

SWT Executive - 17 March 2021

Present: Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts (Chair)
Councillors Benet Allen, Chris Booth, Ross Henley, Marcus Kravis, Richard Lees, Peter Pilkington, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith and Sarah Wakefield

Officers: James Hasset, Dawn Adey, James Barra, Alison North, Andrew Pritchard, Paul Fitzgerald, Marcus Prouse, Amy Tregellas, Clare Rendell, Chris Brown, Emily Collacott, Julie Jordan, Simon Lewis, Paul McClean, Malcolm Riches, Paul Sandison and Richard Sealy

Also Present: Councillors Ian Aldridge, Simon Coles, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, John Hassall, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

107. **Apologies**

No apologies were received.

108. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Executive**

(Minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 9 and 24 February 2021 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Executive held on 9 and 24 February 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

109. **Declarations of Interest**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

| Name | Minute No. | Description of Interest | Reason | Action Taken |
|--------------|------------|--|----------|-----------------|
| Cllr C Booth | All Items | Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr S Coles | All Items | SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke |
| Cllr R Lees | All Items | Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr L Lisgo | All Items | Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke |
| Cllr J Lloyd | All Items | Wellington & | Personal | Spoke |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| | | Sampford Arundel | | |
| Cllr P Pilkington | All Items | Timberscombe | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr M Rigby | All Items | SCC & Bishops Lydeard | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr F Smith | All Items | Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr F Smith-Roberts | All Items | Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr V Stock-Williams | All Items | Wellington | Personal | Spoke |
| Cllr L Whetlor | All Items | Watchet | Personal | Spoke |
| Cllr G Wren | All Items | Clerk to Milverton PC | Personal | Spoke |

Councillor M Kravis declared a personal interest on agenda item 6.

110. **Public Participation**

Mr David Langham submission on agenda items 6, Options Appraisal for Delivering Future Single Rough Sleeper and Homeless Accommodation in Somerset West and Taunton:-

Dear Sirs

Thank you for allowing my comments to be considered. I was disappointed by the incomplete options appraisal at the scrutiny meeting and the suboptimal manner in which this debacle has been conducted.

As you have heard, the community is no longer accepting nor supportive of the use of Canonsgrove as a homeless facility due to the burden, impact on and the reduction in quality of life of the local community.

Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) has demonstrated a disregard for the welfare and interests of local residents and has failed to carry out a formal consultation on the matter. This has very seriously undermined trust and confidence, and has brought the council into significant disrepute.

The options appraisal of sites for longer term use lacked basic information, whilst more concerning details regarding alternative sites were intentionally omitted.

This renders the options appraisal on which your decisions are based incomplete and suboptimal. As there had been many months available to prepare this options appraisal it is inexcusable, demonstrates incompetence, demonstrates a failure of leadership and brings the council further into disrepute.

The community deserves confirmation that these failures of leadership and incompetence will be appropriately managed, in order to restore trust in SWT and its processes.

The request for a further 24 months use of the site is excessive, inappropriate and should be met with extreme caution without performance management of the process to identify further sites.

As a long standing member of the local community, I request that the homeless facility at Canonsgrove, Trull is now terminated as soon as possible and I object to its continued use.

Yours Sincerely, David Langham

The Portfolio Holder for Housing responded:-

We do not believe we have disregarded the welfare or interests of local residents, nor failed to engage and we have had a great deal of partnership working to ensure the site has been well managed and that we have been engaging. With respect to consultation, this has been difficult because until the Options Appraisal was undertaken, we didn't have a firm position to speak to the community about and answer their obvious questions such as "will the site be permanent?" and "how long will you be here for?". We are now in a position to be able to do so. That said, we have been doing an awful lot of work to engage in Trull which includes:

- monthly attendance at the Parish Council meeting with a written report that includes all incidents that have been reported to us over the previous month and how we responded
- engagement with the parish church, including attending a service and speaking with the congregation
- a monthly newsletter which is sent to neighbouring properties and streets and sent to interested parties by email, this includes a set of FAQs in our first meeting. Again the Parish Council have published these on their website. If you would like me to include you on this, I am happy to add you to the circulation list?
- engagement in community activities (litter picks, weeding, planting etc). These have had to stop due to lock-down but will resume again
- weekly site meetings with the police and monthly attendance at a police priorities meeting where Canonsgrove is always discussed.
- Answering all letters and questions from Parish Council, Trull Residents Group and other residents.
- An open invitation to members of the Parish Council to visit Canonsgrove and see the work being done (that however has been withdrawn during lockdown).

