

SWT Scrutiny Committee - 3 March 2021

Present: Councillor Gwil Wren (Chair)

Councillors Libby Lisgo, Ian Aldridge, Sue Buller, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Dave Mansell, Derek Perry, Nick Thwaites, Roger Habgood, Mark Lithgow and Hazel Prior-Sankey

Officers: Paul Fitzgerald, Amy Tregellas, Andrew Randell, Marcus Prouse, Dawn Adey, James Barrah, Chris Hall, Mark Leeman, Simon Lewis, Alison North and Chris Brown

Also Present: Councillors Janet Lloyd, Loretta Whetlor, John Hassall, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ross Henley, Peter Pilkington, Sarah Wakefield, Federica Smith-Roberts, Mark Blaker, Marcus Kravis, Mike Rigby, Chris Booth, Francesca Smith and Alan Wedderkopp

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

136. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Cavill, Stone and Wheatley.

Councillors Habgood, Prior-Sankey and Lithgow attended as substitutes.

137. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee

(Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 27 January and 3 February 2021 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 27 January and 3 February 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

138. 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 S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr Darch declared a personal interest as a friend of Mr and Mrs Langham.

139. **Resolution to adjourn items 10, 11 and 12.**

RESOLVED to adjourn Scrutiny Committee to resume at 6.15pm on the 4th March 2021 to consider the Performance report, 2020/21 Budget Monitoring Report Quarter 3 and Scrutiny Chair Annual Report.

140. **Public Participation**

The following members of the public had requested to speak in relation to item 5.

David Langham

I wish to make a formal complaint regarding the councils actions in allowing the continuation of the highly inappropriate homeless and rehabilitation encampment at Canonsgrove, Trull, a rural residential area.

As a long standing member of the local community, I have been dismayed by the lack of respect shown to the local population, the lack of governance and due diligence shown by the council and the inattention to due process and planning law consultation.

I request written confirmation of receipt of this complaint and confirmation that it will be duly considered, circulated and included in the ongoing decision making process regarding the future of the encampment. I understand that today is the last day for correspondence to be included in the March meeting.

I would like to highlight that the chief reason for my complaint is that my 3 young children have been subject to the most appalling and inappropriate sights and situations involving the residents of the encampment. I would not expect to have seen the prevalence of this type of behaviour in either inner city London or Bristol, where there is a significant police presence. The action to burden an ill-equipped rural community with the complex and dangerous issues that have been demonstrated by the inhabitants of the facility, is highly inappropriate.

I am completely outraged that as a local resident, at no stage have I been formally consulted in any way by the Council on this matter. The first correspondence to residents requesting consultation was a survey on behalf of the parish council last week. This confirms to me that there is a gross disregard for the local community and the absence of any governance, or independent audit of the process.

The local population appear to have been deliberately misled by the council that the encampment was intended an emergency measure only. This now appears to be a gross misrepresentation of the situation and an abuse of powers.

There is a clear difficulty faced by residents to accurately express their views for fear of appearing unsympathetic to the plight of the vulnerable and 'primary homeless'. The council has actively exploited this by not holding appropriate public consultation. I

therefore request that the elected councillors now whistleblow on this very poor and underhand performance by the council.

Andy Langham

I wanted to address you about the illegal homeless settlement at Cannonsgrove 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 and will be the subject of further challenge.

That said, I wanted to restate my (and many 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), here are my key points:

Firstly, This is a laudable and well intentioned proposal.... but..... the site is inappropriate

I am very concerned at the conduct of SWT, which has:

Set up an illegal settlement by breaching a S106 condition: you more than anyone know that ignorance is not a reasonable excuse to breach planning law. You should know better

You have conducted a flawed and prejudiced option appraisal which did not consider other sites for homeless accommodation as promised.

You have wasted (our) public money to justify your already determined result.

You have disingenuously misled residents, the options appraisal is a feasibility study to justify and enable your pre-determined decision.

