

South Somerset District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **South Somerset District Council** held on **Thursday 19 August 2021** in the Council Chamber, SSDC Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil and as a Virtual Meeting using Zoom meeting software.

(6.35 - 7.30 pm)

Present in the Council Chamber:

Members: Councillor Paul Maxwell (Chairman)
Councillor Wes Read (Vice-Chairman)

Jason Baker	Mike Lewis	Jeny Snell
Dave Bulmer	Sue Osborne	Lucy Trimnell
Louise Clarke	Paul Rowsell	Martin Wale
David Gubbins	Dean Ruddle	
Val Keitch	Peter Seib	

Members present on-line via Zoom:

Oliver Patrick	Charlie Hull	Tiffany Osborne
Karl Gill	Pauline Lock	Clare Paul
Peter Gubbins	Tony Lock	David Recardo
Brian Hamilton	Kevin Messenger	Gina Seaton
Henry Hobhouse	Tricia O'Brien	Andy Soughton
Linda Vijeh	William Wallace	Rob Stickland
Nick Colbert	Tony Capozzoli	Mike Stanton
Sarah Dyke	Adam Dance	Colin Winder
Kaysar Hussein	Jenny Kenton	Tim Kerley
Robin Pailthorpe	Mike Stanton	Lucy Trimnell
Andy Kendall		

Officers:

Jane Portman	Chief Executive
Jan Gamon	Director (Place and Recovery)
Jill Byron	Monitoring Officer
Karen Watling	Interim Section 151 Officer
Angela Cox	Specialist (Democratic Services)
Michelle Mainwaring	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)
Becky Sanders	Case Officer (Strategy & Support Services)

35. Apologies for Absence (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robin Bastable, Neil Bloomfield, Hayward Burt, Martin Carnell, Malcolm Cavill, John Clark, Mike Hewitson, Ben Hodgson, Mike Lock, Graham Oakes, Crispin Raikes, Garry Shortland, Alan Smith and Gerard Tucker.

36. Minutes (Agenda Item 2)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 8th July 2021 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

37. Declarations of Interest (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

38. Public Question Time (Agenda Item 4)

The Chairman advised that a number of detailed questions had been submitted by a resident of Chard regarding bus shelters in the town and a written response would be provided to the resident.

Council were then addressed by the Chairman of Bruton Town Council. He thanked SSDC for the engagement with Town and Parish Councils by officers, Members and the Stronger Somerset bid team during the last year. He hoped that the outputs from that engagement would be submitted to the One Somerset team and he looked forward to further workshop meetings with Town and Parish Councils on the unitary authority progress.

The Leader of Council confirmed that she would pass on the comments of the Chairman of Bruton Town Council to the Stronger Somerset bid team.

39. Chairman's Announcements (Agenda Item 5)

The Chairman clarified that those Members attending the meeting remotely via Zoom would not be able to vote on any agenda item, however their participation was welcome. Only the Members present in the Council Chamber would be able to vote.

The Chairman welcomed Jane Portman as the new Chief Executive for South Somerset District Council and wished her every success in her new role.

The Chief Executive said she was delighted to be there and she had received a warm welcome from staff, Members and partner Councils and agencies. She recognised there were interesting times ahead and said she would work hard to ensure all Members were fully engaged in the unitary programme.

The Chairman noted that he had attended the Mayor's civic service at St Johns Church, Yeovil the previous month and he would be attending the opening of the new pavilion facilities at Yeovil Recreation Centre the following week.

The Chairman also asked that Members consider the situation in Afghanistan which was facing great uncertainty at the moment.

Councillor Kaysar Hussain asked what preparation if any had taken place to accept refugees in South Somerset from Afghanistan.

The Chief Executive said that SSDC were awaiting the details of the refugee programme from the Government before deciding how to respond. Whilst SSDC did wish to assist in the re-homing of refugees, they needed to know the details of the programme first.

Councillor Sue Osborne noted that there were elected female politicians who were in serious danger within Afghanistan and who should be assisted to leave the country as soon as possible.

Councillor Clare Paul confirmed that SCC were prepared and ready to support the Afghan resettlement programme and were also awaiting the full details of the programme.

The Chairman concluded that Afghanistan was a serious and tragic situation but there was the will and the capacity to assist within Somerset.

