

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Council

Tuesday, 10th November 2020

held via Microsoft Teams

Meeting Commenced: 6.00 pm Meeting Concluded: 7.40 pm

Councillors:

P David Shopland (Chairman)

P Richard Westwood (Vice Chairman)

P Marc Aplin (joined after attendance roll call)

P Nigel Ashton

P Mike Bell

P Mike Bird

P Steve Bridger

P Peter Bryant

P Gill Bute

P Mark Canniford

P Ashley Cartman

P John Cato

P Caritas Charles

P Caroline Cherry

P James Clayton

P Sarah Codling

P Andy Cole

P Peter Crew

P John Crockford-Hawley

P Ciaran Cronnelly

P Mark Crosby

P Donald Davies

P Catherine Gibbons

A Hugh Gregor

A Wendy Griggs

P Ann Harley

P Karin Haverson

P Sandra Hearne

P David Hitchins

P Steve Hogg

P Nicola Holland

P Ruth Jacobs

P Huw James

P Patrick Keating

P John Ley-Morgan

P Stuart McQuillan
P Ian Parker
P Robert Payne
P Marcia Pepperall
P Bridget Petty
P Lisa Pilgrim
P Terry Porter
P Geoffrey Richardson
A Tim Snaden
P Mike Solomon
P James Tonkin
A Stuart Treadaway
P Richard Tucker (joined after attendance roll call)
P Roz Willis
Vacancy

P: Present

A: Apologies for absence submitted

Officers in attendance: Jo Walker (Chief Executive), Lucy Shomali (Director of Place), Richard Penska (Interim Director of Finance and Property), Nicholas Brain (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), Hazel Brinton (Corporate Services), Sue Efford (Corporate Services), Jonathan Kirby (Corporate Services), Mike Riggall (Corporate Services), James Willcock (Corporate Services)

COU Chairman's Introduction

116

The Chairman welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the Council.

**COU Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest (Standing Order 37)
117 (Agenda Item 4)**

None

**COU Open and Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 September 2020
118 (Agenda Item 5)**

Resolved: that the open and exempt minutes be approved as a correct record.

COU Motions by Members (Standing Order No. 14)

119 The Nature Emergency (Councillors Payne and McQuillan) (Agenda Item 6 (1))

Motion: Moved by Councillor Payne and seconded by Councillor McQuillan

"North Somerset Council acknowledges and notes:

1. That in February 2019, the council declared a climate emergency, as have over two-thirds of local authorities nationally;
2. The ecological emergency, noting specifically species extinction, loss of habitat and the connectivity of habitats, decline in pollinators which are crucial

to food supply, and the loss of and decline in the quality of the soil;

3. That the climate and ecological emergencies are linked and both are the result of over-exploitation of the earth's resources and poor land management. However, there are other causes of the ecological emergency beyond climate change, including other forms of pollution, urbanisation, hydrological change, the proliferation of invasive species, and poor practices in agriculture, woodland management and fishing;

4. That in May 2019, the UN Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) raised the alarm about the urgent ecological emergency the world faces. The UK's State of Nature 2019 report also highlights the critical decline in biodiversity in the UK.

The council further believes that:

1. The survival of our society and economy depend absolutely on the health of the natural environment and ecosystems and the services they provide, for example clean water and air, food, and flood protection;

2. While reducing carbon from fossil fuels is the top priority for tackling the climate emergency, it is also necessary to find ways to increase carbon absorption or sequestration by the natural environment, by for example tree planting, peatland restoration, different methods of land management and improved agricultural practices that enable carbon to be drawn down into the soil on a large scale;

3. Throughout the district of North Somerset, there are opportunities to increase the sequestration of carbon by trees, grassland and soil, but further work is needed to:

- Increase biodiversity and protection of habitats and species, including key pollinators and other insects
- Increase soil quality and quantity, reducing chemical fertilisers and pesticides and preventing soil erosion
- Increase local food production, utilising local productive capacity, through less intensive agricultural methods, as a number of local producers already do
- Increase flood defences using natural flood mitigation measures
- Protect our natural landscape and protect and enhance the associated ecosystems, whilst enabling sensitive development and more people to enjoy the benefit of time spent in nature

Therefore, in addition to the work already underway to address the climate emergency, this council formally declares an ecological emergency and resolves to:

