be reduced to one tier, it makes no sense for the new tier to be at the level of one of the previous tiers. - The government's aspirations for devolved authorities are based on Local Enterprise Partnership areas (in our case, Somerset combined with Devon). A unitary for the whole of Somerset would be too large to be effective.

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		<p>Somerset would be too close in size to a future combined authority of Somerset and Devon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A unitary for the whole of Somerset would be too remote from local communities, residents and businesses. c.300 Parish and Town Councils. - The average size of the 20 rural unitary authorities in England is around 300,000. A unitary for Somerset would serve a population of about 560,000, and would nearly double the biggest unitary population in the country, and spread over a great geographical area. - Single Unitaries are not necessarily the norm, especially if an authority borders on different local authorities. Evidence is Cornwall which is the only single Unitary in the SW and borders Devon. The SCC administrative area borders Dorset, Wiltshire, the other 2 unitaries in Somerset, and Devon (2 tier). - Under the business case, each Councillor will be expected to take on 8 times the work of an existing Councillor, over a wider area and on a much broader range of responsibilities. The loser in this democratic deficit will be the communities and residents. - The SSDC model is a recognised national leader in involving communities, as evidenced by being awarded Council of the Year and 3 Beacon awards for this work – the key element of the model is the Area Committees. - One of the government's tests is a strong level of public support. The business case has exaggerated claims on this are wrong, not only because the business case has just been published, but because the last time a single unitary was suggested, it was rejected by 82% of the population. <p>3. The financial arguments in the business case appear to be inadequate and flawed, and unconvincing.</p>

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		<p>need an independent and thorough investigation. Observations include: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The cheapest solution is not usually the best. - There is a substantial risk of not delivering the financial benefits. - The business case has failed to demonstrate any duplication in front-line services leading to savings. - The business case takes no account of the transformation savings that have been realised by district councils. - The reported finances of the county and district councils are outdated, and in some cases misleading. The county's claims of financial stability need to be carefully scrutinised, including any hidden borrowing. - Savings of Chief Executive salaries are claimed, when these are less than those of other district directors. - Financial analysis appears to estimate cost from the County perspective, rather than from the point of view of the Council taxpayer. - District and Parish Councils have had to step in and fund community services that have been cut by the county council. Will these be funded under the single unitary? - No cost to the taxpayer has been taken into account when parishes take on responsibilities. - £18.5m per year saving, even if corroborated by scrutiny, would be less than the cost of the delivery of social care, which is what has happened so far when delivered at a county scale. - It has been stated that the single unitary will discontinue commercial investment to save

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		<p>services. It is unclear how this lost income will be made up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is unclear whether the financial case relies on rises in Council Tax. <p>4. The business case also claims to offer benefits that are not sufficiently evidenced. These need an independent and thorough investigation.</p> <p><u>Any aspects of the business case it does support.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDC is open to the view that a unitary authority can provide a solution to the future of government in Somerset, but not at this scale. However the district councils do underestimate the challenge of a unitary delivering the best services to resident communities even at a smaller scale. - SSDC accepts that there are some services that should continue to be delivered at a county wide or a regional combined authority level (eg. transport, health, police, regional strategic waste partnership, home finder, some back-office functions), but not those working with supporting communities - The discussion paper commissioned by SALC is worthy of further study. However agrees in particular with the views expressed that: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The burgeoning demand, particularly for children's and adult social services, will case soon dwarf any proposed savings o It is clear that the scale and complexity of Somerset's challenges are so great that unlikely to be effectively addressed from a unitary council which is too distant recognising and responding to local concerns

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		<p>Reason: To propose the South Somerset District Council response to the “One Somerset” Business Case.</p> <p align="center"><i>(Voting: 42 in favour, 12 against, 1 abstention)</i></p>
A7	2019/20 Treasury Management Activity Report	<p>RESOLVED: That Full Council agreed to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. note the Treasury Management Activity for the 2019/20 financial year; b. note the position of the individual prudential indicators for the 2019/20 financial year; c. note the outlook for the investment performance in 2019/20; d. note the Council operated within all of the Prudential Indicators during 2019/20. <p>Reason: To review the treasury management activity and the performance against the Prudential Indicators for the 2019/20 financial year as prescribed by the CIPFA Code of Practice and in accordance with the Council’s Treasury Strategy, Annual Investment Policy and Treasury Management Practices.</p> <p align="center"><i>(Voting: unanimous in favour)</i></p>
A8	Proposed joining of Yeovilton Parish Council and Limington Parish Meeting - Community Governance Review	<p>RESOLVED: That Full Council:-</p>

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		<p>a. Noted the receipt of the request and its validity;</p> <p>b. Agreed to undertake a Community Governance Review of the Parishes of Yeovilton and Limington:</p> <p>c. Agreed the Terms of Reference of the review as detailed in Appendix A, including the timetable and arrangements for public consultation;</p> <p>d. Agreed that the review will be carried out by the Democratic Services Specialist, in consultation with Ward Members and the Area East Committee;</p> <p>e. Noted that further reports would be brought to Council in order that decisions may be made in respect of draft proposals and final recommendations of the Review.</p> <p>Reason: To agree to conduct a Community Governance Review (under the provisions of Part 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) in the area of Yeovilton Parish Council and Limington Parish Meeting to merge to form one Parish Council.</p> <p align="right"><i>(Voting: unanimous in favour)</i></p>
A10	Motions	RESOLVED: That Full Council:-

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. acknowledged the efforts that this council had made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote renewable energy; b. recognised that councils can play a central role in creating sustainable communities, particularly through the provision of locally generated renewable electricity; c. further recognised; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that very large financial setup and running costs involved in selling locally generated renewable electricity to local customers result in it being impossible for local renewable electricity generators to do so, • that making these financial costs proportionate to the scale of a renewable electricity supplier's operation would create significant opportunities for councils to be providers of locally generated renewable electricity directly to local people, businesses and organisations, and • that revenues received by councils that became local renewable electricity providers could be used to help fund local greenhouse gas emissions reduction measures and to help improve local services and facilities d. accordingly resolved to support the Local Electricity Bill which, if made law, would make the setup and running costs of selling renewable electricity to local customers proportionate by establishing a Right to Local Supply; and e. further resolved to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inform the local media of this decision,

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write to local MPs, asking them to support the Bill, and • write to the organisers of the campaign for the Bill, Power for People, (at 8 Delancey Passage, Camden, London NW1 7NN or info@powerforpeople.org.uk) expressing its support. <p>Reason: To confirm the Council's support for the Local Electricity Bill.</p> <p><i>(Voting: unanimous in favour)</i></p>