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Meeting: Full Town Council, Item 12.5

Date: 13th April 2021

Author: Town Clerk, with draft responses to the consultation from Councillor O'Connor

Subject: Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

1.0 Purpose of report

- 1.1 At the council meeting on 16th March 2021 it was agreed that another council meeting would be held to formulate a response to the government 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. A working party was formed and has met, led by Cllr O'Connor and consisting of Cllrs Shearn, Harrison and Lovell, for the purpose of considering the 2 proposals in detail and drafting a response for the council to consider, in advance of submission on 19th April 2021.
- 1.2 They are recommending that Shepton Mallet Town Council's response is to prefer the structure for the future administration of Somerset of the **Stronger Somerset proposal** (based on the creation of 2 new councils) for the following reasons:
- a. This proposal would be likely to improve both local government and service delivery across the new areas of East and West Unitaries, as well as improve council services and in turn give greater value for money. Whilst it may not generate as much initial savings as the other proposal, it does in the longer term appear to have more sustainable structures and in particular will provide much stronger strategic leadership and local leadership than the other proposal.
 - b. Whilst we agree with the need that a re-organisation of local government is long overdue for Somerset, we feel this also represents a clear opportunity to deal with some of the structural deficiencies of the current three tiers of local government that have hindered those different levels over the years. After reviewing both proposals, we believe that the

Stronger Somerset proposal represents the most realistic approach to resolving those issues and shows more appreciation of the complexities of service delivery in Somerset. More clarity in this proposal is required regarding the co-development around Charters/locality agreements and community networks in-regards to devolution of assets to a town council like Shepton Mallet. However, overall, we believe the two unitaries proposal will better serve Shepton Mallet.

- 1.3 In the same vein, it does not support the proposal for a One Somerset (based on the creation of a single unitary authority) for the following reasons:
- a. After reviewing both proposals, we do not believe that the One Somerset proposal represents a realistic approach to resolving those issues. Its simplistic approach that big is better simply does not demonstrate an appreciation of the complexities of service delivery in Somerset. There is a huge amount of economic imbalance that the Local Community Networks simply will not deliver on.
 - b. The risk of service delivery failure in this proposal, especially for towns such as Shepton Mallet already remote from Taunton, is much higher in this proposal than the Stronger Somerset proposal. We believe the two unitaries proposal will better serve Shepton Mallet.

2.0 Background information

- 2.1 Somerset has submitted two 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.
- 2.2 The consultation link is here <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/governance-reform-and-democracy/somerset/>
- 2.3 The district council 's proposal (called Stronger Somerset) is for the creation of 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 Stronger Somerset proposal link is here <https://www.strongersomerset.co.uk/>
- 2.4 Somerset County Council's proposal (Called One Somerset) is for a single unitary authority. The One Somerset proposal link is here <https://onesomerset.org.uk/proposals/>

3.0 Government Consultation

- 3.1 The Working Party considered the questions that are being posed in the public consultation and how this council might wish to respond. The questions, with suggested responses, are below in Appendix A (Stronger Somerset) and Appendix B (One Somerset) and the council needs to agree if it wishes to respond as proposed. Individuals are also able to respond.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 For Councillors to consider this document and discuss the proposed response at the meeting.
- 4.1 To agree at the meeting to either support this proposal as a response, or to propose amendments to a response.
- 4.3 To delegate authority to the Town Clerk to make the response to the public consultation as agreed in this meeting, by 19th April 2021 and to publish the response as part of the minutes of this meeting.

Appendix A

Questions on the proposal for two unitary councils from Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West & Taunton Council and South Somerset District Council

Q1. 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?

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below:

Yes, this proposal would be likely to improve both local government and service delivery across the new areas of East and West Unitaries.

We believe that this proposal is also likely to improve council services and in turn give greater value for money.

Whilst it may not generate as much initial savings as the other proposal, it does in the longer term appear to have more sustainable structures and in particular will provide much stronger strategic leadership and local leadership than the other proposal.