1. Promote the policy as "tackling the climate and nature emergencies";
2. Whilst recognising the ongoing consultation regarding the new local plan, one of the aims of the local plan should be to achieve a biodiversity net gain;

3. Use existing planning policy and development management to ensure biodiversity is improved, environments enriched and the destruction of habitats is resisted when development occurs. This could be achieved through development of a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD);
4. Seek to work actively with partners locally in North Somerset, regionally in the West of England and beyond to drive collaborative action to improve biodiversity;
5. Identify areas within North Somerset which could be suitable for habitat restoration and seek to restore them through the council's emerging Green Infrastructure Strategy, due in April 2021;
6. Seek opportunities to promote local produce and reduce the intensity of agriculture of North Somerset through engagement with businesses and farmers;
7. Encourage residents, businesses and landowners to reduce pesticide use, and seek to become a pesticide-free council;
8. Continue to collaborate with our communities, businesses and other organisations such as schools and colleges to improve ecological knowledge and understanding and to encourage more sensitive land management.“

Seven members signalled their support for a debate on the Motion.

Councillor Payne spoke in support of his Motion and urged all members to support it. Councillor McQuillan as seconder then spoke in support of the Motion and the need for urgent action.

In debating the Motion councillors expressed their support for the actions proposed and referred to the many and wide ranging benefits of tackling both the climate and nature emergencies together. Reference was made to the need to update and enforce certain action plans and policies to ensure they were consistent with the objective of tackling the climate and nature emergencies, and to the importance of securing inter-generational buy-in and community ownership of these measures.

Councillor Shopland declared an interest in this matter as a member of the National Farmers Union.

Following the debate it was

Resolved: that North Somerset Council acknowledges and notes:

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3. That the climate and ecological emergencies are linked and both are the result of over-exploitation of the earth's resources and poor land management. However, there are other causes of the ecological emergency beyond climate change, including other forms of pollution, urbanisation, hydrological change, the proliferation of invasive species, and poor practices in agriculture, woodland management and fishing;

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6. Seek opportunities to promote local produce and reduce the intensity of agriculture of North Somerset through engagement with businesses and farmers;

7. Encourage residents, businesses and landowners to reduce pesticide use, and seek to become a pesticide-free council;

8. Continue to collaborate with our communities, businesses and other organisations such as schools and colleges to improve ecological knowledge and understanding and to encourage more sensitive land management.

COU Chairman's announcements (Agenda Item 8)

120

The Chairman referred to the low key Armistice Day commemorations taking place this year and reported that a train would be travelling from the West of England to Paddington on 11 November, collecting wreaths from local communities at stations on route following which these wreaths would be displayed on the war memorial at Paddington station. He reported that the Vice-Chairman would be handing over a wreath at Yatton Station on behalf of this council and as Chairman he would be laying a wreath at a war memorial in Clevedon on behalf of North Somerset Council.

COU Leader's announcements (Agenda Item 9)

121

The Leader drew members' attention to the letter he had circulated to councillors at the weekend updating them on the latest position on the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) negotiations. Following negotiations with fellow unitary authorities (UAs), the Metro Mayor and Ministers on the council's application to join WECA, Ministers had asked the four UAs to initiate a public consultation to run in parallel with financial and powers discussions with MHCLG and Treasury, with a view to presenting a deal to all four UAs for agreement in January. To progress the application it was necessary for all UAs to start and conclude consultations by the end of November in order to meet government timescales for introducing legislation. However Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees had been unwilling to commence consultations at this time therefore the council's application was stymied until at least 2025. He stated this was hugely disappointing due to the adverse impact on funding for infrastructure and skills investments within North Somerset but he assured members that the council would continue discussions with Ministers and consider all future options including any opportunities presented by the Devolution White Paper anticipated in the Spring.

With reference to the current lockdown the Leader thanked all residents for the sacrifices they were making to protect their local communities and thanked staff and contractors for the work they were doing to support residents and communities through this difficult period.

COU Chief Executive's announcements (Agenda Item 10)

122

The Chief Executive referred to the recent webinar held on 5 November providing an update on Covid 19. If any member had missed the webinar but would like to view it she could send them the link if they contacted her.

COU Forward Plan dated 2 November 2020 (Agenda Item 11)

123

Councillor Davies presented the Forward Plan.

Resolved: that the forward plan be noted.