That said, we have made a commitment to improve engagement with the community now that we have a clear position to engage on.

We also covered at the meeting why it was not appropriate for us to discuss the wider sites that we had been reviewing and are currently considering as to do so, can commercially compromise our attempts to procure these and can affect their purchase value.

I do not recognise the statement around failed leadership and incompetence as being applicable in this situation.

We also covered at the meeting why setting a timescale of less than two years would not be appropriate. We had considered whether a shorter timescale was suitable but need to balance the wishes of those who want to see homeless people moving out of Trull as early as possible against the need to ensure that we make considered and sound decisions about procuring and commissioning alternative accommodation in other localities which will have implications for the residents that use that accommodation as well as the surrounding neighbourhoods for many years into the future. Twelve months is an unrealistic timescale to identify, procure, line up management and support and then decant around 60 people. We do have to remember that these are some of the most vulnerable people in our District and it is important we get this right.

Mr Simon Lord submission on agenda items 6, Options Appraisal for Delivering Future Single Rough Sleeper and Homeless Accommodation in Somerset West and Taunton:-

Dear Councillors

I am a resident of Trull and have four particular areas of concern in relation to item 6 on the agenda.

Firstly, as the Executive will be aware, in using part of the Canonsgrove site as a homeless hostel, the Council has breached the existing Section 106 agreement for the site. The 106 agreement was put in place for a specific purpose; to protect the people and environment of the village. That purpose remains as valid today as at the point it was agreed. It is quite shocking for the Council, which has a duty to enforce planning breaches, to be knowingly breaching planning conditions itself. I would be interested to hear the thoughts of the planning portfolio holder on this.

I am aware that BTC are in the process of submitting a S106 variation order application to regularise this breach. I do not therefore feel it is appropriate for this committee to approve the extension of its current lease with BTC until that planning matter has been determined by the Planning Committee, as that decision will have a material effect on what can and cannot take place at Canonsgrove.

I understand the site is currently under a lease until 1 October. You do not therefore have to make a decision today. You have sufficient time for the variation order to be properly and transparently determined before this committee considers its future use of Canonsgrove.

I would therefore respectfully ask that the Executive considers an alternative recommendation to the three before it.

That alternative recommendation being this matter be deferred until such time as the Planning Committee has determined the variation order to the Section 106 agreement relating to the Canonsgrove site.

Secondly, nowhere within the report before the committee is there ANY mention of the views of the homeless people themselves. Where would they prefer to live and why? This seems to be a huge oversight. For me this should be a fundamental consideration in informing future accommodation provision for homeless people, rather than simply bulk warehousing the homeless where they are out of sight, where officers want to put them. If the committee were minded to approve my suggested recommendation it would also allow time for officers to consult the homeless people about what they would prefer and share this with members of this committee.

Thirdly, if the committee were minded to proceed today, then I would ask that it only considers option 1. However, I would ask the committee to recognise that the village has already been placed under huge strain for more than a year. This was meant to be an emergency arrangement.

From June 2021 the majority of Coronavirus restrictions are likely to be lifted and many vulnerable people, such as homeless people, will have received their vaccines. This will enable people to once again share open-plan accommodation, such as Lindley House, which was unsuitable during the height of the pandemic. We do not think it fair or reasonable to expose the village to a further two years of significant disruption to normal village life. A high proportion of the residents of the village are elderly and frankly don't have time on their side. I would therefore

ask that the committee limits any lease extension until March 2022. This provides a full 12 months during which to secure alternative accommodation. It also ensures that SWAT has fully resolved this issue before the Council ceases to exist. My worry would be that if this is allowed to run until March 2023, and be co-terminus with the ending of SWAT, officers and Councillors will allow this to drift and there be no one accountable to take ownership.