We (your local residents whom you represent) are being disenfranchised by you our elected representatives.

As Council tax paying residents I/we don't expect SWT:

to be incompetent

to breach the law when it suits you.

to flagrantly ignore the interests of your long established residents

to not consult residents in a proper and transparent manner nor mislead on a promised options appraisal with no options.

to incompetently waste our Taxes

to use our tax funding to directly adversely affect and diminish our peace and quiet, and enjoyment of where we live

to compromise our and our children safety

SWT per se should be

censured for its conduct on this matter.....

ashamed of its actions for compromising the interests of (your) local residents in favour of a very small minority.

We deserve better than this. This is undemocratic.

I call upon SWT to :

- cease the illegal use of Canonsgrove by the end of March as Lockdown restrictions are eased
- withdraw the existing proposals forthwith
- conduct a fundamental review and reappraisal of the need and process, with a proper comprehensive, transparent and moderated process.
- hold accountable those who have conducted this compromised affair.

Andy Langham

Trull Residents Group

I write on behalf of Trull Residents' Group (TRG), having now been able to download SWT's Options Appraisal from the Council's website and consider its contents.

Appendix 5 of the Options Appraisal was only published yesterday, and Appendix 4 is to be published today, which is the final day for comments to be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee. That has prejudiced the ability of the community to review and respond to those late additions.

Report Recommendation

Your Officers recommend Option 1, which is a short-term extension of the lease at Canonsgrove. This would provide SWT with ?me 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.

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 ?me-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:

O p t i o n 2

TRG maintains its strong objection to Option 2, and supports your Officers recommendation that it is not progressed. This option is for a comprehensive and sizeable redevelopment of Canonsgrove with the provision of between 105 and 157 accommodation units including a 'hub' for homeless people with complex needs, additional accommodation for homeless people with fewer support needs, and 60-105 additional units for students/medical professionals/care/support.

TRG has submitted professionally-informed Topic Papers to the Options Appraisal which show that Option 2 (or any such ongoing / expanded use) would be contrary to:

- Existing planning and legal restrictions on the use of the site, designed to protect Community safety and amenity.
- Policies set out in Adopted and Emerging SWT Local Plans, the Adopted Trull Neighbourhood Plan (which forms part of the legal Development Plan) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 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 Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plan and NPPF 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. Policies require such provision to be within accessible, central locations, rather than in rural villages away from services and facilities.

Whilst it is clear that Officers do not recommend longer-term use of the site, any decision to go against that advice and 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 when it last considered the matter, but which was overlooked by the Executive and Officers who have instead produced a report focused on Canonsgrove.

Do Noth ing

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

Other Matter s

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. Contrary to what is said in the Options Appraisal, the survey presented the options which were known to the Parish Council at the time. 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 Parish Council survey shows that the vast majority of people favored 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 39 incidents of crime and an?-social behavior reported to the Police and 87 other occurrences of an?-social behavior reported to the Parish Council.

Summary andConclusions

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, subject to assurances regarding 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 Neighborhood 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

Trull Residents Group

Linda Brierley

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

Dawn Johnson
Dear Councillors,

I write with regards to item number 9 on your agenda for the Scrutiny Meeting to be held on 3rd March 2021 "Options appraisal for delivering future single rough sleeper and homelessness accommodation in SWT";

In the Options Appraisal it mentions that the YMCA has been supported by SWT in a successful bid for funding in order to buy the Gascony Hotel in Minehead. This will house 18 clients. If the Executive Committee decided to go against the Officer recommendation and go with Option 2 it would appear to all intents and purposes that YMCA would be the preferred provider for the district.

Yet we have another provider with much experience in this field and an in-depth knowledge of the town, built over 40 years. That provider is ARC, formerly Taunton Association for the homeless.

Alongside that experience and knowledge, they have capital reserves with which to respond to SWT's requirements following the Options Appraisal and are eager to help.