Q2. 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.

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below

Yes, we believe that these proposals are likely to improve those services and we have confidence that this proposal will deliver via a maximum co-operation for cost benefit.

Q3. Is this proposal also likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services?

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below

No, we don't believe that this proposal would impact on other services delivered such as outlined above.

Q4. Do you support this proposal from the councils?

Yes No

Please explain below

Yes. We have looked carefully at both proposals and believe that this proposal, i.e. the Stronger Somerset would be more beneficial for Shepton Mallet, its people and in turn the Town Council, as there is more emphasis on delivering locally

Q5. Do the unitary councils proposed by this proposal represent a credible geography?

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below

Yes. Having studied both proposals, in our opinion, this proposal clearly represents the more credible geographic area. Although both unitaries would be smaller at the outset than the other proposal, the population of Somerset will undoubtedly increase significantly and this bid takes that into account and is therefore future proofed in a way that the other bid is clearly not. Also, the size of Somerset and the different parts of the county and demographics are matched in a more sophisticated approach and understanding than the other proposal.

Q6. Do you have any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation of local government in this area?

As an ambitious Town Council, Shepton Mallet wants to progress its neighbourhood plan and deliver the best for our residents.

Whilst we agree with the need that a re-organisation of local government is long overdue for Somerset, we feel this also represents a clear opportunity to deal with some of the structural deficiencies of the current three tiers of local government that have hindered those different levels over the years.

After reviewing both proposals, we believe that the Stronger Somerset proposal represents the most realistic approach to resolving those issues and shows more appreciation of the complexities of service delivery in Somerset.

More clarity in this proposal is required regarding the co-development around Charters/locality agreements and community networks in-regards to devolution of assets to a town council like Shepton Mallet.

However, overall, we believe the two unitaries proposal will better serve Shepton Mallet.

Appendix B

Questions on the proposal for one unitary council from Somerset County Council

Q1. 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?

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below

Yes, this proposal would be likely to generate savings, through reducing duplication of work and staff.

But also No, in that, it is not clear whether this would in turn mean an improvement in council services. And also No, in that we do not feel that it is likely to provide a stronger strategic or sustainable structure.

We equally do not see the required level of local leadership in the proposal.

Q2. 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.

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below

Q3. Is this proposal also likely to impact local public services delivered by others, such as police, fire and rescue, and health services?

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below

No, we don't believe that this proposal would impact on other services delivered such as outlined above.

Q4. Do you support this proposal from the councils?

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below

No. We do not support this proposal. have looked carefully at both proposals and believe that this proposal, i.e. the Stronger Somerset would be more beneficial for Shepton Mallet, its people and in turn the Town Council, as there is more emphasis on delivering locally

Q5. Do the unitary councils proposed by this proposal represent a credible geography?

Yes No

Please explain your reasoning below

No. Having studied both proposals, in our opinion, this proposal simply does not represent a credible geographic area. It is just too big and does not take into account future population increases or the vast size of Somerset.

Q6. Do you have any other comments with regards to the proposed reorganisation of local government in this area?

As an ambitious Town Council, Shepton Mallet wants to progress its neighbourhood plan and deliver the best for our residents. Whilst we agree with the need that a re-organisation of local government is long overdue for Somerset, we feel this also represents a clear opportunity to deal with some of the structural deficiencies of the current three tiers of local government that have hindered those different levels over the years.

After reviewing both proposals, we do not believe that the One Somerset proposal represents a realistic approach to resolving those issues. Its simplistic approach that big is better simply does not demonstrate an appreciation of the complexities of service delivery in Somerset. There is a huge amount of economic imbalance that the Local Community Networks simply will not deliver on.

The risk of service delivery failure in this proposal, especially for towns such as Shepton Mallet already remote from Taunton is much higher in this proposal than the Stronger Somerset proposal.

We believe the two unitaries proposal will better serve Shepton Mallet.

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