Finally, I would also ask that in the intervening period the make-up of the tenants at Canonsgrove be fundamentally changed. At present 45% of the 'high dependency' homeless people in the ENTIRE DISTRICT are accommodated at Canonsgrove. This is wholly disproportionate and unacceptable for a small village of this size. High-dependency generally means people with substance or alcohol misuse or significant mental health issues. People of this nature do not blend easily into a quiet village environment. This I believe is at the very heart of the problems being experienced by the people of Trull and Staplehay. I would therefore like to see a clear plan put in place which shows how Canonsgrove will be decommissioned within the period of any lease extension, starting with 'High dependency' residents.

In closing and in summary, I would ask the committee to

- Defer consideration of this matter until such time as the Planning Committee has determined the variation order to the Section 106 agreement relating to the Canonsgrove site.
- Seek the views of the homeless people themselves with regard to where they would prefer to be accommodated (e.g. in villages or towns)
- If the committee decides to approve option 1 limit any extension to March 2022 and request officers draw up a clear glide-path to decommission the hostel.

Thank you for your time, Simon Lord, Trull (resident)

The Portfolio Holder for Housing responded:-

Thank you for your representation.

We have been made aware that there is a 25 year old Section 106 agreement related to Canonsgrove Halls of Residence which does have restrictions on its use and that currently use as homeless accommodation is in breach of this. This should have been picked up from earlier advice from the Planning Service and unfortunately, the S106 was not attached to the case file in the normal way and therefore this has been an unfortunate oversight. Under normal circumstances a variation to a Section 106 agreement would be submitted in writing by the applicant to the Planning Manager and a decision made through delegated powers and therefore this would have happened some weeks ago after we first became aware of the breach. However as we are aware of the public interest in this site and of the homeless accommodation, we wanted to ensure that any decision was taken in a transparent manner are therefore submitting a formal planning application for consideration which will be determined in accordance with the Councils Constitution. Once the planning application has been submitted to the Local Planning Authority, a statutory consultation will be undertaken and if the parish council / ward member and more than 4 individuals submit comments with planning reasons that are contrary to the planning officers recommendation, the application will then be determined by planning committee.

Bridgwater and Taunton College will be submitting a planning application to vary

the Section 106 shortly. The Local Planning Authority is aware of the impending application and as I understand it will await this before any decisions are taken on enforcement.

With respect to the lease itself, this will be negotiated between the YMCA Dulverton Group, who manage the site and the Bridgwater and Taunton College who own the site. The conversations and negotiations will take some time to progress and these organisations will want to begin these conversations at the most appropriate time for them. All parties are aware that there is a Planning Application being submitted to the Local Planning Authority for consideration. The work undertaken at Canonsgrove includes ensuring that all residents there have a Housing and Support plan in place. As part of this, they each have a support worker and there has been a lot of engagement with the residents to ask for their views on the homeless accommodation and support and some of these stories and insights have been published in the monthly newsletters we have published on Canonsgrove (6 to date) which we circulate to the local neighbourhood and the parish council publishes on their website. There has been very strong support from the residents for the provision and support they have received. A number have testified how the intervention and provision has turned their lives around and others have said that it has literally saved their lives. We know from feedback that many residents have really benefitted from the quiet location and ability to reflect and take time to address the issues in their life, without a lot of the temptations that face them in the town centre. There are others that have preferred a more central location, but on the whole the responses have been extremely positive about the provision at Canonsgrove. We have considered whether a shorter timescale is suitable but need to balance the wishes of those who want to see homeless people moving out of Trull as early as possible against the need to ensure that we make considered and sound decisions about procuring and commissioning alternative accommodation in other localities which will have implications for the residents that use that accommodation as well as the surrounding neighbourhoods for many years into the future. Twelve months is an unrealistic timescale to identify, procure, line up management and support and then decant around 60 people. We do have to remember that these are some of the most vulnerable people in our District and it is important we get this right.

We will of course need to develop a decant plan however until we have agreed properties, provision and support with partners we will not know which residents we would move out first and therefore we cannot commit to an ideal scenario which may not be deliverable however we will certainly do our best to see how we can ensure a healthy mix of people staying at Canonsgrove as more properties become available to move on to.

