

# **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING**

Friday, 25th March, 2022

Present:- **Councillors** Colin Blackburn, Shelley Bromley, Neil Butters, Jess David, Sally Davis, Kevin Guy, Matt McCabe, Sarah Moore, Robin Moss, Lisa O'Brien, Vic Pritchard, Manda Rigby, Mark Roper, Karen Walker and David Wood

### **123 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the Democratic Services Manager to read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

### **124 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

### **125 MINUTES - 16TH FEBRUARY 2022**

On a motion from Councillor Karen Walker, seconded by Councillor Sarah Moore, it was

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **126 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL OR FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

None.

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

It was noted that, with the agreement of the Chair, Councillor Kevin Guy had made an urgent statement about extreme NHS pressures at the virtual meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022, a copy of which is available to view; <https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/g5492/Public%20minutes%2024th-Mar-2022%2018.30%20Council.pdf?T=11>

### **128 QUESTIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There were no statements made at this meeting, although the statements made at the virtual meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022 were noted;

<https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/g5492/Public%20minutes%2024th-Mar-2022%2018.30%20Council.pdf?T=11>

### **129 AEQUUS GOVERNANCE, STRUCTURE AND BUSINESS PLAN**

The Council considered a report setting out proposed changes to the Governance and Structure of the Council's wholly owned housing and development companies (Aequus Developments Ltd and Aequus Construction Ltd) and also presenting the Aequus Accounts for 2021/22, together with the Business Plan for 2021/22 to 2023/24.

On a motion from Councillor Kevin Guy, seconded by Councillor Neil Butters it was

**RESOLVED** to;

1. Approve the amendments to the Reserved Matters Schedule in the Shareholder Agreement within the Councils' Protocol for Governance Arrangements of Local Authority Trading companies (Appendix 3);
2. Approve the changes to the Company Structure set out in paragraph 7 of the report, including the transfer within the corporate group of ADL and ACL, and the establishment of the holding company;
3. Delegate to the Council's Section 151 Officer the authority to confirm the final documentation required to complete the changes set out in paragraph 7 of the report and to determine the timing and implementation of the new company structure proposed. This will include authority for the Council's Section 151 Officer to provide shareholders approval for all legal, financial and corporate filing documentation to implement the new structure;
4. Note the ADL & ACL 2020/21 year end audited accounts (Appendix 4);
5. Approve the Aequus Business Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 (Appendix 5 of the report.)

*[Notes:*

1. *The above successful resolution was carried with 5 councillors voting against and 10 councillors voting in favour.]*

## **130 CLIMATE EMERGENCY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Council considered the annual report setting out progress on delivery against climate emergency targets.

On a motion from Councillor Matt McCabe, seconded by Councillor David Wood, it was

**RESOLVED** to note;

1. Progress on the delivery of the Year 2 (2021-22) Climate Emergency Action Plan;
2. The extensive and wide-ranging action being taken across the council to tackle the climate emergency; and

3. The latest available data relating to carbon emissions (Council managed and district-wide emissions).

*[Notes;*

1. *The above successful resolution was carried with 3 councillors abstaining and the remaining 12 councillors voting in favour.]*

### **131 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSON & INDEPENDENT MEMBER**

The Council considered a report inviting appointment of an independent person and independent member to support the Standards Committee.

On a motion from Councillor Kevin Guy, seconded by Councillor Robin Moss, it was

**RESOLVED** to recommend to Council on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022 to;

1. Approve the appointment of the Independent Person with responsibility for supporting the Standards Committee, as set out in section 5 of the report;
2. Note the resignation of Ms Russell and record the thanks of the Council for her contribution to maintaining high standards of behaviour during her tenure as an independent member of the Standards Committee; and
3. Confirm the appointment of an Independent Member of the Standards Committee, as set out in section 5 of the report.

### **132 COUNCILLOR ATTENDANCE - 6 MONTH RULE DISPENSATION**

The Council considered a report regarding attendance.