40. Local Government Reorganisation - Structural Change Order (SCO) (Agenda Item 6)

The Leader of Council introduced the report and noted that there had been a briefing prior to the Council meeting which most Members had attended. She said the Secretary of State had proposed there should be a single unitary council in Somerset from April 2023 and the report outlined how South Somerset would engage with the Government and the other Somerset Councils to progress and implement this. She outlined the history of the District Councils proposal for two unitary authorities for Somerset and the Somerset County Council proposal for one unitary authority. She noted the consultation and local poll which had taken place and the criteria under which the bids had been assessed. She said that all Councils were now positively engaging in the process and there had been meetings between all Council Leaders and Chief Executives. A detailed timetable was not yet known but the negotiation of the Structural Change Order was likely to be during August/September. The MHCLG would then prepare the Structural Change Order. She confirmed that all District Councillors would remain until April 2023. Because of the short time frames, delegated authority was sought for the Chief Executive to negotiate the terms of the Structural Change Order in consultation with the Leader of Council and Monitoring Officer. She noted that the proposed Member Working Group was not a requirement but she felt that in the interest of transparency it was needed.

In response to questions, the Leader of Council and Chief Executive advised:

- The report would not be amended on the point regarding the number of or type of responses to the consultation or local poll.
- There would be an increase in staff workload to undertake the work required by the MHCLG.
- Officers may propose a number of options in the review of the number of Councillors for the new unitary authority but the MHCLG would make the final decision.
- It was not known if a full consultation process would be part of the initial review of the number of Councillors for the new unitary authority but it was more likely in the full review proposed to take place after April 2023.
- The district councils had hoped for a more detailed response on the Secretary of State's decision.
- Sedgemoor DC were also setting up a cross-party members working group.
- The elections in May 2022 would be for Councillors to the new unitary authority and some District Councillors may choose to stand in that election. But the SSDC District Councillors would remain until April 2023. There would be a briefing sheet for Town and Parish Councils on this point.
- The Councillors elected to the new unitary authority would be responsible for implementing the arrangements for the new council.
- Officers and Leaders would work together to achieve the best solution and governance in the Structural Change Order.
- The Leader would keep the Green Party member informed during the process.

During discussion the following points were made:

- To attempt a review of the number of Councillors in the new unitary authority for inclusion in the Structural Change Order would be unusually rushed at a time when officers were already stretched when such a review was normally conducted over a year. It would be sensible to elect two councilors to each County Division and hold the full review with the Boundary Commission after the elections.
- South Somerset Councillors had a history of working together on issues to represent the people of South Somerset irrespective of political group.
- The Scrutiny Committee had endorsed the recommendations at their meeting earlier that week and their questions were answered at the District Executive meeting.
- A swift review of the number of Councillors for the new unitary authority now was a risk which could satisfy no-one and the new council would have to work with for years.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Leader of Council proposed the recommendations and they were seconded by the Deputy Leader and Councillor Dean Ruddle. Members in the Council Chamber unanimously supported the recommendations.

RESOLVED: That Full Council:-

- a. noted the next steps following the Secretary of State decision;
- b. delegated authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of Council and Monitoring Officer to submit any responses and undertake negotiations regarding the content of the Structural Change Order and associated matters;
- c. established a member working group to work with the Leader, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer in considering the Structural Change Order, the membership of that group to be the Leader of Council, the Deputy Leader, the Leader of the SSDC Conservative Group and the Leader of the SSDC Independent Group.

Reason: To formally to notify the Executive and Full Council of the decision of the Secretary of State on 21 July 2021 to implement the proposal for a single unitary council for the County of Somerset, to update members as to the next steps and to seek delegated authority for the Chief Executive to negotiate the terms of the Structural Change Order with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (“MHCLG”).

(voting: unanimous in favour)

41. Motions (Agenda Item 7)

There were no Motions submitted by Members.

42. Questions Under Procedure Rule 10 (Agenda Item 8)

There were no questions submitted by Members under Procedure Rule 10.

43. Date of Next Meeting (Agenda Item 9)

Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Full Council would take place as a virtual meeting using Zoom meeting technology on **Thursday, 16th September commencing at 6.30 p.m**

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Chairman

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Date