

## SOUTH LAKELAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings at a virtual meeting of the Council held on Tuesday, 8 December 2020, at 6.30 p.m.

### Present

#### Councillors

Stephen Coleman (Chairman)  
Pete McSweeney (Vice-Chairman)

Giles Archibald	Tom Harvey	Kevin Lancaster
Robin Ashcroft	Eamonn Hennessy	Susanne Long
Rupert Audland	Hazel Hodgson	Ian Mitchell
Pat Bell	Rachael Hogg	Jon Owen
Ben Berry	John Holmes	Suzie Pye
Roger Bingham	Kevin Holmes	Doug Rathbone
Jonathan Brook	Vicky Hughes	Brian Rendell
Helen Chaffey	Helen Irving	Matt Severn
Brian Cooper	Andrew Jarvis	Peter Thornton
Tracy Coward	Janette Jenkinson	David Webster
Philip Dixon	Dyan Jones	Ian Wharton
Judy Filmore	Helen Ladhams	Mark Wilson
Alvin Finch	Malcolm Lamb	Shirley-Anne Wilson

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Michael Cornah, Gill Gardner, Chris Hogg, Dave Khan and Janet Willis.

### Officers

Tom Benson	Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist
Inge Booth	Legal, Governance and Democracy Specialist
Lawrence Conway	Chief Executive
Linda Fisher	Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer)
Simon McVey	Operational Lead Support Services
Simon Rowley	Director of Customer and Commercial Services
Helen Smith	Finance Lead Specialist (Section 151 Officer)
David Sykes	Director of Strategy, Innovation and Resources

**C/66**

### **CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION**

Following confirmation that the live stream of the meeting had commenced, the Chairman welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting. He referred to the new Government legislation allowing councils to conduct remote meetings and explained in detail to all taking part, and for the benefit of members of the public observing, the procedures for the meeting. The Chairman then asked the Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) to carry out a roll call, during which all Members present indicated by which means they were taking part and confirmed that they were able to see (where practicable) and hear all Members participating in the meeting. The Chairman referred to officers present who would introduce themselves when asked to address the meeting.

During his introduction, the Chairman took the opportunity to place on record, on behalf of all Members, their thanks to James Airey following his recent resignation from the Council, for his many years of public service. Councillor Tom Harvey, Leader of the Conservative Group, also paid tribute to James, pointing out that both the District and County councils, as well as residents, had lost a tremendous advocate for the area. Councillor Mark Wilson, Leader of the Labour Group, explained that James had been a Member in the ward next door to his and that they had always tried to work across the boundary in partnership. Councillor Peter Thornton drew attention to the benefit of James having been a strong opponent which, Councillor Thornton believed, had made himself perform better as a councillor. All Members wished James well for the future.

**C/67 MINUTES**

No Member having raised concern when asked by the Chairman, it was

RESOLVED – That the Chairman be authorised to sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 5 November 2020.

**C/68 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No questions, representations, deputations or petitions had been received from members of the public in respect of this meeting.

**C/69 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS**

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer), in relation to Items Nos. 5 and 6, reminded Members that a dispensation had been granted to all Members with regard to allowances in respect of matters relating to Local Government Reform and Devolution for a period of four years.

In addition, she explained that, for Agenda Items Nos.5 and 6, councillors who were dual-hatted, i.e. District Councillors and County Councillors, would have an Other Registrable Interest under the Code of Conduct. The Other Registrable Interest would be recorded and, unless any Member considered themselves to be biased or predetermined, they could speak and vote on both items.

In terms of the Other Registrable Interests and Members in attendance at this meeting, these would be recorded for Councillors Ben Berry, Roger Bingham, Pete McSweeney, Peter Thornton and Mark Wilson. In addition, with regard to those Members present who had indicated at the last meeting that they were employees of Cumbria County Council, Councillors Tracy Coward, Alvin Finch and Jon Owen, and, more recently, Councillor Helen Ladhams, they had indicated that they were not biased or predetermined on any of the matters but their interests would be recorded.

Members having been asked, no other declarations of interest were raised in respect of any of the items on this Agenda.

**C/70 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUDED ITEMS**

There were no excluded items on the agenda.

**C/71****LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM - PROPOSAL FOR BAY AREA**

Copies of appendices 1 and 3 to the report, which had been marked “to follow” on the agenda, had been circulated to Members and published on the Council’s Website on 4 December 2020. A revised version of page 13 of Appendix 1 had subsequently been sent to Members on 7 December and had also been published on the Council’s Website, with a fully revised version of Appendices 1 and 3 having been circulated and published on the Council’s Website earlier in the day of the meeting.

