

# **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING**

Thursday 14th March 2024

Present:- **Councillors** Michael Auton, Tim Ball, Alex Beaumont, David Biddleston, Colin Blackburn, Alison Born, Deborah Collins, Chris Dando, Jess David, Mark Elliott, Sarah Evans, Fiona Gourley, Kevin Guy, Alan Hale, Ian Halsall, Dave Harding, Liz Hardman, Gavin Heathcote, Steve Hedges, Saskia Heijltjes, Oli Henman, Joel Hirst, Lucy Hodge, Duncan Hounsell, Shaun Hughes, Dr Eleanor Jackson, Samantha Kelly, John Leach, Hal MacFie, Ruth Malloy, Lesley Mansell, Matt McCabe, Paul May, Sarah Moore, Robin Moss, Michelle O'Doherty, Bharat Pankhania, June Player, Manda Rigby, Dine Romero, Paul Roper, Sam Ross, Onkar Saini, Toby Simon, Shaun Stephenson-McGall, Alison Streatfeild-James, George Tomlin, Malcolm Treby, Karen Walker, Sarah Warren, Tim Warren CBE, Andy Wait, David Wood and Joanna Wright

Apologies for absence: **Councillors** Anna Box, Paul Crossley, Grant Johnson, George Leach and Ann Morgan

### **76 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure as set out in the agenda.

### **77 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **78 MINUTES - 20TH FEBRUARY 2024**

On a motion from Councillor Paul May, seconded by Councillor Robin Moss, it was

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **79 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL**

The Chair reminded Members about the microphone system and silencing mobiles. She then made the following statement;

“We would like to express deep sympathy for all those affected by the conflict in Palestine and Israel. To those in the Bath and North East Somerset area who have been affected by this conflict, we offer our support during this difficult time.

We hope for an immediate ceasefire and a peaceful resolution to this conflict. We hope for the immediate release of all hostages and for aid to be delivered.

We believe that Muslims, Jews and people of all faiths and none, should feel safe and supported throughout the world and we therefore condemn the increase in

antisemitic and Islamophobic violence and abuse in the UK. In particular, we condemn the use of all dehumanising language and call on our communities to treat each other with respect and refrain from inflammatory terms to describe either the Palestinian or Israeli populations.”

## **80 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

There were no items of urgent business.

## **81 QUESTIONS, STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Statements were made by the following members of the public;

Jake Hotchkins spoke to Members about his experience of being a care experienced person, in support of the motion later on the agenda. He called on Members to demonstrate they were taking their corporate parenting responsibilities seriously by adopting care experience as a protected characteristic. A full copy of the statement is available attached to the minutes and added to the Minute book.

Terry Galloway also spoke in support of the care experience motion on the agenda. He explained he was leading the campaign nationally to make care experience a protected characteristic in UK legislation. Councillor Joanna Wright asked how such a move would have impacted Terry as a young man, to which he replied that this was about system design and the process of making decisions. The hope is that the system will change around people, so they won't have to actually declare and won't have the barriers that they often face. A full copy of the statement is available attached to the minutes and added to the Minute book.

John Morgan made a statement on behalf of his neighbour, Alexandra Watkins, against the proposed ETRO to block Winifred's Lane and Lansdown Crescent, in the context of the wider Liveable Neighbourhood programme, and urging Councillors to reconsider this proposal. Councillor Joanna Wright asked if John considered this would be beneficial to health or not, to which he replied that it didn't affect him at all. A full copy of the statement is available attached to the minutes and added to the Minute book.

Chad Allen made a statement calling on the Council to cut back or remove ivy from various locations as natural habitat was being destroyed.

Luke John Emmett made a statement calling for more support for the cultural industries and expressing disappointment that culture was not more embedded in the Heritage Services Business plan. Councillor Robin Moss asked if Luke knew when the last time was that the Council had a strategy for, or gave out grants for, commissioned work to artists or makers. Luke replied that the end of the Cultural Strategy coincided with the closure of the Arts department in 2017, and there hasn't been any cohesive support since then. Ad-hoc initiatives happen and are appreciated but an over-arching strategy is needed. Councillor Saskia Heijltjes asked how much the culture industries contribute to the local economy. Luke replied it was a huge amount; citing the statistic that for every £1 invested in the arts, it brings back between £2 - £7 into the local economy. He added that the arts budget of £423,000 which had been cut, although not a large amount, then leveraged

income from the Arts Council and other funders. A full copy of the statement is available attached to the minutes and added to the Minute book.