On a motion from Councillor Kevin Guy, seconded by Councillor Neil Butters, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** to;

1. Agree that the members listed in Appendix A (with the inclusion of Councillor Alan Hale), who are unable to attend a council meeting for a period greater than six months, due to long covid or the higher risk of serious illness from Covid 19 for themselves or for their family members, receive a dispensation further to section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 until 24 September 2022;
2. Agree that, in the light of this meeting being conducted through the contingency arrangements (meaning most of those members planning to attend a physical meeting are now unable to do so), a dispensation is issued for all Councillors unable to attend a physical meeting for a further period of 3 months from this meeting, further to section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, until 24th June 2022.

### **133 ANNOUNCEMENT OF CHAIR(MAN) AND VICE-CHAIR(MAN) DESIGNATE FOR 2022/23**

The Council considered a report inviting indication of which Councillor will be formally nominated as Chairman and Vice Chairman at the Council's Annual General Meeting.

On a motion from Councillor Kevin Guy, seconded by Councillor Karen Walker, it was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that, for forward planning purposes, Councillor Shaun Stephenson-McGall is named as Chair(man) of the Council (designate) for the 2022/23 Council year and Councillor June Player is named as Vice Chair(man) (designate) for the 2022/23 Council year.

#### **134 CLEANING UP OUR RIVERS - MOTION FROM LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP**

On a motion from Councillor Jess David, seconded by Councillor Matt McCabe, it was

**RESOLVED** unanimously that;

##### **Council notes:**

1. The recent report of the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (Jan 2022) which found that rivers in England are in a mess: "a 'chemical cocktail' of sewage, agricultural waste, and plastic is polluting the waters of many of the country's rivers".
2. That only 12% of the Bristol Avon catchment is classified as having 'good ecological status' with the main sources of pollution being treated sewage discharges and diffuse pollution from farming and land management.
3. That rivers in B&NES are an irreplaceable asset for both people and nature, enjoyed by many for recreation and leisure, and part of the rich landscape character and natural capital of our area.
4. That Bath and North East Somerset Council is a member of the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership which includes Wessex Water, the Environment Agency and Wiltshire Council and is working closely with partners to identify and deliver collaborative solutions to improve water quality and improve the water environment for people and wildlife.
5. That not all properties in B&NES are connected to the public sewage system or to private sewers and that some continue to discharge wastewater straight into the river or into non-compliant, polluting soakaways.
6. That Government funding to the Environment Agency to monitor river quality and regulate sources of pollution has dropped by 75% in the last decade.

##### **Council believes:**

1. That cleaning up our rivers is important for public health and to protect and enhance wildlife, and that this requires the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders including water companies, farmers, land-owners, developers and businesses.

2. That investment in our sewerage system must be accelerated so that discharges of untreated sewage, including from storm overflows, cease.
3. That farmers and land managers have a responsibility to monitor and reduce the flow of pollutants (including nutrients and pesticides) from their land into rivers.
4. That government must provide the funding and powers to enable more effective monitoring and enforcement by water regulators; OFWAT and the Environment Agency.
5. That water companies must continue to improve the public information they provide on sewage discharges to ensure that it is accessible and as close to real time as possible.
6. That developers and property owners have a role to play in reducing surface water from entering the combined sewer system. Installing sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), both in new buildings and through retrofitting, and reducing 'urban creep' can help to reduce the load on our sewerage system.
7. That government must legislate to ban the sale of non-degradable and plastic containing wet wipes which are a major cause of blockages and capacity issues in the sewer network. The incorrect disposal of fats, oils and greases is also a cause of blockages.
8. That the capacity of environmental infrastructure (including sewerage systems) must be sufficient to support new housing development and that water companies must engage with local authorities in the preparation of new drainage and sewerage plans.
9. That the Council has a role to play in educating and raising awareness of the many individual behavioural changes that citizens can make to lessen their impact on water pollution and harm to the water environment.