Mr Tony Langham submission on agenda items 6, Options Appraisal for Delivering Future Single Rough Sleeper and Homeless Accommodation in Somerset West and Taunton:-

Good evening.....Thank you all at SWT for your work on our behalf.

I wanted to address you about the illegal homeless settlement at Canonsgrove for which you are responsible.

My representation is being read by an Officer of SWT which I expressly object to as You have removed my right to personal representation which I and my advisers consider ultra vires .

I wanted to restate my (and many silent others) objections to a homeless settlement at Canonsgrove.

I can't possibly say everything I want to in 3 minutes (my full arguments are set out in my correspondence to the scrutiny Committee which I hope you have read and noted) , my key points are :

This is a laudable and well intentioned proposal and not without good intent and merit, I do not dispute that But..... the site is inappropriate and you have handle this very badly indeed.

I listened to the Scrutiny Committee on 3 March. As a committee it either did not hear my comments or ignored them. I have received no response from SWT. In any form.

At the Scrutiny Committee I thought the councillors did not hold the officers to a sufficiently high and professional standard of accountability for their poor conduct and performance in this matter.

It all looked and sounded very cosy and predetermined, with little separation between councillors and officers.

Officers obfuscated and were unclear as to finance and costs and admitted there were other options but they did not present them. They were obfuscating and pursuing a one solution decision.

The fact remains that the use of the site is and was unlawful.

You dismissively ignored our comments and objections as inconvenient and unwelcome.

The residents were misled (deliberately it seems) about the options appraisal which was not an options appraisal but a feasibility study to justify and extend the use of Cannonsgrove. Even your fellow councillor members accepted this.

The interests of the local residents are being subordinated and compromised by you in favour of a very small minority.

You have seriously antagonised and alienated local residents and dealt with them in a dismissive and undemocratic manner you have failed to put the interests of your local residents first.

It brings seriously into question the conduct and competency of SWT.

We deserve better from you.

I would ask you to close the settlement in Oct 2022. 18 months is more than sufficient time to meet your immediate obligations and establish alternative provision.

I object to the continuation of the site until March 2023. Trull residents group had no agreed authority to support the 2 year extension and you should not rely on it.

Should you decide to proceed with the extension to the use of the site until March 2023 I request that you establish a clear and decisive rehousing plan by Oct 2022 to allow sufficient time for alternative provision for residents to be made and for the decommissioning of the site in March 2023. This is more than reasonable.

You may wish to take a moment to reflect on this unedifying episode and apologise to local residents, your council tax payers.

If I can assist you in any way please do let me know.

ARJ Langham MBE

The Portfolio Holder for Housing responded.

Mrs Linda Brierley submission on agenda items 6, Options Appraisal for Delivering Future Single Rough Sleeper and Homeless Accommodation in Somerset West and Taunton:-