Councillor Giles Archibald, Leader and Promoting South Lakeland Portfolio Holder, reported that, further to the decisions of Cabinet and Council on 5 November 2020 to submit an outline proposal for a Bay area unitary authority, work had continued on development of the full proposal which had to be submitted by the deadline of 9 December 2020.

The full proposal formed Appendix 1 to the report and presented the case for a new unitary council for the Bay, focussed on the cohesiveness of the area and its communities. It indicated the opportunities, strengths and strategic needs of the area’s communities and economy and how they may best be addressed through the leadership and resources of local government based on the geography of the functioning economic area and health services footprint.

The proposal set out the approach which had been followed to develop a clear and justified proposal which met the criteria for local government reorganisation. It demonstrated that the Bay was a credible geography and population size, that the proposal had strong level of local support, that it would deliver affordable and efficient local government and that it was deliverable.

The proposal was founded on the principle that ‘form follows function’. The starting point was an understanding of what needed to be addressed in the Bay area, ‘the drivers of change.’ The proposal identified the critical importance and opportunity for public services transformation so that whole system approaches were adopted to address needs. It set out opportunity for a new relationship between communities, the third sector and public services, enabling co-production of services and principles of subsidiarity. From this assessment of needs and opportunities for service reform came the objectives for the Bay Authority and the basis on which success could be measured.

The proposal provided comparison with alternative proposals against the criteria for reorganisation. It presented a financial assessment, identifying financial cost, benefits and sustainability of The Bay. It set out the cost and approach to managing the transition from existing to new arrangements. It emphasised that, by adopting the ‘form follows function’ approach, the most significant benefits for the area and the affordability of public services were derived from service reform and transformation in addition to the savings from organisation structural changes.

The proposal provided commentary on an option for the organisation of local government in the remainder of Cumbria should the proposal for the Bay be implemented. It provided commentary with regard to Lancashire. It presented the opportunity for future discussions to proceed on combined authorities and devolution of powers and resources from Government.

The report included details relating to other proposals on the table. It also provided details on consultation carried out through a communications and engagement plan.

The main outcomes were that the Opinion Poll had demonstrated that there was a broad and strong level of support for the proposals amongst residents across the area. Engagement with strategic bodies indicated that there were benefits to be derived through collaborative work to align and transform services to achieve better outcomes for residents and improve the sustainability of services; that collaboration would improve the strategic voice and influence of the Bay area; and that there were no insurmountable issues which would stand in the way of a Bay Unitary Authority proposal being implemented. The survey demonstrated a very high degree of public support for organising local government on the scale and geography of the Bay.

Councillor Archibald, in presenting the report, expressed thanks to officers from all tiers of local government for their amazing work during the pandemic, paying tribute to the collaborative working between the tiers, the leadership of Cumbria County Council and the work carried out by Colin Cox, Director of Public Health. Councillor Archibald expressed pride in the District Council's part in the activity. He further referred to work which had been carried out in relation to the proposal for the Bay, a compelling and thorough business case having been put together during this difficult time.

Councillor Archibald drew Members' attention to correspondence which had recently been received from the Cumbria Fire and Rescue Authority and the Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner, copies of which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting, as well as a response from Barrow Borough, Lancaster City and South Lakeland District councils to the Cumbria Fire and Rescue Authority.

Councillor Archibald informed Members that the proposal before Council was a result of significant detailed work by the consultant team, officers and Members based upon a clear understanding of the legislative requirements of local government reorganisation. All of this work had been undertaken within the very tight timescale set by the invitation. He pointed out, however, that submission of the proposal was only a milestone on the journey and that more detailed work would be required. Councillor Archibald reminded Members that the invitation had specified that Type C proposals were eligible, and that presenting a proposal which crossed a county boundary was recognised by the Secretary of State. The proposal reported that there had been engagement with representatives of strategic stakeholders and it made reference to those meetings and the issues raised. These discussions had shaped the proposal to date. Councillor Archibald clarified that the proposal did not propose to change existing Police and Fire boundaries. He explained that Counsel's Opinion had been sought in this regard and that it was clear from the legal advice received that there was no impediment to the Bay solution. It was recognised that there were complexities to be addressed and also that there were options available to the Secretary of State. Councillor Archibald looked forward to the Local Recovery and Devolution White Paper to see detail of the Government ambition on future reform of transformation of the Police and Fire services. Councillor Archibald emphasised the offer for continued collaborative work with all interested bodies as the proposal progressed. He made it clear that the correspondence which had been received did not change the view that the proposed arrangements were deliverable. He pointed out that the proposal had been updated in to include the correspondence in Appendix 1 and the references changed in the body of the proposal changed accordingly, adding that Members had been informed where any changes had been made.