COU Corporate Parenting Responsibilities (Agenda Item 13)

124

Councillor Gibbons presented the report. She asked members to review the survey results and consider whether these would be good enough for their own children and what aspects of the survey they would like to know more about. She assured members that as Executive Member she was working closely with the Young People's Champions to address the issues identified within the survey.

Members welcomed the report and in discussing the survey results reference was made to the key findings and areas that could be improved. Reference was made to the webinar on corporate parenting responsibilities attended by councillors some months back where councillors had been asked to provide suggestions on how they could assist and members asked what progress had been made to date on implementing these. Whilst recognising that some suggestions could not be progressed at the current time due to Covid 19 restrictions it was agreed that the list be revisited to identify what actions could be progressed immediately. Members noted individual actions that had been taken by members to provide support to children and young people in care.

With reference to the information provided in the report it was suggested this should be benchmarked and provided in a standardised format which would facilitate regular monitoring. In noting the low proportion of young people who retained the same social worker during the year, reference was made to the importance of building long term relationships and it was suggested this should be given greater priority.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

COU Question Time (Standing Order No. 18) (Agenda Item 14)

125

Advance written questions were received from councillors in advance of the meeting and, together with any advance responses received, were circulated

to councillors and published on the website. Full details together with the responses to them are contained in Appendix 1.

COU 126 Reports on joint arrangements and external organisations and questions relating thereto: Avon Fire Authority (Agenda Item 18 (1))

Councillor Payne presented the report.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

COU 127 Reports on joint arrangements and external organisations and questions relating thereto: Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel (Agenda Item 18(2))

Councillor Westwood presented the report.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

COU 128 Reports on joint arrangements and external organisations and questions relating thereto: West of England Joint Scrutiny Committee (Agenda Item 18 (3))

Councillor James presented the report. He stressed the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee fully recognised the benefits for the region of North Somerset Council joining WECA and had urged all Mayors and Leaders to do everything possible to bring this about. It was therefore disappointing that this approach had not been supported by the Bristol Mayor. He suggested this would prevent North Somerset accessing adult skills funding for training in advanced digital skills and would have a pronounced impact on transport at a time when this was urgently needed. He stressed that urgent action was needed to address this now.

In discussing the issues reference was made to the serious economic disruption that would be faced over coming months which would be exacerbated if the council missed out on funding and job creation opportunities. Members urged all councillors to engage with colleagues in other authorities to try and progress this and secure a better deal for the region. Members expressed their disappointment and frustration at the position adopted by the Mayor of Bristol suggesting this would have a significant impact on local residents and the region's economy for years to come. The Leader noted the strength of feeling expressed by members but explained the difficulties now posed due to the time constraints around the timetable for introducing legislation. He undertook to engage directly with Ministers to progress this in whatever way possible and to continue to work with WECA partners for the benefit of North Somerset and the region.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

COU 129 MetroWest Phase 1 Update – Programme and Procurement (Agenda Item 19)

Councillor Tonkin presented the report. He referred to the challenges as a result of delays to the project brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic and

thanked officers for their work on this project. He drew members' attention to the revised estimated opening date of December 2024, the proposals for seeking to claw back some of the time delays, the key risk exposure to the council and mitigating actions to reduce this wherever possible. He highlighted section 12 of the report setting out the key project risks and how these would be managed.

At the request of a member and having regard to the length and complexity of the report Councillor Tonkin undertook to provide a one page summary to members explaining the following: the reasons for the nine month delay; what this has added to the cost, timescales and scope; the change in and resultant potential risk exposure to the council; action being taken to get back on track. He also agreed to provide further detail in relation to the number of jobs to be created for younger people and opportunities for apprenticeships provided by local colleges.

Motion: Moved by Councillor Tonkin, seconded by Councillor Cato and

Resolved:

(1) that it be noted that the Development Consent Order (DCO) examination for MetroWest Phase 1 has commenced five months later than expected at the point of when the DCO Application was submitted in November 2019, causing a knock-on delay to the overall delivery programme timescales, as indicated in figure 1.1. of the report. Officers from North Somerset Council (NSC) and the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) are working with senior colleagues at Network Rail and the Department for Transport on solutions to mitigate this projected time delay;