**Council therefore resolves:**

1. To write to Government Ministers to ask that they:
  - a. Restore funding to the Environment Agency to ensure a stronger regulatory regime for river water quality that delivers year on year improvements.
  - b. Increase funding for Catchment Partnerships so that they can do more to engage all partners in the actions needed to improve river water quality.
  - c. Strengthen the legal obligations and powers available to water companies to contribute to improving river water quality.
  - d. Ban the sale of non-degradable and plastic containing wet wipes as a major cause of blockages in the sewage system.
  - e. Introduce incentives for the introduction of SUDS through new build development and retrofitting.
2. Work with our partners Wessex Water to:

- a. Accelerate their plan to reduce the environmental and health impacts of discharges from the sewage system, including improving monitoring and information available to the public;
  - b. Ensure that all properties in B&NES are connected to the mains sewage system, have a compliant treatment system or a septic tank, and that all developers are aware of their obligations;
  - c. Identify opportunities for the installation of community-level SUDS that can help to reduce the load on the combined sewer network;
  - d. Engage residents to avoid the use of disposable wet wipes and communicate wider messages about only flushing the three P's (*pee, poo and paper*) down the toilet.
3. To continue to support the work of the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership to engage all riparian landowners, including farmers, and local communities in an action plan to tackle pollution and improve river water quality.
  4. To refer the topic of cleaning up our rivers to the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel for their further consideration and monitoring.
  5. Through the planning system:
    - a. encourage the use of SUDS to deal with surface water and reduce the amount of water going into combined sewers;
    - b. explore opportunities through the new Local Plan to reduce 'urban creep' and to avoid or mitigate pollution from intensive farming within catchment areas.

### **135 UKRAINIAN REFUGEES - MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR ROBIN MOSS**

On a motion from Councillor Robin Moss, seconded by Councillor Kevin Guy, and supported by all Group Leaders, it was

**RESOLVED** unanimously that;

This Council:

- 1 Notes that at the time of writing the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says that ten million people have fled their homes in Ukraine. 3.6 million have left for neighbouring countries while another estimated 6.5 million are thought to be displaced inside Ukraine itself.
- 2 Notes that under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, sponsors in the UK are able to nominate a named individual or family to stay rent-free in their home or in a separate property for at least six months and that there is no cap on the number of refugees who can benefit from this scheme. Further notes that refugees will be allowed to live and work in the UK for at least three years and that they will be entitled to access healthcare, benefits, employment support, education and English language tuition. Also notes that as of 21 March,

under the Family Visa Scheme, 12,400 UK visas have been issued for Ukrainians who have a family member in the UK.

- 3 Notes that local authorities will receive £10,500 in extra funding per refugee for support services with more for children of school age, and that hosts will be offered £350 per month.
- 4 Believes that the escalation of violence, repeated bombings and attacks on Ukraine pose a serious threat to peace and democracy across Europe.
- 6 Recognises that support for refugees cuts across party politics and that councillors from across the political spectrum will wish to stand shoulder to shoulder to express their full support and solidarity with Ukrainian people and affirm their commitment to provide help and support to Ukrainian nationals.
- 7 Recognises the generosity and goodwill of B&NES residents who showed through the welcome they gave Syrian refugees that this is an area which is willing and able to provide sanctuary to desperate people and further encourages those wishing to help to donate to established organisations such as the British Red Cross and Unicef as well as the Disasters Emergency Committee.
- 8 Notes that on 1 March, the Leader of the Council wrote to the Home Secretary and to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Safe and Legal Migration to express solidarity, call for visa requirements to be lifted and reiterate the readiness of this Council to welcome refugees.
- 9 Agrees that a further letter be sent to both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary repeating this Council's willingness to welcome Ukrainian people fleeing war and persecution in their own country and urging the UK government to act to ensure that the UK does all it can to help alleviate this humanitarian crisis.

### **136 QUESTIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

The Council noted the statement from Councillor Duncan Hounsell which had been made at the virtual meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022 about local and national visitor accommodation policies.

<https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/g5492/Public%20minutes%2024th-Mar-2022%2018.30%20Council.pdf?T=11>

The meeting ended at 11.07 am

Chair .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**