

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Council

Tuesday, 16 April 2024

New Council Chamber

Meeting Commenced: 6.00 pm

Meeting Concluded: 8.20 pm

Councillors:

Wendy Griggs (Chairperson)
Peter Crew (Vice-Chairperson)

Nigel Ashton
Mike Bell
Mike Bird
Christopher Blades
Steve Bridger
Peter Bryant
Peter Burden
Mark Canniford
Ashley Cartman
Annabelle Chard
Caritas Charles
James Clayton
Andy Cole
John Crockford-Hawley
Ciaran Cronnelly
Stuart Davies
Thomas Daw
Oliver Ellis
Catherine Gibbons
Jenna Ho Marris
Nicola Holland
Clare Hunt
Patrick Keating
Sue Mason
Hugh Malyan
Stuart McQuillan
Tom Nicholson
Ian Parker
Robert Payne
Marcia Pepperall
Bridget Petty
Lisa Pilgrim
Terry Porter

Michael Pryke
Luke Smith
Mike Solomon
Dan Thomas
Helen Thornton
Joe Tristram
Richard Tucker
Annemieke Waite
Roger Whitfield
Martin Williams
Hannah Young

Apologies: Councillors: Jemma Coles, David Shopland and Timothy Snaden.

Officers in attendance: Jo Walker (Chief Executive), Nicholas Brain (Assistant Director Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer), Claire Shiels (Director Children's Services), Amy Webb (Director of Corporate Services), Hayley Verrico (Director of Adult Social Services), Philippa Penney (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Vanessa Andrews (Marketing and Communications Manager), Jenny Ford (Head of Development) and Jacqui Scott (Virtual School Head).

COU 156 Public Participation, petitions, and deputations (Standing Orders 2 (vi) and 17)

None received.

COU 157 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (Standing Order 37)

None declared.

COU 158 Minutes

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of 20 February 2024 be approved as a correct record.

COU 159 Chairperson's announcements

None.

COU 160 Adult Social Services and Housing Commissioning Intentions 2024/25

Councillor Whitfield presented the report which set out the planned delivery of the Adult Social Services and Housing commissioning priorities for the forthcoming eighteen months. It outlined all of the services regardless of value to support the theme of openness and transparency.

The Adult Services and Housing Policy & Scrutiny Panel had been consulted in March this year. Appendix A listed all the new services for the coming eighteen months, whilst Appendix B gave the extensive list of current services. Publishing the intentions was expected to help design and lead a healthier market for the future.

There were many areas where services were commissioned for preventative work, with robust plans in place for delivery and procurement. The recommendations also sought approval to commence specific procurement activities or extend contracts beyond their original term.

Motion: moved by Councillor Whitfield, seconded by Councillor Canniford

The Leader clarified the position that this report was setting out a broad commissioning intention and reserved scope for appropriate scrutiny throughout that process. Any contract award would be subject to usual process in line with established contract standing orders.

Councillor Whitfield confirmed that consideration was given to the real living wage during any process such as this, and that in-house service delivery formed part of the commissioning and procurement strategy.

Resolved: that Council

Received the planned Adult Social Services and Housing commissioning priorities for the next 18 months and, where necessary, seek approval to commence specific procurement activities or to extend contracts beyond their original term, specifically:

1. Agreed the Adult Social Care and Housing commissioning intentions for the next 18 months.
2. Approved the commencement of activities listed in Appendices A & B, delegating to the Director for Adult Social Care, approval to determine the relevant procurement or commissioning routes, and the award of any contract, in consultation with the relevant Executive Member(s).
3. Approved activity listed in Appendices A & B the extension of any contracts that have already reached the term under the original permission to commence a procurement.

COU 161 Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan update and progress report

Councillor Waite introduced the report which provided a progress update against previously agreed activity. Whilst much of the work remained on track, there were still some areas of concern, including the Council's own estate and fleet, which were being prioritised as exemplified by the following activity.

The successful award of Salix funding for Hutton Moor would decrease the Council's footprint by 300 tCO₂e per year. Funding had been secured through the Libraries Improvement Fund for a replacement EV mobile library. A successful bid of £15m had also been secured to deliver electric buses for certain routes.

Councillor Waite outlined progress in other areas including the success of Solar Together, and the peat restoration project.

A draft Climate Adaption Strategy had now been completed which considered climate projections, flood risks, heat vulnerability and economic impacts. It was largely based on reports from IPCC, Met Office, and government, and made use of the local adaptation tool. We could all expect weather changes, evidenced by the months of record rainfall. Flooding has had major impact on the deterioration of our roads with potholes in places never seen before. Members were reminded that these could not be repaired when the roads were wet. Other effects included coastal erosion and farmers being unable to plant crops, all of which were serious matters and would most adversely affect the more vulnerable.

Every adaptation plan must begin with assessing risks, many of which could only be properly addressed by legislation and funding. If approved, the plan would be a living document.

The recent peer review had commended the council and reflected a credit to all the hard work over the last few years. Work had already started and plans were being developed for a series of round table workshops in the coming months.

