

MINUTES

**Draft minutes subject to approval at the next meeting of the Executive
Executive – 22 January 2007**

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Bishop, Mrs Bradley, Cavill, Leighton and Mrs Lewin-Harris

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Mr J J Thornberry (Strategic Director),
Ms J Wishlade (Strategic Director), Mrs D Durham (Democratic
Services Officer) and Mrs W Sharland (Administrative Officer)

Also Present: County Councillor P Buchanan (Deputy Leader, Somerset County
Council), Mr A Jones (Chief Executive, Somerset County Council),
Mr K Rickards (Chief Executive, Sedgemoor District Council) and
Mr D Bamsey (Sedgemoor District Council).

Also Present: Councillors Beaven, Mrs Biscoe, Bowrah, Miss Cavill, Coles, Croad,
Davies, Denington, Durdan, Floyd, Govier, Guerrier, Hayward, Henley,
C Hill, Mrs Marie Hill, Mrs M J Hill, The Mayor (Councillor Hindley),
House, Lees, Lisgo, Meikle, Morrell, Mullins, Murphy, Paul, Phillips,
Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Stone, Stuart-Thorn, Vail,
Watson and Wedderkopp.

(The meeting commenced at 6 pm.)

5. Apologies

Councillors Clark, Garner and Hall.

6. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2006 were taken as read
and were signed.

7. Public Question Time

Councillor Henley, as a member of the public, stated that in the light of the
result of the ballot in relation to the Housing Stock Transfer the position of the
Executive Councillor with responsibility for Housing was crucial. Could it
therefore be confirmed that Councillor Garner, the appropriate Executive
Councillor, had recently moved abroad.

Councillor Williams reported that the vote of the tenants had been accepted
and every effort would be made to minimise its impact on them. Councillor
Garner had worked overseas before and he would continue his duties as the
relevant portfolio holder.

8. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Prior-Sankey and Paul declared personal but not prejudicial interests as members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Govier and Henley declared personal but not prejudicial interest as members of Somerset County Council and Wellington Town Council, and Councillors Mrs Biscoe and Hindley declared personal but not prejudicial interest as members of Wellington Town Council.

9. **Response to the White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” on the Proposed Alternatives for Local Government Structure in Somerset**

Reported that the White Paper challenged Local Government on its future delivery and how this could best be achieved. Council, at its meeting on 12 December 2006, had already taken the decision that they opposed the unitary bid for the whole of the County which had been proposed by Somerset County Council. All other Districts had been unanimous in their rejection of the single unitary proposal. There were now two further propositions to meet the White Paper objectives. A two unitary bid, East and West for Somerset and an enhanced partnership approach.

The Chairman reported that the County Council, at its meeting earlier that day, had agreed to submit a bid for unitary status for the whole of the county. County Councillor Paul Buchanan, Deputy Leader of the Council, and Alan Jones, Chief Executive, were present to speak in support of the County Council's bid and to answer any questions in relation to it.

Also present were Kerry Rickards, Chief Executive of Sedgemoor District Council and Doug Bamsey, Sedgemoor District Council, who submitted details of the two unitary bids.

With regard to the enhanced partnership approach option, all the Somerset districts had co-operated on producing a prospectus on how the aims of the White Paper could be achieved by developing a partnership approach. This would build on the excellent partnership working that everyone had been engaged in over the past years. All district Chief Executives and Leaders had been involved in this and had signed up to it as a valid and innovative way forward. It was taking partnership to the next level and whilst it built on what was currently carried out, it was also about a very different approach. The business case for savings made through this approach indicated a similar level of efficiency gains as those produced by the unitary bids. The key advantage was that it could deliver the outcomes required within the White Paper without the disruption of structural change and the reduction in democratic representation.

South Somerset District Council had been leading the work on an East Somerset Unitary Council. This would cover the area currently covered by themselves and Mendip District Council. Whilst they had to declare in their bid what would happen to the rest of the County, they could not put in a bid on behalf of another area. It was understood that, in the East Somerset bid a unitary authority for West Somerset (the areas currently covered by Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council) had been proposed.

Sedgemoor District Council were leading work on developing a view on what a West Somerset unitary authority would look like. This work was still emerging. Taunton Deane had been co-operating with this work to ensure that there was good representation of the issues within Taunton Deane.

The main advantage of this option was that there was less of a democratic deficit than in a single unitary. However, there would also be some partnership projects that this Council were currently in line to deliver that would need to be rethought if this approach was taken and there was therefore some concern about this option.

The final draft of the prospectus for the enhanced partnership was submitted together with the latest draft Executive summary in relation to two unitary councils' bid.

A full detailed discussion ensued on the merits of the various options that were being proposed.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended that the enhanced partnership approach be supported.

(The meeting ended at 7.50 pm.)