(2) that it be noted that the above time delay is one of five key strategic risks that have been reported previously. Figure 1.1. of the report profiles these strategic risks against the project programme prior to any mitigation. Senior officers are working closely with senior colleagues at Network Rail and the Department of Transport to mitigate these risks which will inform timely decisions to be brought forward to the respective NSC, West of England (WoE) and WECA decision making bodies for approval, following full scrutiny engagement;

(3) that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to finalise the project Delivery and Procurement Strategy together with the Chief Executive of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) be approved, as per the June 2020 WoE report, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport, the Director of Development and Environment, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance and Property. The guiding principles of the project Delivery and Procurement Strategy are set out in paragraph 6.1 of the report;

(4) that authority be delegated to the Director of Development and Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance and Property, to enter into a side agreement with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) in relation to cost, risk and liability sharing arising from NSC entering into agreements with statutory undertakers (mostly utility

companies), for works to divert, protect and create new connections. The guiding principles of the side agreement are set out in paragraph 7.10 of the report; and

(5) that authority be delegated to the Director of Development & Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance and Property, to enter into agreements with statutory undertakers for works to divert, protect and create new connections, including the following companies:

- I. Bristol Water
- II. CLH Pipeline System (CLH-PS) Limited
- III. Wales and West Utilities
- IV. Wessex Water
- V. Western Power Distribution
- VI. National Grid Electricity Transmission
- VII. Bristol Port Company

COU Constitution Changes to Delegations (Agenda Item 20)

130

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report.

Motion: Moved by Councillor Davies, seconded by Councillor Cartman and

Resolved: that the changes to the Constitution referenced in the report be approved and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to implement them.

COU Draft Municipal Calendar 2021-22 (Agenda Item 21)

131

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report.

Motion: Moved by Councillor Davies, seconded by Councillor Cartman and

Resolved: that the draft Municipal Calendar for 2021/22 be approved.

Chairman

Appendix 1

Council Meeting, 10 November 2020 Question Time (agenda item 14)

1. Question from Cllr James to Cllr Davies, Leader of the Council

“In a previous executive Q&A, the Executive responded to one of my residents who is profoundly deaf who asked whether executive facebook live sessions, alongside council meetings could invest in live-captioning and BSL interpretation. One of the gifts of lockdown is that it has given us remote meetings, which make the use of BSL interpretations much easier and more financially feasible.

(i) Could North Somerset please look into making our newly live streamed meetings more accessible by providing post-event captioning, live captioning, and or BSL interpretation so that we can commit to being an open and fair council for all?

(ii) And if my resident sent advanced notice, requesting such provisions for all future such meetings, would we be bound by the equality act to do so anyway?”

Response from Cllr Davies

(i) The council is currently reviewing the three possible forms of assistance that provide a greater level of accessibility to online meetings for those who have difficulty hearing:

1. Live transcription of the meeting using a British sign language interpreter
2. Utilising closed captions as provided by Teams or Google
3. Live captions generated in real time by a typist

Live transcription using an interpreter can be achieved either as a direct participant in a Teams meeting, or as a separate video feed mixed into the video stream prior to streaming. Such assistance is extremely effective. The interpreter can either be present in the room in the case of a CEO briefing session or provide services remotely as a participant in a Teams meeting. The council already possesses the technology to deliver both solutions and there are interpreters available to undertake this work who would previously have been booked for face to face meetings.

We have previously experimented using closed captions generated automatically by Microsoft Teams. Whilst this technology makes a brave attempt at producing a transcript of the meeting in real time, there are times when it makes mistakes, particularly in relation to people’s names. This has previously resulted in potential embarrassment to both officers and councillors, and, as a result, the solution has not been explored further. This solution does however offer the advantage of being readily available at no additional cost or overhead.

Live captioning achieved through the use of a typist is more of a challenge for the council to implement given that it does not already have the equipment required to overlay a feed of captions to a meeting stream. Whilst this is a one-off investment, the ongoing cost of the typist must also be considered and will require budget growth to support.

Closed captions can also be generated by Google through the YouTube web stream. The council does not have sufficient subscribers to its YouTube channel in order to qualify for live streaming however closed captions generated after the meeting represent the current approach adopted by the council whilst other options are considered. The disadvantage of having captions generated post-event however is obviously that it does not allow real-time involvement in the meeting. Council meetings however are streamed as a one-way broadcast; there is no means by which any member of the public can participate in the meeting in terms of making a representation other than by submitting a written disposition in advance.