Motion: moved by Councillor Waite, seconded by Councillor Petty.

Members thanked Councillor Waite for the detailed report which showed the enormity of the task ahead. Communication and encouragement with residents were both central to support delivery of the plan.

Members noted that many of the activities were reliant on large grants, and regard should be given to the economic impact alongside climate adaption considerations. This would be considered as part of an energy strategy going forwards.

Those risks which were beyond council control should be clearly articulated in order to present government with a costed and targeted list. With regard to flooding, there was concern that service delivery capacity within the council was disproportionate to that risk, and that this should be reviewed in the context of the MTFP. The spiralling cost of insurance due to flooding was also a problem being experienced by householders.

It was agreed that this refreshed action plan should be presented to schools and educational establishments as part of the careers and green skills agenda.

Councillor Waite summarised that the plan would be re-presented to Council with more targeted future risks and actions.

Resolved: that the Council

1. Supported the adoption of the Climate Adaptation Strategy
2. Supported the development of the Net Zero Pathway
3. Noted the progress on existing projects to tackle climate change, which were also summarised in this report.

COU 162 Corporate Parenting Report

Councillor Gibbons presented the report which provided information about the statutory duties regarding children in care as well as insights into their experiences of education, training, and employment.

Councillor Gibbons was pleased to welcome Jacqui Scott as the new Virtual School Headteacher. The virtual school offered personalised support for each child in care, working closely with schools, foster carers, and other professionals.

It was not a physical school but played a school role to look after all the children who come into care in North Somerset. Mainstream school didn't suit all, and Jacqui gave a number of examples reflecting the challenges experienced and the successes of this approach. She referred to a number of interventions and support which reached widely across a broad spectrum of activities including the Inclusion Officer role to support transition, trauma training, unaccompanied asylum seekers, and lifechanging experience opportunities

Members were encouraged to continue to support children in care in their capacity as councillors, but also in other areas such as being a school governor, teacher, or business owner being able to offer work experience. All members were welcome to attend celebration events.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

COU 163 Petitions to be presented by Members (Standing Order No. 16)

None received.

COU 164 Motions by Members (Standing Order No. 14)

Councillor Charles introduced his motion as published with the agenda papers. He referred to the democratic emergency declared by the previous administration and the perceived lack of public confidence in the democratic process. People seemed willing to be part of informing decision making and this keenness was reflected across society as a whole. Petition to debate provided a useful tool to enable discussion, achieve answers and support more informed decisions. The proposed threshold was open for further consideration, but the current proposal was in line with that of Bristol City Council.

Seven members indicated their support for a debate on the motion.

Motion: Moved by Councillor Charles and seconded by Councillor Holland.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Bell which was in line with the spirit of this motion and the council's commitment to openness and transparency. It provided an additional threshold of 500 which could trigger a referral to the appropriate Policy and Scrutiny Panel. The amendment was supported by Councillor Charles.

Amendment: the proposed alternative wording was moved by Councillor Bell and seconded by Councillor Gibbons, and accepted by Councillors Charles and

Holland.

“This Council Believes

1. We are facing rapidly deteriorating public confidence in the democratic process.
2. That our corporate plan vision of being “Open” and “Fair” should be signalled by our willingness to embrace a range of ways for us to engage in a constructive ongoing engagement with the residents and businesses we serve.
3. That in the formulation and implementation of policy and service change we can gain insight and lived experience from developing mechanisms that allow us to work alongside citizens in understanding their views and accepting or feeding back on changes recommend by the population of north somerset.
4. That involving residents and businesses on an ongoing basis in the work of the council is not a threat to representative democracy but a valued addition to the effectiveness of service delivery.

“This Council Notes

1. That a recent Local Government Association perception survey showed trust in local authorities in the areas of service delivery, value for money and listening to residents’ concerns are at an all-time low. The same survey found that 68% of residents trusted councillors to make decisions about how services are provided locally compared to just 7% who trusted Members of Parliament or Government ministers to make decisions.
2. Recent data from the Office for National Statistics show that only around a third of people feel they have a say in what their government does.
3. That across the world governments have increasingly used innovation in democratic engagement by using deliberative democratic practices such as the Citizens Assembly on Abortion in Ireland and in the UK through Assembly North and its work on devolution.
4. That in neighbouring Bristol the council has successfully run a petitions scheme that allows citizens to petition for a debate on an issue of concern at full council if they successfully reach the threshold of signatures of eligible residents and businesses.

“This Council Resolves to

1. To adopt a right to petition along the lines of the scheme used by Bristol City Council where upon receipt of the specific threshold of eligible citizen signatures a debate on the issue stated shall be called for the next available meeting of full council or the relevant policy and scrutiny panel.
2. Ensure that the details of any petition submitted to the council are published on the council website and that the response to any petition, whether meeting the threshold for debate or not, is communicated to the petition organiser and published on the website.
3. The threshold of signatures to trigger a full council debate shall be 2,500 local government electors within North Somerset. The threshold of signatures to trigger a debate at the relevant policy and scrutiny panel shall be 500 local government electors.
4. To instruct the Monitoring Officer to make the necessary constitutional changes and administrative adjustments, in consultation with the Audit Committee, to ensure the effective implementation of the scheme by the end of 2024.