- They are financed via Housing Benefit rather than Government grants in the main. This means that they retain their independence rather than being beholden to government money that can come to an end or suffer cuts. This business model allows better levels of sustainability.
- Their Housing Benefit Bill to DWP IS £280/month from April 21, a rate that is favourable to DWP.
- ARC have a resident qualified GP offering direct primary healthcare who has worked with them for some years and have requests for rooms in their centre from a number of agencies including DWP, Mental Health, Nursing, Counselling etc
- Their current manager at Lindley House is very experienced in homeless issues and has been working directly with people who find themselves homeless in Taunton for 19 years.

What is unique about the provision and work at Canonsgrove? It would appear to be the standard now required of anyone dedicatedly working with supporting people who find themselves homeless. The YMCA Canonsgrove Housing Benefit Bill per person per week is "£369.52", almost a third higher than that at Lindley House run by ARC. The YMCA provision at Canonsgrove also incurs a bill for 3 meals a day per person whereas Lindley House have onsite kitchens and a chef creating meals from food donations.

I would expect to see all these factors taken into consideration within the Options Appraisal, not only as an assessment of Canonsgrove but within a true Options Appraisal which compares offers by any prospective provider. A local government site describes an options appraisal as a "technique for reviewing options" and further says "the pros and cons of each of these ways to be considered in terms of the benefits (financial or non - financial) that they can deliver". It is a comparison process not a let's look at one, decide for/against and then look at what other options we have.

This SWT Options Appraisal as designed is highly challengeable. There have been repeated claims that this is a prejudicial appraisal process. It has now been admitted by SWT that there has not been time to assess all other options within the appraisal process, just Canonsgrove.

If SWT are to get the best provision for people that find themselves homeless, there needs to be an appraisal of all options alongside each other so that all strengths and weaknesses of providers are considered.

I end with three questions. Do councillors really feel that this Options Appraisal has been honest, integral, open and transparent? Do councillors really feel that this Options Appraisal evidences the best council practice? Has it responded to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation from November 2020 that any appraisals involving Canonsgrove should involve communication with Trull and Comeytrowe?

Yours sincerely,

Dawn Johnson

141. **Scrutiny Committee Request/Recommendation Trackers**

(Copy of the Scrutiny Committee Action Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee Action Plan be noted.

142. **Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Scrutiny Committee 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 Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan be noted.

143. **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.

144. **Full Council Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Full Council 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 Full Council Forward Plan be noted.

145. **Options appraisal for delivering future single rough sleeper and homelessness accommodation in SWT**

The Executive in November 2020 requested officers to return in early 2021 to present the best options to deliver accommodation to support the identified demand and needs for single homeless and rough sleepers. This report provided;

- An update on progress made since November,
- Recommendations in relation to the future use of Canonsgrove, and
- Future actions and activity to increase the supply of accommodation and better outcomes for single homeless in the District.

Since the report to Executive in November 2020 the Council has progressed its support for single homeless by maintaining the volume of accommodation required to support some of the most vulnerable people in the District during the Covid crisis including the challenge of the second national lockdown. The following has been achieved:

Successful allocation of circa £1m Next Steps capital funding to support the YMCA Dulverton Group purchase the Gascony Hotel, Minehead providing eighteen units of single homeless accommodation and grant revenue funding to support the continuation of the Canonsgrove accommodation up to October 2021.

Established an understanding of the accommodation gap for Single Homeless in the District (87 units) and the relative demand of twelve requirement categories to reflect the variety of vulnerability and needs of the single homeless. The required accommodation need on an ongoing basis is 374 of which 287 is available on an on-going basis leaving 87 units of unsecured accommodation including Canonsgrove which needs to be retained or replaced to meet single homeless demand.