I was very pleased to read Mark Leeman's comprehensive report. I agree, unfortunately, hostels are still the most common accommodation projects in the country. They might be the most viable financial option in the short term, even this is debatable; but that doesn't make them the best option for clients or produce the best outcomes. I would hope that, more increasingly, smaller housing options are used which replicate the living conditions enjoyed by most. For this reason I was disappointed to learn that there will only be a very limited pilot of Housing First provision. Very successful pilots are already in place across the country so I wonder why such a cautious approach is being taken? Housing first has been proven to be particularly beneficial for clients with complex needs who have been evicted or voluntarily left hostel provision repeatedly. I support Option 1. I have always felt that Canonsgrove is too far from the town centre. The winter months emphasise the inappropriateness. Who wants to walk or cycle into town in cold, wet and windy weather? As a local resident who would like to rely more on public transport I have found that the irregularity of buses makes this very difficult. Some residents could remain at Canonsgrove for considerable periods of time. I could understand a "Somewhere Safe to Stay Assessment Hub" being placed there. A small, safe, nurturing environment where needs could be assessed before placement in the appropriate long-term provision. The key here is that the client would know that it would be a short, finite time spent in a rural environment. If there is a call from some clients for non-town centre accommodation it could be provided in smaller multi-occupancy housing placed within a community, not on the outskirts which, to my mind, is socially isolating. The 2 year lease gives time to work towards achieving the best outcome for those finding themselves homeless and, hopefully, for improved communication with the local community. Despite the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation on November 4th last year: ".....any options appraisal must be open, transparent and a forward looking review of all potential sites. Any appraisals involving Canonsgrove should be communicated with both Trull and Comeytrowe Parish Council as well as local residents" Following the above SWT argued that Trull could not be given special treatment as other areas within Taunton would also be affected. In the event it has been admitted that there was no time to consider any other site. Canonsgrove has been at the centre of the OA as we had always suspected. Obviously that does not constitute an open, transparent OA, even to a layperson such as myself. At the last Trull Parish Council Meeting Jonica Walkinshaw, representing the YMCA, mentioned the adversarial tone of communication surrounding Canonsgrove. I believe the blame for this lies squarely on the shoulders of SWT. When a community is denied any democratic input into plans which will directly affect them it is inevitable that mistrust is engendered. PR newsletters do not listen to concerns. Prepared Q and A sessions within a Parish Council meeting (some answered, some answered evasively, others not answered at all) do not represent a two way discussion. SWT have shown little respect for the concerns of the community. It is important that, over the next 2 years, there is real communication between all parties. I believe that a small committee involving representatives from YMCA, SWT, the local church, Trull Parish Council and Trull Residents Group is necessary. Together, in a non-combative way, they could work together to achieve the best

outcome for the vulnerable, both within Canonsgrove and the village, whilst the long-term future of the former is being pursued.

Yours sincerely Linda Brierley

The Portfolio Holder for Housing responded:-

Firstly thank you for your support of our Accommodation Strategy. The Housing Team did put a lot of time into getting the balance of this right. I agree that Housing First is certainly a good model and it is part of our future thinking. We are looking to sign up (under the Homeless Prevention Board) to be a pilot for this along with the other Districts in Somerset, to build on work that we are already doing in some of our properties. To make Housing First successful does require a really solid network of support agencies that are willing and able to commit to provide flexible support for as long as it is needed. This in turn requires a mature commissioning model which I would argue is not yet in place and would take a significant time to establish and would require buy-in and budget commitments from many agencies. This is why the Homeless Prevention Board is so important and why we are invested in this. Part of the reason for the success of Canonsgrove has been the willingness under an emergency Covid situation for these agencies to come to one building to provide that wrap-around support. In practice, gaining commitment for this to happen across a multitude of addresses is far more difficult (and expensive) to secure.

Many agencies we have spoken with suggest that Housing First is a great model for around 10% of a homeless/rough sleeper group, but it needs to be really targeted. As a Housing Landlord of 5,700 properties we do have significant experience of accommodating tenants with complex needs and we know that without the right level of support that this can lead to failed tenancies.

I do recognise the need for improved constructive two-way communication between interested parties on the Canonsgrove project and we are very much committed to this. I do genuinely hope that this can start now that there is clarity on the way forward. Thank you for your suggestion of a committee, we are considering how best to have this engagement and I have spoken with the Chair of the parish council and shared some ideas with him.

Ms Jessica Wintrip submission on agenda items 6, Options Appraisal for Delivering Future Single Rough Sleeper and Homeless Accommodation in Somerset West and Taunton:-

Dear Council,

I am a resident of Trull and have lived here for 25 years. I think it is a marvellous idea to house the homeless at Cannonsgrove. It gives you, our local authority, a real chance to make a difference with this group of people.

I think the council should actively encourage and support this initiative and help make homelessness in our area a thing of the past. Do not be discouraged by some negative comments from a few Trull residents. These people have no inkling of what it is like to live without a home and the support of friends and family. It is blatant nimbyism.

A homeless person is a human being just like you and me and one who deserves respect and help.

Thank you for listening to me.

Yours sincerely, Jessica Wintrip, Trull Residents Group

The Portfolio Holder for Housing thanked Ms Wintrip for her comments.

Trull Residents Group submission on agenda items 6, Options Appraisal for Delivering Future Single Rough Sleeper and Homeless Accommodation in Somerset West and Taunton:-

Dear Councillors

I write on behalf of Trull Residents' Group (TRG) further to our representations to the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 3rd March.