(ii) The council is obliged by the Equality Act, so far as is reasonably practicable, to approximate the access enjoyed by disabled people to that enjoyed by the rest of the public. The purpose of the duty to make reasonable adjustments is to provide access to a service as close as it is reasonably possible to get to the standard normally offered to the public at large.

In considering what constitute *reasonable adjustments*, the council must consider such questions as

- The extent to which it is practicable for us to implement the adjustment;
- The financial and other costs of making the adjustment;
- The extent of any disruption which taking the steps would cause;
- The extent of the service provider's financial and other resources;
- The amount of any resources already spent on making adjustments; and
- The availability of financial or other assistance.

Collectively the meetings of the Council, its panels and committees consume on average around 15 hours per month over ten months of the year. Calculating on the basis of £150/hour for interpretation or typist services, this would cost the council approximately £23k. It would provide Deaf and hearing-impaired people with the required standard of service set out in the Equality Act and enjoyed by hearing people. This should be judged against the cost previously paid for interpreters etc at face to face meetings with North Somerset customers. A meeting could typically cost around the same.

The council's next steps will be to investigate the practical issues (eg suitability of IT services, availability of interpreters), to determine if the interpretation and captioning services can be delivered and so seen to be reasonable.

2. Question from Cllr James to Cllr Davies, Leader of the Council

"How many of North Somerset Council's employees, and employees contracted by North Somerset Council earn the Real Living Wage (£9.30 per hour), and what would the cost implications be of North Somerset Council tackling inequalities by becoming a Real Living Wage Employer?"

Response from Cllr Davies

In respect of the living wage we only have one spinal point that is less than £9.30, it is £9.25 (excluding apprentices). There are three people on this spinal point (excluding schools) and all three will be in receipt of increments that will increase their salary above that amount by February 2021. The three will increase to £9.43 when the increments are applied.

Supplementary Question asked at the meeting

Cllr James welcomed the leadership being shown by the Council but in a supplementary question referred to the number of people trapped in low paid jobs and asked the Leader if partners and contractors could be encouraged by the council to pay all their employees the Real Living Wage.

Cllr Davies responded that whilst the council could urge contractors to pay the Real Living Wage it had no direct control over this but he suggested it may be appropriate to ask scrutiny to look at the council's policy in this area to determine whether this could be strengthened.

3. Question from Cllr Cronnelly to Cllr Solomon, Executive Member for Communities, Tourism and Leisure

"Hutton Moor Leisure Centre continues to be affected by unlawful encampments on their car park and it's a very sensitive area as the leisure centre is well used by the community. Over the last 18 months I'm aware of at least 6 occasions when this has happened. On most occasions we've started the court process and on one occasion had to use enforcement agents. All of this costs in terms of time, legal fees, resources and lost revenue.

The entrance to Hutton Moor is one of the areas of vulnerability and needs to be seriously looked at to see if improvements can be made. Surely it will cost us less in the long term to make changes - such as a height barrier - than it would be to continue with this cycle of eviction.

When Melrose car park had issues with encampments a better barrier was put in. Why is Hutton Moor being ignored and when will improvements be made? Lockdown would be the optimum time to make any changes to the entrance. Will you commit to making these changes?"

Response from Cllr Solomon

I am aware Hutton Moor is regularly a target for travellers; and this year alone there have been at least 4 unauthorised encampments on site and currently we have travellers on site. This leaves us with a mess to clear and challenges for staff and costs thousands of pounds.

Over the years a number of schemes to prevent the travellers accessing the site have been installed, bunding and posts, but these just stop travellers driving onto the pitches. The car park is now the issue, and again in the past different schemes to prevent access to the carpark have been looked at, but due to the site needing to allow access for delivery vehicles, coaches and work vans (customers), without causing a back up on the road; the scheme is not as straight forward as hoped and has always stopped.

This situation cannot continue, so I have now asked the leisure manager and her team to look at this as a priority (which was already in place), and investigate different options and obtain some quote for the works, we will then look at moving forward.

4. Question from Cllr Haverson to Cllr Gibbons, Executive Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning

"There has been huge public concern about the failure of central government to provide free school meals during half term, a decision which fortunately has now been revoked for Christmas. Many local councils including NS stepped up to the mark last week, by publishing local businesses who offered free meals and giving out back up phone numbers for families unable to access this support. I understand this back up support from NS was funded by our Welfare Provision Scheme.