Produced a draft Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy setting out the aspirations and requirements of the Council to single homeless need and single homeless provision by 2027 (appendix 1)

Commenced discussions with existing and new partners to support the provision of new accommodation supply and ensure existing supply is supporting the outcomes identified in the draft Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy and avoid the eviction of rough sleepers once the Covid emergency has ended

Reduced the number of single homeless living in B&B to circa 10 households.

The Homeless Reduction Board has developed its Terms of Reference and will meet in May to drive forward improved commissioning and partnership working to achieve better outcomes for Somerset's most vulnerable people. The Homeless Reduction Board will ultimately seek to influence service delivery through an 'integrated commissioning' approach across health, care and housing.

SWT has also carried out an option appraisal on the future contribution of the Canonsgrove site. The recommendations of the option appraisal are presented below and the details of this appraisal form much of this report and appendix 2. The option appraisal was required to understand the future contribution of Canonsgrove to support the Council's ambition as presented in the report to Executive November 2020 and presented in more detail in the draft Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy (appendix 1).

The paper proposed a number of future steps should the Executive support the recommended option including;

- Return to Full Council for approval of the Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy along with implementation plan, any budget request, information about the first schemes and projects for approval or for noting as appropriate
- Negotiate with the owners of Canonsgrove Bridgewater and Taunton College (BTC) to extend the lease of units to cover the period up to March 2023 to support the most vulnerable homeless during Covid and for a period to allow alternative suitable provision to be secured.
- The service will develop a single homeless accommodation delivery plan to deliver the ambitions of the Single Homeless Accommodation strategy and establish an officer Delivery Panel to filter, prioritise and approve new supply opportunities. This panel will seek to meet both the accommodation and the support requirements of customers.
- Progress discussions around opportunities in relation to new or improved supply through current partners Arc and YMCA Dulverton group plus emerging partners such as Citizens Somerset and the SPV.
- Explore in greater detail the opportunity which a wholly owned corporate company could provide in terms of additional new Private Rented Sector supply and contribute towards reducing the accommodation bottleneck which is caused by insufficient move on or permanent accommodation for single homeless. This potential new supply would complement activity to increase provision through private and social landlords, Citizens Somerset and SWTs Housing Directorate.
- Develop a significant 2021/2022 and 2022/2-023 MHCLG Next Steps Accommodation bid both capital and revenue funding. Support bids by citizens Somerset and other organisations for Homes England funding. These will be picked up through normal approved delegation routes (approved separately through portfolio-holder, director and S151 Officer).
- The YMCA Dulverton Group will complete the Gascony hotel refurbishment for the start of the new financial year and will provide new long term supply for eighteen single homeless customers some of whom will be decanted from the current Covid emergency provision at the Beach Hotel.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Community engagement had been undertaken with Trull Parish Council, 17 incidents in relation to the Cannonsgrove accommodation had been reported in the last month to the Council and Police.
- Reassurance was provided by officers that the options appraisal had been an objective exercise.
- Monthly newsletters to residents were sent out keeping them informed of the Cannonsgrove accommodation.
- MHCLG were involved in assisting officers with working in a more constructive way with residents and the Parish Council. Considerable time and effort had been undertaken in fostering good relations alongside being objective and independent.
- The committee encouraged positive communications with the Parish Council and residents group.
- It was recognised there was significant controversy around the use of the site as well as positive news and successes around the use of the facility.
- Alternative sites had been considered. Timing and adapting the sites had been an issue in addition to funding to purchase the sites and costs involved.
- No new guidance had been received by Government due to the lockdown continuing into 2021.