Report Recommendation

TRG would ask you to approve Option 1, as recommended by your officers and by Councillors on the Scrutiny Committee. This short-term extension of the lease at Canonsgrove would provide SWT with time to deliver alternative accommodation across the district, suited to the needs of homeless people in terms of its type and more central location, close to services and amenities. The lease and current use of Canonsgrove would therefore end in 2023, and we agree with the Scrutiny Committee that the wind-down of the site should ideally occur by a date 6-months in advance of that.

Given the significant community issues which the current use has caused in Staplehay, Trull and Comeytrove, TRG would accept this option on the understanding that it is time-limited and that management, community safety and communication arrangements are strengthened in order to minimise further disruption over the next two years.

Alternative Options

The Options Appraisal presents two alternative options:

Option 2

TRG maintains its strong objection to Option 2, and supports the recommendation of your officers and the Scrutiny Committee that it is not progressed. This option is for a comprehensive and sizeable redevelopment of Canonsgrove including a 'hub' for homeless people with complex needs and additional accommodation for homeless people with fewer support needs.

TRG has submitted professionally-informed Topic Papers to the Options Appraisal which show that Option 2 would be contrary to:

- Planning and legal restrictions on the use of the site.
- Policies set out in Adopted and Emerging SWT Local Plans, the Adopted Trull Neighbourhood Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Previous SWT planning decisions on this land and on adjacent sites, which highlight the unsustainable nature of Canonsgrove for people with restricted mobility options.
- Current best practice in terms of the size and type of homeless accommodation provision.
- Usual industry practice in evidence-based and open commissioning/procurement.

Specifically, the use of Canonsgrove as accommodation for homeless people is contrary to policies relating to:

- Safe and suitable access for all users
- Sustainable access/carbon neutrality/limiting the need to travel
- Crime and the fear of crime
- Amenity and community cohesion
- Protected species

- Discrimination against people without access to motor vehicles and/or with health/mobility problems

There are other matters including delays to emergency service access due to Canonsgrove being 2 ½ miles from town; impact on heritage assets; and the presence of Protected Species and Tree Preservation Orders onsite.

All of this makes Canonsgrove unsuitable for homeless accommodation, which should be in accessible, central locations, rather than in rural villages away from services and facilities.

Any decision to progress Option 2 would appear to be legally challengeable. Councils' decisions have to be based on a thorough review of potential options – something which the Scrutiny Committee insisted upon, but which was overlooked in the production of an 'Options Appraisal' focussed on Canonsgrove.

Do Nothing

TRG supports the identification of long-term provision for homeless people across the SWT area in line with policy and best-practice. A mix of suitable accommodation needs to be found in central locations, close to services and amenities, across the district.

Other Matters

It is disappointing that none of the five TRG Topic Papers submitted to the Options Appraisal are mentioned in the report, unlike the submissions of various other parties.

We also note Officers' misrepresentation of the Trull Residents' Survey, run by Trull Parish Council and sent to 900 households in the parish. This erroneous commentary has been added by SWT Officers and does not reflect the views of the Parish Council. It should be noted that:

- The survey presented the options which were known to the Parish Council at the time, and the reference to a 'sizeable' hub reflects the words of Simon Lewis (SWT) in his earlier report to your Committee. Options Appraisal Option 2 would be of this unacceptable 'sizeable' scale.
- The survey's 25.8% response rate is in the same order as the turnout for many local elections nationally, and compares very favourably with examples including the 1.5% response rate to SWT's East Reach consultation.
- The vast majority of people favoured either a centrally-located facility in Taunton, a Housing First approach, or smaller, dispersed accommodation.
- Just 0.9% of people supported a homeless accommodation 'hub' of scale at Canonsgrove.

The comments of local residents, set out in Appendix 5d of the Options Appraisal, provide powerful evidence of the serious impact and concern that the current use of the site has had on the community.