However, when I tested this system myself by phoning the call centre numbers published by us, the results were disappointing. The information I got was ill informed and not adequate, the only offer given to me was for food bank vouchers. I was subsequently told by officers that Tesco vouchers or even cash handed out in the Town Hall should also have been offered.

This highlighted that for families in rural locations such as my ward, support via our WPS is very difficult to access, especially currently when travel by public transport is discouraged. Our nearest food bank is either Cheddar or Weston. I have suggested to explore including Coop vouchers in the options on offer, as Coop stores can be found in most villages. Also to ensure that call centre operatives are adequately trained. Please can I be reassured that this will be pursued?"

Oral response from Cllr Gibbons provided at the meeting.

Cllr Gibbons responded that whilst the poor response received by Cllr Haverson was unfortunate it was not typical, with feedback from other users being more positive. She stated managers had now looked into the matter and would ensure more comprehensive training was given to new call centre staff to ensure they provided accurate information and could signpost callers as appropriate. She added that the reason why Co-op vouchers were not offered as an option was because they could be used to purchase a wide range of goods and were not restricted to food items. It was noted this matter had been raised with the Co-op by other authorities too and that they were currently looking into this.

5. Question from Cllr Codling to Cllr Davies, Leader of the Council

"I would like to know more about the new Assistant Executive member positions and the evidence of need leading to their creation. Councillor Davies, I understand that you were vociferously opposed to the existence of these positions - and derogatory in your criticism of the previous administration - when they were first introduced. With perhaps a better understanding now of the responsibilities and pressures of leading a Council since becoming Leader, the creation of the new positions suggests you have come to agree with the previous administration. Since the appointments did not need the approval of full Council, could you outline the relevant executive decision making - was this by way of an Executive Members' vote (and were all parties of the Rainbow Coalition in agreement?) or is it solely your decision as Council Leader? If it is the latter, are your Rainbow Coalition Executive colleagues all in accord and were they consulted?"

Response from Cllr Davies

Cllr Codling, thank you for your questions. For ease of reading for others I have split them down as follows:

I would like to know more about the new Assistant Executive member positions and the evidence of need leading to their creation.

1. Q = Councillor Davies, I understand that you were vociferously opposed to the existence of these positions - and derogatory in your criticism of the previous administration - when they were first introduced

A = I was vociferously opposed to most of what the previous administration did, in the partisan way in which they led this council, leaving us as one of the most unequal and poorly funded authorities in England. I shall say that my comments on their effectiveness under the previous administration were all made in public meetings. Given that very sadly one of those who so served is no longer with us, any more detailed specific comment would be disrespectful.

2. Q = With perhaps a better understanding now of the responsibilities and pressures of leading a Council since becoming Leader, the creation of the new positions suggests you have come to agree with the previous administration.

A = No! We are faced with four challenges of a global pandemic, an extant crippling recession, public services stripped of capacity by your party's Austerity policies and, more parochially, having to adapt to working and meeting remotely. Those challenges are not going to go away any time soon and the workloads of the executive for the foreseeable future are only going to increase. In these circumstances I had concerns as leader on the capacity of this administration to deliver for the residents of North Somerset and also for the personal wellbeing of my colleagues with the team we have. It was decided for speed to use the mechanisms available to increase that capacity until we can hold an annual meeting. As you will know there is a constitutional review ongoing.

3. Q = Since the appointments did not need the approval of full Council, could you outline the relevant executive decision making - was this by way of an Executive Members' vote (and were all parties of the Rainbow Coalition in agreement?) or is it solely your decision as Council Leader? If it is the latter, are your Rainbow Coalition Executive colleagues all in accord and were they consulted?

A = as the appointments are outside the constitution (which was one of the criticisms I made when they were first created) then formally they need no approval, yet unlike the previous administration, we have prepared detailed role descriptions for the Assistant Executive Members so that there is transparency about their remit and purpose. However this administration makes all decisions in a collegiate manner, the executive met virtually informally, discussed and agreed. Once that proposal had been agreed then the decision was announced at the next available public meeting. And I should like to record my thanks to all my colleagues in the administration for their work during these times of emergency.

