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Meeting: Full Town Council, Item11.16
Date: 16th March 2021
Author: Town Clerk
Subject: Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

1.0 Purpose of report

1.1 To inform councillors on the public consultation on the local government reorganisation in Somerset and to consider how the town council is going to respond. The closing date of the government consultation is 19th April 2021. The consultation asks the council to state its preference between the 2 proposals. Individuals are also able to respond. The questions are summarised at the end of this report.

2.0 Background information

2.1 Somerset has been invited (along with 2 other counties: Cumbria and North Yorkshire) to submit proposals to the government for a local government reorganisation. Somerset County Council has its One Somerset proposal and the District Councils have submitted their Stronger Somerset proposal and both proposals form the basis of the consultation. This report is not about the contents of those proposals, but to consider how this council wishes to respond to the consultation and the proposals. The public consultation closes on 19th April 2021. The link to that consultation is here <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/governance-reform-and-democracy/somerset/>

2.2 The four district councils - Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton and South Somerset – jointly submitted a proposal for two unitary councils: Eastern Somerset comprising the area covered by Mendip and South Somerset District Councils and Western Somerset comprising area covered by Sedgemoor and Somerset West & Taunton District Councils. The link to their website is here: <https://www.strongersomerset.co.uk/>

2.3 Somerset County Council submitted a proposal for a single unitary council for the area of Somerset County. The link to that website is here: <https://onesomerset.org.uk/proposals/>

- 2.4 The County Council had arranged for some seminars with the leader of the County Council this week but these have had to be postponed (the Clerk was due to attend). The Somerset Association of Local Councils is holding a webinar on Wednesday 7th April at 6pm and one representative from the town council can attend. The Town Clerk also attended a seminar with the County Council on 3rd March to hear how the process will be rolled out. The County Council commissioned some independent scrutiny of the proposals being made and these documents are attached in Appendix A and Appendix B.
- 2.5 The Town Council discussed and responded to the One Somerset proposal in June 2020 and received an update at the June 2020 town council meeting from the leader of Mendip District Council. The response from the Town Council to the One Somerset proposal is attached at Appendix C.
- 2.6 Councillors will be aware that the local government reorganisation will have a massive impact on the way public services are delivered. New structures will be created and opportunities exist for the reshaping of services and functions. Devolution of assets and services is part of the process, but does not have to occur at the outset. It is necessary to be focussed on the 2 proposals and to respond to them. Cllr T O'Connor has suggested that a new Working Party be formed for the purpose of responding to the consultation, but also to move forward with a discussion on the devolution of assets and services and the wider implications of moving to a unitary authority structure.

3.0 Financial Information

- 3.1 There is no financial implication to responding to a public survey, but the effects of the local government reorganisation will have an impact on this town council

4.0 Environmental Implications

- 4.1 None.

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 For Councillors to consider how the town council responds to this consultation.
- a. To agree who should attend the SALC webinar on 7th April and to draft a report
 - b. To agree who should attend the SCC webinar (yet to be confirmed) and draft a report
 - c. To consider if a new working party be formed for the purpose of developing a draft response to this consultation (to agree four or 5 names that are available for one or 2 meetings, as well as able to read the consultation documents as per the links in this report)
 - d. If the above is agreed, for the WP to draft a response for consideration by the council prior to being submitted (if that is the case it will be necessary to have an extraordinary council meeting in early April).
 - e. Or to consider an alternative suggestion.

Attachments

Appendix A PWC review of Stronger Somerset

Appendix B Neil Gibson Review of Stronger Somerset

Appendix C SMTC response to One Somerset dated June 2020

Questions from the Public Consultation

There are 2 proposals and the consultation asks the same questions of the 2 proposals. They are yes/no and to give a reason.

The questions for each proposal are:

1. Is this proposal likely to improve local government and service delivery across each area? Specifically, is it likely to improve council services, will it give greater value for money, generate savings, provide stronger strategic and local leadership and create more sustainable structures?
2. Where it is proposed that services will be delivered on a different geographic footprint than currently, through some form of joint arrangements, is this likely to improve those services? Such services may for example be children's services, waste collection and disposal, adult health and social care, planning, and transport.
3. Is this proposal also likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services?
4. Do you support this proposal from the councils?
5. Do the unitary councils proposed by this proposal represent a credible geography?
6. Do you have any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation of local government in this area?