

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Council

Tuesday, 21 September 2021

New Council Chamber - Town Hall

Meeting Commenced: 6.00 pm

Meeting Concluded: 8.48 pm

Councillors:

Richard Westwood (Chairman)
Karin Haverson (Vice-Chairman)

Mark Aplin
Nigel Ashton
Mike Bell
Mike Bird
Steve Bridger
Gill Bute
Mark Canniford
Ashley Cartman
John Cato
Caritas Charles
Caroline Cherry
James Clayton
Sarah Codling
Andy Cole
Peter Crew
John Crockford-Hawley
Ciaran Cronnelly
Catherine Gibbons
Hugh Gregor
Ann Harley
David Hitchins
Steve Hogg
Nicola Holland
Patrick Keating
John Ley-Morgan
Stuart McQuillan
Phil Neve
Robert Payne
Marcia Pepperall
Bridget Petty
Lisa Pilgrim
Geoffrey Richardson
David Shopland

Timothy Snaden
Mike Solomon
James Tonkin
Richard Tucker

Apologies: Councillors Peter Bryant, Wendy Griggs, Sandra Hearne, Ruth Jacobs and Roz Willis.

Officers in attendance: Jo Walker (Chief Executive), Sheila Smith (Director of Children's Services), Nicholas Brain (Assistant Director Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer) and Mike Riggall (Information and ICT Security Manager)

Partaking via Microsoft Teams: Councillors Mark Crosby, Donald Davies, Caroline Goddard, Huw James, Ian Parker and Terry Porter.

Amy Webb (Director of Corporate Services), Sue Efford (Committee and Support Services Manager), Alex Hearne (Assistant Director (Placemaking & Growth)), Nicola Webb (Climate Emergency Project Manager) and Pip Hesketh (Interim Assistant Director, Education Partnerships).

COU Chairman's Welcome
49

The Chairman welcomed everyone to this face-to-face meeting of the Council in the New Council Chamber. He referred to the public health recommendations to exercise caution and the council's own health and safety advice which made it necessary to limit the number of councillors, officers and members of the public in attendance in the Chamber to ensure the meeting could take place safely.

He reported that for members and officers who did not yet feel comfortable attending in person or who were unable to attend there was an option to join the meeting via Microsoft Teams. This enabled them to partake in the debate remotely but they would not be formally "in attendance", and members joining remotely would not be able to vote nor count towards the quorum of the meeting.

The meeting was being streamed live on the internet and a recorded version would be available to view within 48 hours on the North Somerset Council website.

To avoid the need for councillors to sign an attendance register and for the benefit of those watching via YouTube, the Assistant Director, Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer undertook a roll call of councillors to confirm attendance.

COU Public Participation, petitions, and deputations (Standing Orders 2(vi) and
50 17) (Agenda Item 1)

None

COU Petitions to be presented by Members (Standing Order No. 16) (Agenda Item
51 3)

None

COU 52 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (Standing Order 37) (Agenda Item 4)

None declared.

COU 53 Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 (Agenda Item 5)

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

COU 54 Motions by Members (Standing Order No. 14) (Agenda Item 6)

Elections Bill (Councillor Charles) (Agenda Item 6(1))

Councillor Charles introduced his Motion.

Motion: Moved by Councillor Charles and seconded by Councillor Cherry

“Council notes:

Councils are responsible for organising all elections in England. A recent Queen’s Speech contained government proposals to require people to show identification including a photograph in order to vote in a General Election.

Allegations of electoral registration or voter fraud are very rare in North Somerset and the rest of the UK.

Council believes:

Voting at elections is the cornerstone of democracy at both local and national level.

Participation in elections should be encouraged in all those who are qualified regardless of age, ethnicity or income.

Unnecessary barriers to voting are likely to reduce voter participation in elections, proper representation of all parts of the community and so legitimacy of those elected to office.

Voter ID is a solution without a problem and as such would introduce barriers to voting which should be of great concern to anyone who supports an open and effective democratic system of government.

Council Further Believes:

That this is only a part of a series of measures including new restrictions on protest and assembly, the independent integrity of the Electoral Commission and restrictions to third party campaigning which threaten to potentially criminalise those who wish to collectively campaign against Government policy.

That an opportunity has been wasted to work to develop cross party action on foreign funding of elections, the promotion of voter registration initiatives, tackling concerns around social media in elections and the influence of the media.

That the protection of democratic principles can be something achieved through consensus across all parties and welcomes those like David Davis and Ruth Davidson who have expressed their concerns regarding the elections bill.

Council Resolves:

To oppose the introduction of photo ID as a requirement to vote at polling stations.