We also note that SWT Officers have reported only two of the letters of complaint to the Council regarding Canonsgrove. That is a misrepresentation of the local community's constant communication of issues to SWT, YMCA, the Police and other agencies. There have been 38 incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour reported to the Police (in addition to those occurring on and around the site) and 88 other occurrences of anti-social behaviour reported to the Parish Council. It is very disappointing to hear certain Councillors again playing-down or denying the clear increase in incidents, when this information is publicly-available.

Summary and Conclusions

Trull Residents' Group has always accepted the use of Canonsgrove as homeless accommodation during the Covid pandemic. We raise no objection to

that use continuing until 2023 (Option 1 in the Options Appraisal) as recommended by your Officers and by the Scrutiny Committee, subject to assurances regarding wind-down/cessation of that use and, in the interim, improved management, communication and community safety measures. This would enable SWT to provide a range of more-suitable accommodation in central, accessible locations across the district during the intervening period. TRG cannot support any long-term use of the site for homeless accommodation (Option 2). Such a use would be contrary to adopted policy, best-practice in provision, and previous planning decisions in the area. It would not deliver best outcomes for homeless people, and it would set a precedent for unsustainable development in rural areas, undermining the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan. Due to the restricted scope of the Options Appraisal, it is probable that any decision to support Option 2 would be legally challengeable. Consequently, we respectfully ask Councillors to protect the interests of homeless people and the wider community by supporting Option 1 and working to find the required range of homeless accommodation solutions in central, accessible areas across the district. Thank-you once again for your time considering our submissions. Yours sincerely, D. Brierley, For Trull Residents' Group

The Portfolio Holder for Housing responded:-

You wrote requesting that the Council supported Option 1 and thank you for your support of this option. This was the recommendation of officers and was approved at Executive on Wednesday.

Thank you for the submission of the five topic papers, these were responded to and were reviewed and considered as part of our work.

We don't feel that officers' concerns about the survey were a misrepresentation. The covering letter for the survey and the survey itself appeared biased against supporting the scheme, with the covering letter including statements such as "significant anti-social behaviour and crime" and "we would anticipate the hub being significantly larger than the current provision which presently houses up to 60 residents. There is ample space for 3 times that number", with no balance of any of the positive attributes of the site or the provision. We have received a number of letters from members of the Trull community who drew the same conclusion about the survey with one of those saying "the survey appeared to be designed to achieve the outcome of rejection of the use of Canonsgrove". That said, that does not detract from the number of people who had concerns about the site and we do accept and acknowledge that the majority of respondents are against the continuation of Canonsgrove in the longer term, preferring homeless people to be housed elsewhere.

We have taken the same position as the Police with respect to crime and anti-social behaviour and do not report to the Parish Council on details of incidents that happen at the Canonsgrove site itself unless they impact the community. Our focus is on minimising and addressing issues that affect people living in the Trull community. We have reported every month for the past five months to the Parish Council on incidents that have been reported to Canonsgrove or the police from residents and these total 20 (an average of 1 a week). The Parish Council has the opportunity to challenge us on these numbers or indeed our actions to address them, so we are trying to be both transparent and accountable on this.

We take all of these issues very seriously and work closely with the police, when

required, to ensure that we respond to the complainant and address the issues raised. We do acknowledge and accept that people have been affected by the behaviour of some of our residents and we work hard to address this. We do recognise the need for improved constructive two-way communication between interested parties on the Canonsgrove project and we are very much committed to this. I do genuinely hope that this can start now that there is clarity on the way forward.

111. **Executive Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Executive Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

Resolved that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

112. **Options Appraisal for Delivering Future Single Rough Sleeper and Homeless Accommodation in Somerset West and Taunton**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were proud of how much the Housing Team had achieved in supporting rough sleepers in the area.
- Councillors thanked the officers for their considered approach to the housing provision during the Covid Pandemic.
- Councillors queried if there was any provision in place if Bridgwater College did not extend the lease.
The Assistant Director for Housing advised that he was hopeful that the lease would be extended. He advised that Bridgwater College had been very supportive to date.
- Councillors agreed that the Council should be proud of the work that had been carried out to support rough sleepers, which was above and beyond that which the Government had set out to achieve.
- Councillors queried whether there were any plans for the decommissioning of the Canonsgrove site.
The Assistant Director for Housing advised that he would communicate with the local residents and groups about any decommissioning plans. He understood their concerns and would like to arrange a meeting to debate the plans properly.
- Councillors agreed they wanted the best outcome for rough sleepers especially during the Covid Pandemic, however, they wanted a long term solution which would hopefully be achieved through the work carried out on the Strategy.
- Councillors thanked the other hotels and houses in the district for their support during the Covid Pandemic.
- Councillors were happy to support the scheme for the whole of the district as long as the works were proportionate and considerate of the local community.