Bob Goodman made a statement about the legalities of listed building consent and detailing various perceived infractions of process. He called for a fully independent inquiry to be held in public. Councillor Colin Blackburn asked if Bob was aware of any other examples of the Council carrying out work without consent, to which he replied that there were, and cited one property he knew of where over £300k was spent without consent. Councillor Tim Warren asked if or when elected members were aware of this taking place, to which Bob replied that he did have confirmation that the previous Administration had not been made aware of this. Councillor Joanna Wright asked for clarity on the significance of the lath and plaster ceiling being replaced with plasterboard, to which Bob explained that the replacement has to be 'like for like' and that when consent was finally given, this was the stipulation. A full copy of the statement is available attached to the minutes and added to the Minute book.

Emma Owens made a statement about the situation in Gaza, challenging Councillors to consider the right course of action to take. Councillor Joanna Wright asked if B&NES Councillors had any legal duty to prevent genocide, following the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) ruling that genocide may be being committed. Emma responded that, since the Genocide Convention 1948 was incorporated into UK law, the nation does have obligations to prevent genocide and punish such crimes. A full copy of the statement is available attached to the minutes and added to the Minute book.

Marie Duffy addressed Councillors about the situation in Gaza and the impact on B&NES residents, some of whom have family there. She called on the Council to do more and highlighted many other Councils who have agreed a motion calling for a ceasefire. A full copy of the statement is available attached to the minutes and added to the Minute book.

Alice Georgiou called on Councillors to use their public platform to show solidarity to call for a ceasefire. She stated that a poll in October 2023 had shown that 76% of the British public supported a ceasefire and it was likely to be a higher percentage now. B&NES Councillors needed to represent their constituents by calling for a ceasefire.

Jane Samson addressed Councillors by passing on a number of statements about the personal impact the Gaza conflict was having on B&NES residents. This was compounded by a perception that, by not taking a peace motion at Council, their Council did not care. A full copy of the statement is available attached to the minutes and added to the Minute book.

Sophie Higgins spoke on behalf of Johyna Ballout, a Palestinian student who was unable to be present. The statement described the history of occupation and the need to fight for Palestinian rights. Assigning blame was not divisive but necessary and taking a neutral stance was cowardly. Councillor Saskia Heijltjes asked Sophie to explain how the situation affected British people and specifically B&NES residents, to which they replied that young people have been told that empire and colonisation

are a thing of the past, but they now see that it seems to be acceptable and supported.

Mohammed Alrozzi in his statement asked why, after 160 days of relentless bombardment and the ICJ ruling, the Council had not demanded a ceasefire. This silence leads to residents feeling defeated and alienated from the decision making processes and erodes trust. He added that the Council had a responsibility to reflect the conscience of the community and urged Councillors to speak up and call for a ceasefire in Gaza. Councillor Kevin Guy asked if Mohammed was aware that the Chair had made a statement at the start of the meeting from all Group Leaders calling for a ceasefire, to which he replied that he had not been aware. Councillor Sam Ross asked if the lack of consensus had personally impacted on him as a Palestinian and a resident of B&NES. Mohammed replied that he had mixed feelings, one of which was that his wellbeing and life do not matter.

The Chair thanked everyone for their statements, which would be considered by the relevant Cabinet Members.

## **82 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES REVIEW**

The Council considered a report inviting their approval to re-establish the independent panel to consider the next review of their allowances scheme, which must take place every 4 years.

The Green group suggested an item for inclusion in the review; - more clarity about councillor parking permits. They will submit this request to the Monitoring Officer for inclusion in scope.

On a motion from Councillor Dave Wood, seconded by Councillor Robin Moss, it was unanimously

### **RESOLVED to**

1. Agree the re-appointment of the Independent Remuneration Panel for B&NES;
2. Agree that the Independent Remuneration Panel be asked to conduct the next full review of the Member Allowances scheme in late summer/Autumn of 2024, with a view to any agreed changes to the scheme being implemented from April 2025;
3. Note the issues carried over from the last review (in paragraph 3.5 of the report);
4. Submit any suggestions for Panel consideration to the Monitoring Officer, before its first meeting in April 2024.

## **83 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHARITABLE TRUST BOARD**

The Council received the annual report which updates Members on the work of the Charitable Trust Board in 2022/23.