Councillor Archibald said that there were many reasons why a Bay unitary authority made sense when compared with other unitary options. The Bay was a functioning economic area, 96% of the people lived and worked in the area, there was a shared cultural heritage and health footprint, housebuilding would be significantly enhanced by combining with the other authorities and the services transformation which had already

been seen in South Lakeland District Council could be accelerated. The Bay unitary authority would be adequately sized to deal with adult social care and it was hoped that delivery of that service would be enhanced through possible closer integration with the Health Trust. Plans for children services as outlined within the business case would speed the necessary reforms to that service. Forming a unitary authority of this size would also permit subsequent formation of a combined unitary authority and a possible agreement over a devolution deal should the unitary authorities decide to form a combined authority. Councillor Archibald referred to the dedication and enthusiasm of his fellow leaders at Barrow and Lancaster for tackling some of the most serious problems faced by society and explained that they were united in their determination to do all possible to tackle the causes and effects of poverty, as well as putting Climate Change and Biodiversity loss high up on the list of priorities. Councillor Archibald further referred to Morecambe Bay's fantastically special eco system and informed Members that it was his belief that its protection and enhancement could be best carried out by an authority based around the Bay. A Bay unitary authority would manage the Bay not just for residents but also for the land, the sand and the sea.

Councillor Archibald was pleased to note that the councils of Barrow and Lancaster had, earlier in the evening, passed the same proposal. He informed Members that, if they also supported the proposal, this would be the only bid with the clear support of all the district councils involved. The proposal already had the support of the leadership teams of all three councils, and now Barrow and Lancaster councils, the public, several town and parish councils, businesses, institutions, and Councillor Archibald, in moving the recommendations contained within the report, hoped that it would also have the support from South Lakeland District Council.

Councillor Jonathan Brook, Deputy Leader and Housing and Innovation Portfolio Holder, seconded the proposal.

Councillor Robin Ashcroft, Economy, Culture and Leisure Portfolio Holder, drew Members' attention to the economic benefits to the area of the proposal, referencing business, culture, place making and the potential to attract young people to the area. He further drew attention to the considerable assets within the Bay, such as Lancaster University, the heritage offer, a way into the nuclear energy industry, world class technical engineering and hi-tech renewable energy. He referred to a letter from Cumbria Chamber of Commerce which stated that businesses within Cumbria found the current two tier system of local government wasteful and confusing. Further, the letter stated that the Bay was a coherent economic and geographical unit.

Councillor Andrew Jarvis, Finance and Resources Portfolio Holder, felt that this proposal, which was based upon improving services and the outcome for residents, offered the best long-term prospect. He drew attention to the problems of the case for a unitary Cumbria which covered a very large area and was split in two by mountains, which would restrict any council's ability to run a fully integrated operation and create a disconnect between residents and the authority. Furthermore, he did not see how a unitary Cumbria could fit in with devolution plans. He referred to the financial aspects of the business case of the proposal for the Bay unitary and felt that the numbers therein were positive. The philosophy behind the business case was not about claiming the biggest savings through cuts and redundancies but was built upon improving services and outcomes for residents. In the end, savings could only be made if work was reduced and simplified and the proposal indicated that it would not be until Year 3 that savings would start to flow through.

Councillor Suzie Pye, Financial Resilience and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder stressed the fact that deprivation existed in South Lakeland which was why pointing towards

deprivation levels in Morecambe and Barrow as a reason to reject the Bay proposal was a flawed argument when applying humanity. She referred to the three area's Poverty Truth Commissions and the cross-council conversations and learning which had taken place in his regard. Furthermore, she pointed out that if the Government was going to consider the Bay proposal, it would also need to support it in terms of funding moving forward. She accepted that grouping with areas that included pockets of high levels of deprivation needed addressing but did not accept that it is a reason to reject what was an exciting and potentially prosperous future for the area. This would be a dynamic authority and, as such, she envisaged a scenario where all relevant areas benefitted from shared experiences and shared goals.