- Councillors wanted to ensure that the necessary support services were in place for the residents of Canonsgrove to access.
- Councillors were keen to support the vulnerable residents of the district through the work on the Strategy.
- Councillors thanked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Housing Team for all their hard work.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing thanked all for their positive comments and reminded Councillors that the work being carried out was for the Strategy to end homelessness by 2027 and that it was not just about the work achieved at Canonsgrove.

Resolved that the Executive:-

- 2.1 Noted and supported the draft Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy including its vision and objectives as a working document to articulate SWT ambition to end rough sleeping in the district by 2027 (Appendix 1).
- 2.2 Approved recommended option one as set out in paragraph 4.38 as the preferred Council option for the future contribution of the Canonsgrove site to support the provision of single homeless accommodation in the District.
- 2.3 Should option two be preferred by the Executive the service requested a supplementary budget of £130k, as identified in the report to the Executive in November 2020. This budget was to prepare for the purchase and conversion of Canonsgrove. Officers would return to the Council to request permission and the budget for the purchase and works for the site.
- 2.4 Officers to improve engagement and two-way communication with Trull residents and stakeholders. This would be through direct engagement with the community as well as attendance at an appropriate forum to engage with the Parish Council and community representatives.

113. **Pay Policy 2021/22**

Resolved that the Executive recommended that the Pay Policy statement 2021/22 was forwarded onto Full Council for approval.

114. **Corporate Performance Report, Quarter 3, 2020/21**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors praised officers for the hard work they had achieved, from going through Transformation and then through the Covid Pandemic, it had not been an easy 18 months for them.
- Councillors requested further information on the red alerts within the report.
- The Assistant Director for Customer gave further information.
- Councillors queried whether the issues surrounding phosphates had impacted on the figures for the Planning Service.
- The Director of Development and Place advised that yes, phosphates had impacted on the service delivery and that the department was in the process of extending the targets to allow for that.

- Councillors were pleased with the figures achieved overall, but that we should still be challenging the targets to achieve more.

Resolved that the Executive considered the attached performance report.

115. **2020/21 Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 3 (31 December 2020)**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked officers for all their hard work especially that carried out on the business grants.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources thanked all for their positive comments and agreed that a lot of work was carried out to ensure that the business grants were paid out correctly, especially when the tier system was introduced.

Resolved that the Executive reviewed and noted the Council's forecast financial performance and projected reserves position for 2020/21 financial year as at 31 December 2020.

116. **Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategies 2021/22 to 2025/26**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors thanked officers for the comprehensive report.
- Concern was raised on the democratic path that the report had been taken through.
The Monitoring Officer confirmed the procedural requirement for the Strategies.
- Councillors queried whether the Community Infrastructure Levy was due to be removed in the next financial year.
- The Section 151 Officer advised that it was the New Homes Bonus that was due to be removed.

Resolved that the Executive:-

2.1 Recommended that Full Council approved the Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies, and Minimum Revenue Provision policy.

2.2 Noted and supported the requirement for a limited review of the Constitution for completeness and consistency on responsibilities for all aspects of the CIT Strategies.

117. **Procurement Strategy**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors requested whether the term 'economically viable' could be removed from section 8 on Climate.
The Section 151 Officer apologised as that had been removed from the actual Strategy document but not the report. However, he did advise that all activity needed to be affordable and deliver value for money.

- Councillors were pleased to see the Strategy come forward and appreciated the work carried out, especially as Auditors had highlighted procurement as important work in their reports.

Resolved that the Executive approved the Procurement Strategy.

118. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

119. **Capital Loan to Third Party**

Resolved that the Executive approved the recommendations within the confidential report.

(The Meeting ended at 9.15 pm)