- Sites explored could be shared to the committee but officers couldn't share this information openly due the risk of jeopardising potential future negotiations.
- Capital/Revenue funding was questioned to meet the 2027 homelessness target.
- It was questioned if a refurbishment programme was planned for Cannonsgrove,
- Officers had kept the Portfolio holder aware of the work undertaken by Trull Parish Council.
- Concerns were expressed over the transparency over the options appraisal with the budget for homelessness needing to be included.
- Most funding was through grant support and housing benefit claims. Once decanting occurred there was less assurance, moderate support was funded through lease costs through YMCA and Bridgwater College.
- Rough Sleepers Initiative funding provided support around this, it was anticipated there would be lots of capital and revenue available to bid next year.
- The committee welcomed the aspiration of the reduction of homelessness by 2027 which was considered a positive result of the pandemic. Although it was acknowledged there was a risk of homeless numbers increasing in the short term as a result of the impact of the pandemic.
- Reducing the instances of antisocial behaviour in the community was essential to manage the accommodation well as part of the decant strategy.
- Concerns were expressed in relation to the lack of options in the report.
- Community engagement work was required to work alongside and improve the relationship with residents and Parish Councils. Support from the Church and volunteers had been positives experienced.
- Concerns were expressed in relation to residents not being essential elements of the stakeholder analysis.
- A joint liaison committee between the parish Council, Residents Group and the Council was requested.

Scrutiny to comment on the following recommendations being made to the Executive:

- Only consider option 1, with clear wind down and end date of March 2023, but ideally 6 months before March 2023, having alternative location/s identified, therefore take out item 3.3 from the recommendation.
- Take into account the recent survey's report by the Trull Parish Council, which provides the needed evidence of the adverse impact of current use of Canonsgrove to the community.
- Provide better management, community safety measures by communicating with the residents to allay current and future concerns by:-
 - 1) Looking at alternative accommodations within the district close to all the amenities now.
 - 2) Work out a wider appraisal to deliver other accommodation options that are tested against the draft strategy with homelessness providers and support agencies, and inform Trull Residents Group, local Parish Councils about future plans, whereby other alternatives are identified and report back to the Scrutiny/SWT council within the next 6 months on plan to exit Canonsgrove.
 - 3) Create a joint liaison Committee to improve two way communication between the Council and relevant local stakeholders

146. **Quarter 3 Performance Report**

Due to the number of items being considered this item was deferred to a second Scrutiny meeting held on 4th March.

147. **2020/21 Budget Monitoring Quarter 3**

Due to the number of items being considered this item was deferred to a second Scrutiny meeting held on 4th March.

148. **Scrutiny Chair Annual Report**

Due to the number of items being considered this item was deferred to a second Scrutiny meeting held on 4th March.

149. **Establishment of a Task and Finish Group looking into funding sources for a Zero Carbon Retrofit programme for SWT's Council Housing stock**

The purpose of this report is to consider and decide whether to establish a Task and Finish Group investigating the topic of Council Housing Zero Carbon Retrofit and, if approved, to also establish the Terms of Reference for said Group (Appendix A).

As per the Somerset West and Taunton Council Constitution, the Scrutiny Committee may appoint Task and Finish Groups. At the 27th January 2021 Scrutiny Committee the Committee resolved that:

A Task and Finish Group on funding sources and approaches for a zero carbon retrofit programme for SWT's council housing is further investigated with a further report brought back to the Scrutiny Committee to decide on establishment, with Terms of Reference."

There are no risks identified with establishing this Group, or associated with the Corporate or Directorate Risk Registers, although the 2030 Carbon Neutrality target is identified on the Corporate Risk Register.

Background and Full details of the Report

As its title suggests a Task and Finish Group is set up for a specific purpose to undertake a review and report back within a defined timescale.

Task and Finish Groups allow Councillors to look at an issue in which they have a particular interest in more detail. They can take a variety of forms, from a detailed review to a short, sharp concentrated focus on a high profile issue. The length of a review and its scope will define how frequently a task group meets, but it is usual to have at least one meeting at the start for planning, and one (possibly two) at the end to settle the report's findings and recommendations. They offer the opportunity to use a variety of more diverse working methods (working flexibly to adapt to the needs of different reviews), including making visits, and use of interviews and publicity events to encourage community participation and public engagement in scrutiny. For example, the task and finish group can gather evidence through a variety of ways, such as:

- written evidence
- oral evidence and interviews with external and internal witnesses
- site visits
- visiting other organisations - partners, user groups, other councils
- research

- talking to people who are affected by the issue

Once the evidence has been gathered, the task and finish groups will produce a report to be submitted to the relevant Scrutiny Committee outlining details of the review process, evidence gathered, conclusions and subsequent recommendations. The Scrutiny Committee can then consider the report and decide whether to recommend the report on to the Executive, or Council as appropriate.