Councillor Dyan Jones, Climate Emergency and Localism Portfolio Holder reminded Members of the Prime Minister's ambitions for a green revolution and referred to south Cumbria's history of successful wind power delivery. She felt that this, combined with engineering expertise, provided an excellent opportunity to innovate and transform. She pointed out that the Bay proposal had the very essence of localism at its heart, growing sustainable communities, tackling bio-diversity loss, improving the natural environment and building local resilience together. She believed that the ingredients for regrowth already existed, with manufacturing and engineering potential in Barrow, tourism opportunities and value in Morecambe and South Lakes, and with skills and investment from universities and further education centres across the three districts. She referred to the opportunity for co-benefits and positive outcomes through collaboration, delivering change and sustainable growth with a careful, measured, prudent approach. She believed that the Bay Authority had vision around the climate emergency with Barrow and Lancaster, the three councils having already joined together to address the issue. She also believed that the Bay proposal had leadership, commitment and focus, with a clear and obvious shared and complementary vision.

Discussion took place during which a number of strong concerns were raised as regards the inappropriate timing of reorganisation in the midst of a serious global pandemic. It was pointed out that there was no clarity on whether town or parish councils would have more powers as a result of the proposal. Disappointment was expressed with regard to the potential loss of county championships and the sporting heritage. It was raised that, looking at the map, this proposal did not look very much like a unitary authority, with a gash driven through the geographical area. Attention was drawn to the fact that Barrow and Lancaster's demographics and their negative statistics in relation to crime and deprivation compared to those of South Lakeland which led to the question of how two separate Police forces would work for the proposed authority. Reference was made to when Cumbria Constabulary had tried to amalgamate with Lancashire in 2005/06 and as to how this had been unsuccessful, due to differences in Council Tax rates. Also referenced was the fact that no comments had been received from Cumbria County Council. Attention was drawn to the letter from the Police and Crime Commissioner in Lancashire who was totally against the proposal and, in fact, indicated that this could not be done. Although it was understood that Counsel's Opinion had been sought with the response suggesting the proposal was appropriate, it was felt that it should be indicated to Members in writing that the proposal could, in fact, go ahead. Furthermore, it was suggested that the same arguments could be raised with regard to the Fire Service. Concerns were further raised with regard to the diminishment of local democracy and also with regard to zero carbon Cumbria and how this would be managed in terms of partnership with both the Bay and Cumbria.

During discussion, a number of comments were raised. Reference was made to the history behind plans for a barrage with a railway running across it and to the fact that this had never come about, also due to the recognition of the areas ecology. Attention

was drawn to access to the hospital in Barrow, which took longer to reach than Carlisle, however, it was pointed out in any case that people often attended medical appointments altogether outside of the area. Councillor Peter Thornton stressed that Cumbria County Council, was a good council, although he felt that a unitary Cumbria would be too large to be local and, at the same time, too small to be strategic. He felt a Unitary Cumbria could not be considered to be local government if ruled from Carlisle. Councillor Thornton emphasised the need for councils to remain as close to the people as possible was raised. He pointed out that unitary authorities had to be of a size where some residents were not near the centre, and it was suggested, therefore, that strong town councils would be essential, in particular for Barrow, Kendal, Lancaster and Ulverston, and the counterpoint to a future unitary, managing local parks, public conveniences, etc. He hoped that, moving towards mayoral authorities, there would not be a Cumbria Mayoral Authority, which was felt to be too small, and the need for a larger mayoral authority covering 1.5m residents was raised, with decent sized Fire authorities and Police forces. The need for Government to fairly fund authorities in the north of the country was stressed. Although Ulverston felt affiliated with the Bay, it was questioned whether this was the same for Ambleside and Grasmere and Windermere. This was later responded to within discussion, Members being informed that these areas in fact also looked south and would not wish to be governed from Carlisle. It was claimed that mountains divided and rivers united, and pointed out that South Lakeland had always looked to the south, with families travelling south for holidays and shopping.

Also during discussion, reference was made to the fact that this proposal had first been raised some 16 years ago. The positive advantage of a Bay unitary assisting in enabling people from Burton or Carnforth in accessing housing was recognised. It was hoped that the proposal would help all residents to prosper. In addition, it was recognised was the fact that this was an ecologically distinct area and the opportunity for enhancement in this regard was welcomed. Also welcomed was the opportunity for more participatory democracy, the Citizens' Jury established by Kendal Town Council being used as an example.

