

# WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

## MINUTES

Minutes of the: **WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL (EXTRAORDINARY MEETING)**

Held on: **WEDNESDAY 11 JANUARY 2007**

Held at: **COUNCIL OFFICES, BRADLEY ROAD, TROWBRIDGE**

Present: Councillors Batchelor (Chairman), Blakemore, Brown, Bryant, Burnan OBE, Carbin, Clark, J Clegg, M Clegg, Conley, Content, Cox, Cunliffe-Jones, Davis, Fortescue, Hames, Hawker, Knight, Lewis, Lovell, Manasseh, March, Mounde, Mudge, Newbury, Oldrieve, Osborn, Payne, Phillips OBE, Repton, Ridout, Swabey, Viles, While and Wiltshire

Officers: Chief Executive (AP), Head of Legal & Democratic Services (NM), Member Support Team Leader (YR)

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### 1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Baker, Barker, Bower, Brice, Chivers, Farkas and James

### 2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chairman referred to the guidance notes from the Standards Board for England previously circulated to Members concerning declarations of interest in respect of dual hatted members when considering the Local Government White Paper issue.

The following Members declared an interest as dual hatted Members in that they were members of this Council and Wiltshire County Council:

Cllrs Batchelor, Content, Newbury, While, Davis and Swabey

In addition, Cllr Swabey declared that her husband was an employee with Wiltshire County Council.

### 3. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER**

#### **Open Forum: Mr Francis Morland**

The Chief Executive presented a report that gave up to date information on:

- the details of the Secretary of State's invitation and the national context

- actions taken and being taken by the County Council and neighbouring district councils within Wiltshire
- the implications arising from this Council's agreed resolution and actions taken to implement that resolution and
- recommendations for further action

The Secretary of State had written to all Councils in October inviting them to submit proposals before 25 January 2007 for unitary structures or pathfinder arrangements for enhanced two-tier working.

The Chief Executive referred to the Council's resolution dated 8 November 2006 that had made this Council's position very clear. One of the Council's resolutions referred to having urgent consultation with the other Wiltshire District councils.

Of the four Wiltshire Councils, three had decided to oppose the unitary county option, with the exception of North Wiltshire. North Wiltshire had asked to see an audited financial case to support the proposal. The Pathfinder arrangement was no longer an option as it would require unanimous agreement between all Wiltshire authorities. None of the Wiltshire District councils were intending to submit any proposals themselves for unitary status either on their own or in conjunction with another authority.

Wiltshire County Council had resolved to research a case for a unitary county. The County Council will be meeting again on 16 January when it may or may not decide to submit a proposal for unitary status to the Government.

The Government will announce its preliminary views during March 2007 with a final decision being made in July 2007.

A further report would be presented to Council once the Secretary of State had made her announcement in March. Depending on the announcement, this Council would need to either address the expression of interest for a unitary county for Wiltshire or take forward the agenda for enhancing the existing two tier arrangements.

This Council had been sharing a lot of information with its partners eg town and parish councils, the Primary Care Trust and the Police. Much of this information had been circulated by way of an information leaflet. There was also a dedicated area of this Council's web site on Local Government Reorganisation.

The Chief Executive sought guidance from the Council in order to communicate the right message to the Council's partners and the Secretary of State.

A debate ensued during which there was no support expressed for the County Council's unitary proposals citing the following reasons:

- the democratic deficit – each Councillor would need to represent approximately 7,000 which would be very difficult to achieve and maintain close links with the electorate
- the cost of the proposal
- that we should concentrate on building on the partnership working which already exists
- no real case had been made for unification
- the implications for town and parish councils
- the effect on decisions such as the Spatial Strategy
- the implications for regulatory functions such as licensing and development control
- the effects on the levels of council tax
- a unitary system would not work in rural areas which would probably require district units
- the timing of meetings of a unitary authority

The recommendations in the report presented were moved by Cllr Content and seconded by Cllr Payne. During the debate, Cllr Carbin requested the addition of a third point requesting that a referendum be held before any changes were made to the structure of Local Government. This was taken on board by the mover and seconder of the motion.

It was therefore

**RESOLVED:**

**That Council:**

- **request the Chief Executive to write to the Government Office for the South West and Department of Communities and Local Government setting out its position in relation to the Secretary of State's invitation - the disruptive effect of this 'distraction' whilst referring to the positive approach being proposed to improve existing arrangements outside of the pathfinder process.**
- **request a further report in April following the announcement of the Secretary of State's 'preliminary views' to consider the next steps in more detail.**
- **request the County Council to ensure that any changes to the local government structure in this area be preceded by a referendum.**

Whilst no recorded vote was requested on the above decision, the voting was recorded as follows:

28 in favour  
None against  
7 Abstentions

(7.00pm – 7.50pm)

These minutes were prepared by Yamina Rhouati, Member Support Officer who can be contacted on direct telephone line 01225 770322 or email [yrhouati@westwiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:yrhouati@westwiltshire.gov.uk)