To declare a democratic emergency and work to ensure that the councils new engagement strategy includes support to encourage and nurture citizen engagement through non biased independently managed schemes such as educational initiatives for schools on civic engagement and voter registration drives that target groups who are often reluctant to register to vote.

To request the Leader to write to the relevant minister indicating this opposition to voter ID and the reasons why and requesting this measure is considered and amended or withdrawn in later stages of the bills progress.

To further request that the Leader make clear to government that any new free voter ID card issued through local councils should be fully funded as a new burden and to highlight the importance of having an accessible and straightforward system of application.”

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

Councillor Charles spoke on the Motion and urged all members to support it. He stressed that allegations of voter fraud were rare and that the introduction of photo ID as a requirement to vote at polling stations was unnecessary, would introduce barriers to voting and threaten local democracy. It would be costly to implement and would place an additional financial burden on local councils. He referred to the far greater problem around voter engagement and ensuring electoral registers were up-to-date and suggested resources would be better spent in these areas.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Cherry suggested there was no real evidence of voter fraud and no justification for the introduction of voter ID, with far greater priorities needing to be addressed.

In discussing the Motion members expressed opposition to the introduction of photo ID for voters and were generally supportive of the proposals as set out. It was generally agreed that such measures were not required and would erode democracy by deterring certain groups from voting. It was suggested that wider reform of the democratic system was needed with a focus on greater voter registration and engagement. An alternative view expressed was that the majority of people already used photo ID, this now being required in many situations, and that every effort should be made to maximise electoral integrity and improve voter confidence. Reference was made to the ongoing consultation by the Electoral Commission on this matter, with a suggestion that the outcome of this consultation should be awaited before dismissing proposals for voter ID.

Following further discussion, it was

Resolved: that the Motion as set out in full above be approved and adopted.

**COU
55 Chairman's announcements (Agenda Item 8)**

The Chairman was pleased to report he had attended two events in recent weeks, the opening of Chestnut Park School in Yatton and two degree ceremonies at Weston College.

He announced that with effect from the November Council meeting post-meeting refreshments would resume, with councillors being asked to pay £5 if they wished to partake. He thanked Councillor Crockford-Hawley for agreeing to arrange this.

He also announced that invitations had been sent out this week to the Chairman's Christmas Party taking place on 3 December 2021 at Princes Hall, Clevedon. A representative group of councillors had been invited together with guests from across North Somerset as a thank you for the help and support given during the pandemic. This event replaced the Chairman's carnival night following the cancellation of Weston carnival again this year.

The Chairman also welcomed Councillor Phil Neve, ward councillor for Congresbury and Puxton, to his first Council meeting.

**COU
56 Leader's announcements (Agenda Item 9)**

The Chairman announced the Leader had invited Councillor Gibbons as Executive Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning to provide an update on the situation at Ravenswood School in Nailsea following the recent extensive flood and electrical damage to the building.

Councillor Gibbons updated members on the latest position, confirming that officers were working hard to enable the school to be re-opened as quickly as possible. She highlighted actions in respect of works to the premises, measures to ensure educational continuity and wellbeing of the children and communication with parents and other parties. It was hoped that following an independent site visit and health and safety assessment the children would be able to return on Wednesday 29 September.

Members thanked Councillor Gibbons, the officer team and the school for their swift response in dealing with this difficult situation and for the open and transparent engagement with parents and others in pushing for a swift resolution. Councillor Gibbons responded to questions from members around the need for reassurances and confirmed that all options had been considered before taking the decision to close the school, that project supervision would be ongoing to ensure the remaining works ran smoothly, that lessons would be learnt from this experience and that parents would continue to be fully engaged and their concerns addressed.

**COU
57 Chief Executive's announcements (Agenda Item 10)**

None

COU Political Balance Update (Agenda Item 11)

58

The Assistant Director, Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer reported on the latest political balance following the recent by-election for the Congresbury and Puxton ward, as follows:

Independent 16: Conservative 13: Liberal Democrat 10: Labour 6: Green 4

COU Forward Plan dated 1 September 2021 (Agenda Item 12)

59

Councillor Bell presented the Forward Plan on behalf of the Leader.

In response to a question regarding the forthcoming Director decision on the Weston to Clevedon Cycle route it was noted that Clevedon Town Council had recently been updated on the proposals and that various meetings had been arranged to brief interested parties.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

COU Corporate Parenting Responsibilities (Agenda Item 14)

60

Councillor Gibbons presented the report. She drew attention to the letter to the Secretary of State from the Chair of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care outlining the 'early findings' for the Spending Review and congratulated the council's looked-after children on their recent exam successes. With reference to the Corporate Parenting Panel she thanked members for their commitment and asked that where unable to attend that they arranged substitutes to encourage wider participation. It was agreed to circulate future Panel meeting dates to all councillors and proposed that engagement would be further improved if the agenda papers for meetings were also sent to all councillors.