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer) provided details with regard to the Barrister's Opinion, explaining that the advice had been clear. Legislation did not constrain the ability to form new unitary councils which crossed existing county boundaries. The Secretary of State had, indeed, invited a proposal to be put forward which actually crossed boundaries. With regard to the difference of opinion of the Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner's letter, the view was that the Secretary of State would consider what incidental or consequential provisions he might wish to make as part of this process if he decided to proceed. This was a discretion, not a duty. Details regarding short term and longer term options around the Police and Fire authorities had been included within the proposal and the documents updated in light of the two letters received.

Councillor Brook thanked Councillor Archibald for his introduction which clearly set out the position. He wished to add his personal thanks to Councillor Archibald, as Leader, for his work and leadership on the proposal which had been driven forward in collaboration with the leaders of Barrow and Lancaster. He also expressed thanks to Members for their useful insights during debate. Councillor Brook specifically referred to housing delivery, and in particular affordable housing, which would continue to be a priority of a Bay authority, if chosen by Government. He explained that both Barrow and Lancaster retained their housing stock and, therefore, had access to a Housing Revenue Account. This facility would provide South Lakeland with expertise in running and managing housing stock and offered the ability to deliver housing through an in-house mechanism. This would help build capacity and complement the existing

arrangements for affordable housing delivery. Councillor Brook drew attention to the fact that South Lakes Housing had indicated support for a Bay authority. In summary, Councillor Brook believe that this was an exciting proposal which he was pleased to support and second. He thanked the officers involved for their hard work and dedication over the last few weeks.

Councillor Archibald echoed Councillor Brook's thanks. He first responded to the question regarding copies of letters received by Members earlier in the day and explained that there was no reason to worry, that all bases had been covered and legislation checked. Engagement would continue with all stakeholders and councillors and he encouraged any Members with queries to contact either himself or officers. He referred to Councillor Pye's inspirational comments and to the importance of understanding that a period of multiple crises was being entered into that needed to be addressed, including poverty and inequality. He referred to the work being carried out by Barrow, Lancaster and South Lakeland in this regard and highlighted the opportunity for working together, seeking growth bids from Government and finding ways in which to enhance the economic growth of the area and ensuring that this was shared fairly and equitably amongst everybody. Councillor Archibald referred to Climate Change and Biodiversity and to the fact that this was mentioned over 40 times within the proposal. He assured Members that a Bay authority would accelerate the concern in this regard. He agreed that it was of importance for consideration to be given to participatory democracy. He referred to ceremonial boundaries and explained that there was no proposal to change these, however, suggested the potential for bay championships also to be initiated. In terms of Lancashire, it was Councillor Archibald's understanding that Lancashire County Council had given an undertaking to the Leader of Lancaster City Council that they would engage if the Bay proposal was invited to the next stage. Councillor Archibald closed, highlighting the excellent opportunity to tackle any challenges together, across the Bay.

A request having been made by the requisite number of eight Councillors, the following vote was recorded in accordance with Rule 15.5 of the Council's Rules of Procedure:-

The following Members voted in favour (37) – Councillors Giles Archibald; Robin Ashcroft; Rupert Audland; Pat Bell; Ben Berry; Jonathan Brook; Helen Chaffey; Stephen Coleman; Brian Cooper; Tracy Coward; Philip Dixon; Judy Filmore; Alvin Finch; Tom Harvey; Eamonn Hennessy, Hazel Hodgson; Rachael Hogg; John Holmes; Kevin Holmes; Vicky Hughes; Helen Irving; Andrew Jarvis; Janette Jenkinson; Dyan Jones; Helen Ladhams; Malcolm Lamb; Kevin Lancaster; Susanne Long; Pete McSweeney; Ian Mitchell; Jon Owen; Suzie Pye; Doug Rathbone; Brian Rendell; Matt Severn; Peter Thornton; and Ian Wharton.

The following Members voted against (2) – Councillors Mark Wilson and Shirley-Anne Wilson.

The following Members abstained (2) – Councillors Roger Bingham and David Webster.

**RESOLVED - That**

(1) the full proposal for a unitary council for the Bay area be approved for submission by the Leader and Chief Executive to the Government by 9 December 2020; and

(2) the Chief Executive and Leader be authorised to approve any minor amendments that may arise following consideration of the proposal by Barrow Borough and Lancaster City councils prior to submission.