5. The scheme will make clear that petitions will be excluded from this scheme in respect of a right for debate if they relate to any matter in respect of a planning decision, any matter relating to a licensing decision or any matter where there is an appeals process already in place. Petitions will also be excluded if it is a duplicate petition or relates to a matter that has previously been considered in the preceding 12 months. In line with our existing approach, petitions must also be relevant to any matter in relation to which the Council has powers or duties, and which affects the district.
6. To instruct the Executive to develop plans for a citizen review of North Somerset's approach to resident engagement as part of work to develop a new engagement and consultation strategy already underway. The resident review shall be conducted using deliberative democratic methodology.
7. The scheme will be regularly reviewed to monitor effectiveness."

The implementation of this right to petition would not affect the current mechanism for a councillor to deliver a petition on behalf of local signatures as this remained unchanged.

Members discussed the threshold level and whether this should be kept under review in the event of either numerous or insufficient numbers of petitions. Whilst the motion referred to citizens, it was recognised that this should reflect North Somerset residents, business taxpayers and electors.

It was noted that the scheme adopted by Bristol City Council reserved the right to verify signatures as required. The use of an IT based e-petition was not proposed at this stage.

Members echoed support for this motion and the addition of the lower threshold enabling matters to be brought to Policy and Scrutiny Panels. This strengthened our democracy and was a clear recognition of trying to be more open and engaging. The levels could be reviewed after six months.

The Leader underlined the importance of treating petitions with respect and to be clear with an open mechanism for response to support trust and confidence.

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

COU 165 Question Time (Standing Order No.18)

Councillor Williams left the meeting at this point.

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

COU 166 Matters referred from previous meeting

None.

COU 167 Leader's announcements

None.

COU 168 Chief Executive's announcements

None.

COU 169 Forward Plan dated 2 April 2024

The Leader presented the Forward Plan.

Resolved: that the Forward Plan be noted

COU 170 Policy and Scrutiny Panel Report

The Chairpersons of each panel commended the report to Council.

Councillor Bridger added some more general comments on the ongoing review of scrutiny improvements and consequential added value. The team were already working on a number of strands including the recording of more evidenced and focused outcomes and tracking actions as part of this. The contribution of non-executive members through the policy and scrutiny process was to be reflected more overtly in the reports that went to the Executive, which was important in adding validity to the process.

COU 171 Reports and matters referred from the Executive - dated 27 March 2024

None.

COU 172 Reports and matters referred from the Policy/Overview and Scrutiny Panels other than those dealt with elsewhere on this agenda

None.

COU 173 Reports and matters referred from the other Committees other than those dealt with elsewhere on this agenda

None.

COU 174 Reports on joint arrangements and external organisations and questions relating thereto

1) Avon Fire Authority

Councillor Thomas provided an oral update to the meeting. Avon Fire Authority met in March to debate the 'Updated 2024/25 Revenue Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan' which was not agreed at the previous AFA meeting in February. The fire service was required to make £4m in savings over the next 4 years. 5 options were presented to meet this budget shortfall. Members rejected the recommended proposal which would have resulted in reduction of fire crew numbers from 5 to 4 and the overall reduction of full-time front-line firefighters by 40. After a long and difficult debate an alternative option was adopted by members which would mean the Fire Fighter number reductions will be delayed with no impact on capital investment plans for the Service.

2) Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel

Councillor Crew provided an oral update to the meeting. This Panel had most recently convened following the start of the pre-election period. Councillor Crew had consulted with Councillor Bridger, and it had been agreed to align future meetings of the Community Safety Scrutiny Steering Group to follow after the Police and Crime Panel meetings. Any information could then be brought to Council as necessary.

3) West of England Combine Authority (WECA) Joint Scrutiny Committee
None

Councillor Waite reported back further to the Environment Agency (EA) motion put to the Council meeting in November 2023. A report had been circulated to members earlier that morning. It seemed clear that maintenance funding was insufficient. The EA had not yet provided a detailed list of those assets that would not be maintained but was expected to do so in the next few months.

Councillor Waite had met with Councillor Burden last month to discuss their shared concerns and was pleased to confirm that these meetings would continue to take place. Further engagement work with the EA would be necessary in order to protect communities. Councillor Waite had been invited to next Internal Drainage Board meeting and also to join a walk to areas where the IDB had responsibility.

Councillor Burden thanked Councillor Waite and echoed his concern with the historical lack of funding for maintenance. A lot of money had been invested for capital work but there had been neglect of the basic maintenance. Councillor Waite had a meeting scheduled with the EA and North Somerset Flood Risk Manager and would feed back to Councillor Burden after that had taken place.

COU 175 Urgent business permitted by the Local Government Act 1972 (if any)

None.

Chairperson