The final decision of whether to form a Group rests with Members of the Committee but it is recommended that Councillors undertake careful consideration of the advice of the relevant Director when seeking to establish. The Chair of Scrutiny has established in communication with the Housing Portfolio Holder, Cllr Fran Smith, that this group would not be duplicating the work of the Housing Development Member Working Group resolved to be established by Council in December 2020, but would be seeking to look at separate issues.

Links to Corporate Strategy – This topic is potentially considered to have some links to the Corporate Strategy as outlined in Appendix A – Terms of Reference, namely Priority Theme 1 on Our Environment and Economy - Objective 1: “Work towards making our District carbon neutral by 2030 - deliver projects based on a Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan that work toward this goal”. Consideration when setting up a Task and Finish Group should be given to:

- External or national priorities,
- Priorities identified within the SWT Corporate Strategy and in key policies such as the Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan (CNCR), (consideration should be given to which priorities may benefit from the intervention of scrutiny, for example, overview of progress against milestones or specific policy development in a priority area);
- Key decisions to be taken and the Executive and Scrutiny Committee’s Forward Plan;
- Evidence from recent public consultations or a trend emerging from Councillors’ case work which may be the subject of scrutiny

During the consideration of the item the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Energiesprong aimed for a zero carbon modular approach with the aim of bringing the costs down, this was an ambitious approach and needed to prove to be deliverable in the UK.
- The intention was to look at the Energiesprong approach in addition to the wider ambition of making housing more energy efficient.
- More flexibility in timescales was required to look at data to evaluate before the next financial year, with more effective results from data capture on retrofitting options in this time period.
- The committee not to solely look at one specific provider with alternatives also considered if they were viable options.
- The Terms of reference would be agreed at the first meeting.
- It was questioned how much of the HRA stock had solar panels fitted, a response would be provided following the meeting.
- The committee requested that the Housing Portfolio maintenance schedule should be relevant and included in any proposals on future retrofitting of housing stock.

Resolved that the Scrutiny Committee resolved to establish;

1.

- a) A cross party Task and Finish Group for Council Housing Zero Carbon Retrofit to investigate this topic in further depth and to report back to the Scrutiny Committee within four months (if possible).
- b) The Terms of Reference for the Council Housing Zero Carbon Retrofit Group (Appendix A) are approved.

2. Note: If the above recommendations are not approved the Task and Finish Group will not be established.

150. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the press and public**

Resolved that:- The Scrutiny Committee Recommended that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business on the ground that it involves 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).

151. **Confidential Capital Loan to Third Party**

The Section 151 Officer introduced the report and proposal and basis for the Loan to the third party.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Clarification was provided to the committee that these were unsecured loans
- Concerns were expressed that if other funding options couldn't be accessed why should the Council provide a loan. Members were made aware there was no responsibility from the Council to provide a loan.
- It was questioned what securities were being held by other loan providers.
- The bank would hold the first charge but the council would be looking to hold the second charge.
- A range of assets were held on the balance sheet.
- The risks from a budget perspective along with future liabilities was a concern for the committee and was also recognised by officers.

Scrutiny recommends Executive and Full Council approves the following:

- (a) Agree the principle of a secured capital loan expected to be for up to 9 years.
- (b) A Supplementary Budget as an Investment Loan for Service Purposes in the Council's Capital Programme.
- (c) Delegated authority to the S151 Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources, to agree the final detailed terms and conditions of the loan.

(The Meeting ended at 9.15 pm)