**C/72****LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - LOCAL ELECTIONS**

Councillor Giles Archibald, Leader and Promoting South Lakeland Portfolio Holder, presented a report asking Council to consider whether it wished to seek postponement of local elections in May 2021 on account of proposals for local government reorganisation and in response to a request from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Council, having approved the submission of a full proposal for local government reorganisation at C/71 above, the decision of the Council with regard to the local elections would be conveyed to MHCLG on 9 December 2020.

The report suggested that a postponement of elections would place at risk: the need for certainty to plan for elections at a time when Covid-19 may still exist; a need to refresh councillors, several of whom may be retiring; and the opportunity to give residents the chance to vote in the full knowledge of the plans afoot for reorganisation. The report further suggested that, from a procedural point, there did not appear to be justification to postpone local elections on account of the proposals being put forward. It was pointed out, however, that the timing of any consultation and issue of purdah was wholly within the decision of MHCLG and that they should be advised of the need to consider timing in this regard.

Councillor Archibald drew attention to approval in the previous item for the proposal for a Bay Unitary Authority and explained that elections to the new authority would not take place until 2023. It was felt, therefore, that there was not a need to ask for any delay in the 2021 elections, as councillors elected in 2021 would serve for a period of two years.

Councillor Archibald having moved the recommendations within the report was seconded by Councillor Dyan Jones.

Concerns were raised with regard to the cost implications of full elections, to safety for voters in the light of Covid-19, as well as to those involved in political campaigning and the delivery of leaflets, and to the imminence of reorganisation. A particularly strong concern was raised at the holding of elections in May 2021, reference being made to the sacrifices being made by NHS workers, and it being stressed that this would be irresponsible during a pandemic and that it would not be until at least June before there was any sign of normality.

A number of comments were raised. It was suggested that, should the elections go ahead, they should be carried out through all-out postal votes, thereby allowing residents to engage safely, with attention being drawn to the fact that not everyone would have been vaccinated against Covid-19 by May 2021. A pressing need for all-out postal votes was stressed and the fact that it was in the Council's gift to make comment within its response to MHCLG to ask for consideration to be given to this or to some other safe method of voting. Another suggestion was that more postal votes should be encouraged but that this should not be enforced, with some residents seeing it as their civic duty to attend a polling station to cast their vote. Attention was drawn to the fact that both the Cumbria County Council Conservative Group Leader and Labour Group Leader had asked for the elections to be cancelled but that the Cumbria County

Council Liberal Democrat Group's desire was for the elections to proceed. It was raised that the extra costs involved in holding elections would be minimal, as it was believed that the Police and Crime Commissioner elections were scheduled to take place in any case.

A majority spoke in favour of pressing ahead with elections due to the fact that there were vacancies on the Council, Members feeling that it would not be democratic to put them off due to local government re-organisation or Covid-19. It was, furthermore, pointed out that the question being asked was whether the Council wished to hold elections in May 2021 due to local government re-organisation and not due to Covid.

The Legal, Governance and Democracy Lead Specialist (Monitoring Officer), during discussion, explained that the issue of all out postal voting was beyond the Council's control and reminded Members that the Council was being specifically asked to comment on the holding of elections as part of the proposal for reform. She added that, the decision on whether to hold elections was down to Government and that, if the elections were to proceed, guidance on safe voting was also expected.

Councillor Archibald reiterated the fact that the Council was being asked if want to delay the elections due to reorganisation. In response to a query raised during discussion, he informed Members that the Police and Crime Commissioner elections were currently scheduled to be held in May 2021, and that these would go ahead unless the Government decided to delay for a month or so in the light of Covid-19. Councillor Archibald acknowledged the validity of the points raised around the need to ensure that people could vote safely through the maximisation of postal voting. He suggested that this could be considered at a future meeting, potentially through an appropriate motion. Today's question, he said, was different, and he asked Members to support the proposal.

A vote on the proposal was taken by roll call and it was

RESOLVED – That

- (1) Council expresses a preference at this stage:-
  - (a) not to request a postponement of local elections (By Elections/Local and Town and Parish) in May 2021 on account of proposals for local government reorganisation;
  - (b) specifically, that South Lakeland's District Elections and By Elections, together with By Elections for town/parishes be excepted from any cancellation of elections under any future Structural Changes Order; and
  - (c) that the County Council elections proceed in May 2021; and
- (2) MHCLG be advised of the need to consider the timing of any future consultation on proposals and conflict with purdah restrictions and to exercise their powers with regard to the holding of local elections accordingly.

The meeting ended at 8.25 p.m.