Supplementary Question asked at the meeting

In a supplementary question, Cllr Codling asked the Leader whether the skills and experience of other councillors had been considered in determining which members should be appointed as Assistant Executive Members, whether other options had

been considered and whether there had been consensus on these appointments across the Executive.

In response Cllr Davies drew attention to the written responses he had already provided on these appointments and added that he had held confidential meetings with his colleagues and all were in accord. His rationale for making these appointments now was to safeguard the health and wellbeing of Executive colleagues who were dealing with the challenges of a global pandemic in addition to business as usual. He confirmed other options had been considered and that he would review current arrangements and alternatives as appropriate at the Annual meeting in May.

6. Question from Cllr Clayton to Cllr Davies, Leader of the Council

“Can the leader tell me if the appointments of the two assisting executive members are temporary and that he will review the appointments in May with the view of removing them and if that’s not to be the case can I ask why?”

Response from Cllr Davies

As I have said in response to a very similar question, we are faced with four challenges of a global pandemic, an extant crippling recession, public services stripped of capacity by Austerity and having to adapt to working and meeting remotely. Those challenges are not going to go away any time soon and the workloads of the executive for the foreseeable future are only going to increase. In these circumstances I had concerns as leader on the capacity of this administration to deliver for the residents of North Somerset and also for the personal wellbeing of my colleagues with the team we have. It was decided for speed to use the mechanisms available to increase that capacity until we can hold an annual meeting when we shall review all executive appointments.

7. Question from Cllr Crockford-Hawley to Cllr Davies, Leader of the Council

“Following the local government election of May 2019 it fell to the Leader of Council to establish an Executive (Cabinet). In our new multi-party council the appointment to executive office and committee chairs needed to satisfy the aspirations, demands and prejudices of (1) co-operating parties (Independent, Liberal Democrat, Labour, Green and Portishead Independent, Conservatives having chosen not to participate in a NSC coalition) and (2) the constituencies, towns and parishes which make up North Somerset. A balanced approach was sought, though the speed with which offices needed to be filled precluded councillors getting to know one another since everything had to be cut and dry at our first meeting of Council. Many of us met for the first time at that opening gathering eighteen months ago and therefore had little understanding of individual interests or skills.

Hopefully, and despite not meeting in person since the March lock-down, we all now have a much better understanding of one another’s abilities, or lack of them.

The Leader’s recent decision to appoint deputy Executive Members has come without any discussion by councillors.

Would the Leader explain the rational for making these appointments and for filling the posts as he has done? Why were ‘ordinary’ councillors not given an opportunity to debate the matter of deputy Executive Members? If these appointments were made

to relieve existing Executive Members of their workload then either those workloads were excessive or the office holders were not up to task.

Would the Leader state whether the remuneration of these new office holders is being taken from the existing cost of Executive membership or being financed from other sources? The pandemic has caused Chairman of Council's duties to become virtually non-existent; perhaps money is being sequestered from the Chairman's budget to help finance these new appointments?

It is clear that some Executive and Committee office holders' workloads are hefty. It is equally clear that some are light. Will the Leader agree to investigate this disparity along with a consideration of how the Executive works, in order for appropriate discussion to occur and for changes to be in place at the Annual Meeting in May 2021?"

Response from Cllr Davies

Cllr Crockford-Hawley, thank you for your many questions. For continuity the response is similar to those already given:

1. We are faced with four challenges of a global pandemic, an extant crippling recession, public services stripped of capacity by Austerity and having to adapt to working and meeting remotely, as well as providing 'business as usual'. Those challenges are not going to go away any time soon and the workloads of the executive for the foreseeable future are only going to increase. Additionally we have to produce a new Local Plan and address the very serious implications of the pandemic for our local businesses in key areas of tourism and hospitality.
2. In these circumstances I had concerns as leader on the capacity of this administration to deliver for the residents of North Somerset and also for the personal wellbeing of my colleagues with the team we have. It was decided for speed to use the mechanisms available to increase that capacity until we can hold an annual meeting.
3. As the appointments are outside the constitution then formally they need no approval, yet unlike the previous administration, we have prepared detailed role descriptions for the Assistant Executive Members so that there is transparency about their remit and purpose. And this administration makes all decisions in a collegiate manner.
4. The funding is from underspend on councillors' expense costs.
5. We have already committed to a review of the Executive at the next annual meeting, which will hopefully be in May 2021.
6. It would be impolite of me to comment on the Chairman's business.