In discussing the report members welcomed the opportunity to recognise and celebrate the recent exam achievements of looked after children. Reference was made to the importance of understanding as corporate parents the chaotic lives that some children experienced and Councillor Gibbons referred to the various seminars run by the LGA on this subject. Reference was also made to the growing number of children with autism and the need for the council to have an autism strategy to fully address this.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

COU Question Time (Standing Order No. 18) (Agenda Item 15)

61

Oral questions were directed to members concerned and the summary notes and topics involved are contained in Appendix 1.

COU Reports on joint arrangements and external organisations and questions relating thereto - West of England Combined Authority (WECA) Joint Scrutiny Committee

62

Councillor James referred to the WECA meeting that had taken place earlier in the day and, with the Chairman's consent, gave a brief oral update on discussions at

that meeting. He confirmed that the Joint Committee had voted to cease support for Bristol Airport's expansion plans which may lead to a submission to the Airport Planning Inquiry before it concludes.

The agenda papers for the meeting are available to view on the WECA website and draft minutes will be available in due course.

COU 63 Development Programme: Approval of Commissioning Plan for Development of Weston Town Centre Sites (Agenda Item 20)

The Chairman announced that this item had been withdrawn due to ongoing work on the sites and would be brought back to a future meeting.

COU 64 Climate Emergency Progress Update (Agenda Item 21)

Councillor Petty introduced the report and thanked officers for their work on the progress update of key activities related to the Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan. She gave a slide presentation summarising the annual update of council carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions for the area and providing a brief overview of key achievements, challenges and required actions. The presentation slides are included within the Council report.

Councillor Petty proposed a further recommendation be added and that, as Executive Member, she write to Alok Sharma, President for the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), confirming this council's commitment and pushing the government to demonstrate its genuine leadership as hosts of the International Climate Change Summit in November. This was seconded by Councillor Hogg.

Members thanked the Executive Member and officers for an excellent report and raised questions on key issues to which Councillor Petty responded. The following points were addressed: the impact of the 1.1% increase in temperatures as evidenced by recent extreme weather events and whether temperature targets were achievable; the key risk areas requiring the most urgent attention and the challenge in addressing these, with current figures suggesting the council would achieve net zero in 2106 rather than 2030; the importance of evidencing whether the council was moving towards its goals and the need for actual numbers and detailed information to be included under the 'Climate Change and Environmental Implications' section in reports to monitor this; if the council was serious in achieving its climate change commitments there was a need for every project to be looked at in detail in terms of what could be done better; the need to take a stance as community leaders and to bring the public along with us, as in the case of the Bristol International Airport expansion; the need for significant changes in relation to transport as the biggest emitter of CO₂; the need to consider what support could be offered to those working alongside the council to incentivise them to change to electric vehicles; issues around the introduction of Clean Air Zones and whether these should be supported; the need for the council to own the climate emergency and for individual councillors to challenge themselves and others to do more, giving people easy identifiable actions they can work towards to make a difference, such as the Plastic Free Weston Campaign; the need for clarification around the increase in carbon volumes for waste, with further education required around waste and recycling; the importance of honest and open discussion around targets and challenges, with a third of local councils

moving away from targets; a recognition of the complexities and the fact that local authorities had insufficient resources to achieve carbon neutrality, with tough decisions to be taken on what key services to cut if resources were to be re-directed to the climate emergency; the need for political leaders to show bravery in taking tough decisions to do the right thing which may not always be popular; the need to consider resilience to climate change as well as carbon reduction, investing in the council's estate, assets and how we deliver services to ensure they were fit for purpose; particular challenges for less affluent households in making some of the proposed changes and the need to widely publicise any funding and grants available to help make these changes; the need to put pressure on the government to insist on higher standards to drive down emissions; recognition of the efforts being made by this council to lead by example in building housing to high quality certified standards.

Motion: Moved by Councillor Petty, seconded by Councillor Hogg and

Resolved:

- (1) that the annual update of the council carbon footprint be noted;
- (2) that the annual update of North Somerset area emissions estimates be noted;
- (3) that the progress with specific initiatives within the Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan be noted;
- (4) that the Leader and Chief Executive share the council's achievements with local MPs and ask them to highlight significant climate change requirements in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review; and
- (5) that the Executive Member writes to Alok Sharma, President for the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), confirming this council's commitment and pushing the government to demonstrate its genuine leadership as hosts of the International Climate Change Summit in November.

COU 65 Urgent business permitted by the Local Government Act 1972 (if any)

None

Chairman
