

Motion for Council 24 September 2019 (Agenda Item 6)

A changing district and changing times – updating the approach to reflection before council meetings.

North Somerset is a vibrant and diverse community that has seen many changes over the years. Our diversity comes in many forms be it cultural, spiritual or social and all contributions have a valued role in creating and enhancing the tapestry of life in North Somerset.

Our new administration elected in May reflects many thoughts and opinions and has found a way to come together in a spirit of openness and inclusivity. We welcome the opportunity that can be afforded by a moment of pause for reflection before the start of each council meeting can offer. Such a moment allows us to reflect on our mission to serve and remind us of the wider context of our role within the community of North Somerset.

The current arrangement of prayers before full council however though valued does not give voice to our wider community. We miss the opportunity to hear words of guidance or reflection from other voices who may wish to share their wisdom with us.

The last census (2011) recorded religious preference as:

- Christian 61% • No Religion 29% • Muslim 0.40% • Buddhist 0.30% • Hindu 0.20% • Jewish 0.10% • Agnostic 0.10% • Other 8.40%

Alongside the strong spiritual work done in our community we have an active volunteering culture that adds to the civic strength of our region and plays a vital role in all aspects of our lives. The Quartet Community Foundation report that there are over 556 registered voluntary organisations in North Somerset offering services in a variety of areas including:

- Social activities (48%) • Volunteering (41%) • Information & signposting (40%) • Health & social care (30%)

We should have an opportunity to hear these voices within the context of a moment of reflection not just those voices that are spiritual in nature.

The Chairman of the Councils role is a vital one as an ambassador for the authority and to reflect on the core values and approaches we wish to portray.

We therefore ask officers to make arrangements to replace the prayer time before the start of full council with an opportunity for members to gather for up to 15 minutes ahead of the council meeting for a period of reflection which would be an opportunity for councillors to receive insight

from our community which can aid us in our work. The insight we receive can be open to a variety of spiritual and voluntary groups as long as they agree with our principles of equality and tolerance.

We also call for the chairman to reflect this spirit of diversity and inclusivity in all civic functions under their control.

Cllr Caritas Charles