On a motion from Councillor Tim Ball, seconded by Councillor Joanna Wright, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** to note the Annual Report of the Charitable Trust Board for 2022/23.

**84 MOTION FROM LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP - CARE EXPERIENCED PEOPLE**

On a motion from Councillor Paul May, seconded by Councillor Liz Hardman, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED**

Council notes that:

5. Care experienced people face significant barriers that impact them throughout their lives.
6. Despite the resilience of many care experienced people, society too often does not take their needs into account.
7. Care experienced people often face discrimination and stigma across housing, health, education, relationships, employment and in the criminal justice system.
8. As corporate parents, we have a collective responsibility for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by us as an authority.
9. All corporate parents should commit to hearing the voices of looked after children and young people and to considering their needs in any aspect of Council work.
10. This issue has been discussed at the Corporate Parenting meeting of 17 January 2024, at which all Councillors present supported the idea of treating care experience as a protected characteristic, and with care experienced people locally.
11. Councillors should be champions of the children in our care and challenge the negative attitudes and prejudice that exists in all aspects of society.
12. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies, such as Councils, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation of people with protected characteristics.
13. 75 other Local Authorities (cross party) have already adopted the motion to protect Care Experience.
14. The Independent Review of Childrens Social Care (2022) recognised that Care Experience should be considered a Protected Characteristic. The

national advisor for Care Leavers, Mark Riddle (DfE) supported this recommendation in May 2023.

**Council therefore:**

15. Recognises that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination.
16. Recognises that Councils have a duty to put the needs of disadvantaged people at the heart of decision-making and include them in decisions which affect them.
17. Include a category of “care experienced” in all equality impact assessments, thereby ensuring that future decisions, services and policies made and adopted by the Council will be assessed to determine the impact of changes alongside those who formally share a protected characteristic.
18. Requests that in the delivery of the Public Sector Equality Duty the Council includes care experience in the publication and review of Equality Objectives and the annual publication of information relating to people who share a protected characteristic in services and employment.
19. Resolves that this Council will treat care experience as if it were a protected characteristic and that this shall be in addition to any other protected characteristic which may be relevant to an individual.
20. Formally calls upon other bodies to treat care experience as a protected characteristic until such time as it may be introduced by legislation.
21. Ensure Council departments continue to proactively seek out and listen to the voices of care experienced people when developing new policies and practices.

**85 MOTION FROM LABOUR GROUP - DEBATE NOT HATE**

On a motion from Councillor Lesley Mansell, seconded by Councillor Dine Romero, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that

**Council:**

1. Believes the intimidation and abuse of councillors and local government officers, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy, by preventing elected members from representing the communities they serve, deterring individuals from standing for election, and undermining public life in democratic processes.
2. Notes that increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse is having a detrimental impact on local democracy and that prevention, support

and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians must improve to ensure councillors, officers and their families feel safe and that councillors are able to continue representing their residents.

**Council therefore:**

1. Takes a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers.
2. Challenges the normalisation of abuse against councillors and officers.
3. Upholds exemplary standards of public and political debate in all it does.
4. Commits to providing councillor and officer training in online safety.
5. Commits to ensuring the Council has a clear reporting mechanism to allow monitoring and recording of incidents of harassment and abuse of councillors and officers.
6. Commits to regularly reviewing support available to councillors and officers in relation to abuse and intimidation and safety.
7. Agrees to work with the local police to ensure there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors, officers and their families, and discuss the need to take a preventative approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, like MPs.
8. Commits to publicising its position, processes and sanctions internally and externally to further these aims.
9. Further agrees to sign up to the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign which aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the response to and support those in public life facing abuse and intimidation.
10. Requests the group Leaders jointly write to BNES' local MPs to ask them to support the campaign and to the Government to ask them to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of people working and holding office in local government.

**86 QUESTIONS, STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

The Chair made reference to the Q&A document which had been circulated. In accordance with CPR rule 3.1.22, Councillor Kevin Guy added comments to his written answer, mentioning the generators and ambulance that had been sent out. They were currently fundraising for a school bus to bring children in to school from the suburbs, plus there are links with musicians and schools. He thanked everyone involved.

Councillor Joanna Wright made a statement about the proposed peace motion which had not been accepted onto the agenda. She set out reasons why she considered

that it was directly relevant to B&NES and called on local leaders to reconsider and bring this item back to a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.18 pm

Chair .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**