

## SWT Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 7th April, 2021,  
6.15 pm



Somerset West  
and Taunton

[SWT VIRTUAL MEETING WEBCAST LINK](#)

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**Members:** Gwil Wren (Chair), Libby Lisgo (Vice-Chair), Ian Aldridge, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Dave Mansell, Derek Perry, Phil Stone, Ray Tully, Nick Thwaites and Keith Wheatley

### Agenda

**1. Apologies**

To receive any apologies for absence.

**2. Minutes of the previous meetings of the Scrutiny Committee**

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

To receive and note any declarations of disclosable pecuniary or prejudicial or personal interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The personal interests of Councillors and Clerks of Somerset County Council, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes.)

**4. Public Participation**

The Chair to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public who have submitted any questions or statements, please note, a three minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak before Councillors debate the issue.

(Pages 5 - 28)

### **Temporary measures during the Coronavirus Pandemic**

Due to the Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), we will holding meetings in a virtual manner which will be live webcast on our website. Members of the public will still be able to register to speak and ask questions, which will then be read out by the Governance and Democracy Case Manager during Public Question Time and will either be answered by the Chair of the Committee, or the relevant Portfolio Holder, or be followed up with a written response.

**5. Scrutiny Committee Request/Recommendation Trackers** (Pages 29 - 38)

To update the Scrutiny Committee on the progress of resolutions and recommendations from previous meetings of the Committee.

**6. Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan** (Pages 39 - 40)

To receive items and review the Forward Plan.

**7. Executive Forward Plan** (Pages 41 - 44)

**8. Full Council Forward Plan** (Pages 45 - 48)

**9. Climate Change Delivery Partnership** (Pages 49 - 58)

This matter is the responsibility of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change Cllr Peter Pilkington.

The purpose of the report is to provide an update in relation to the opportunity to create a climate change delivery partnership with Sedgemoor District Council for the benefit of both organisations.

**10. Phosphates Update (Verbal Update)**

This matter is the responsibility of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change Cllr Peter Pilkington.

The purpose of the report is to provide an update in relation to the Phosphates impact in the areas of Planning and the Environment across the district.

**11. Executive Councillor Portfolio Holder Session - Housing** (Pages 59 - 78)

*To consider reports from Executive Councillors on their respective Portfolios;*

*i. Councillor Fran Smith – Housing*

*3.2 of the Scrutiny Terms of Reference state that the Scrutiny Committee may review and scrutinise and ask questions of*

*the Leader, lead Councillors, the Executive in relation to their portfolios.*

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'James Hassett', written in black ink.

**JAMES HASSETT  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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If you would like to ask a question or speak at a meeting, you will need to submit your request to a member of the Governance Team in advance of the meeting. You can request to speak at a Council meeting by emailing your full name, the agenda item and your question to the Governance Team using [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

Any requests need to be received by 4pm on the day that provides 2 clear working days before the meeting (excluding the day of the meeting itself). For example, if the meeting is due to take place on a Tuesday, requests need to be received by 4pm on the Thursday prior to the meeting.

The Governance and Democracy Case Manager will take the details of your question or speech and will distribute them to the Committee prior to the meeting. The Chair will then invite you to speak at the beginning of the meeting under the agenda item Public Question Time, but speaking is limited to three minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes and you can only speak to the Committee once. If there are a group of people attending to speak about a particular item then a representative should be chosen to speak on behalf of the group.

Please see below for Temporary Measures during Coronavirus Pandemic and the changes we are making to public participation:-

Due to the Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), we will holding meetings in a virtual manner which will be live webcast on our website. Members of the public will still be able to register to speak and ask questions, which will then be read out by the Governance and Democracy Case Manager during Public Question Time and will be answered by the Portfolio Holder or followed up with a written response.

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For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team via email: [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

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**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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 Nothing***

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 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. 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 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, 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 Cannonsgrove 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 Cannonsgrove.
  - 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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)



## SWT Scrutiny Committee - 4 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, Ray Tully, Roger Habgood and Hazel Prior-Sankey

Officers: Paul Fitzgerald, Andrew Randell, Marcus Prouse, Emily Collacott, Chris Hall, Alison North, Councillor Peter Pilkington (Portfolio Holder for Climate Change), Malcolm Riches and Richard Sealy

Also Present: Councillors Ross Henley, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

151. **Adjourned from Scrutiny Committee held on 03.03.2021) Adjourned Scrutiny Committee meeting from 3rd March 2021 restarted at 6.15pm**

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

The report provided an update on the council's performance for the first 9 months (April – December) of the 2020/21 financial year. The report includes information for a range of key performance indicators.

As part of the Councils commitment to transparency and accountability this report provides an update on performance for a number of key indicators across a range of council services.

Impact of Covid-19. There had been a continued impact on the work of the Council as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Q1 corporate performance report provided a more detailed update on the specific additional work undertaken by the council between April and July. Many of these tasks have continued and the pandemic has still had a significant impact on the council's activity and workload. In recent months the rapid moves from the second national lockdown in November 2020 through Tiers 2, 3 and 4 and into the current third national lockdown have presented significant challenges in administering things such as the business grant schemes. Further funding has also been provided by Government to support the discretionary element of the Test and Trace payments scheme. Good progress is however being made in quickly distributing grants to eligible businesses. In addition we are diverting resource to provide critical assistance to the NHS in making appointments for the Covid vaccination programme.

Key Performance Indicators The table in Appendix 1 includes the councils Key Performance Indicators and shows how the council has performed for the first 9 months of the 2020/21 financial year. The table also includes a "direction of travel" arrow to show whether performance has improved, worsened or stayed the same, since the last corporate performance report which was for the end of September. For the majority of indicators the target has either been met or, in many cases, has been exceeded. The direction of travel shows that performance has reduced slightly for 9 of the indicators, but the majority of them are still within target. Overall there are 3 'Red' and 2 'Amber'

indicators, which are being monitored closely. More information is provided below regarding the red and amber indicators. For the indicators that were marked as red at the end of Q2 (Complaint and FOI response timescales), monthly figures have been included to show how performance has improved significantly over the last 3 months.

Number of complaints responded to in 10 working days The performance indicator remains red and below target. Realistically, as the indicator is cumulative, we are likely to remain below target for the remainder of this financial year. In view of the poor performance identified earlier in the year a significant amount of work has been put into both improving response times and identifying changes and improvements to the process. This work is beginning to pay dividends and the monthly trend over the past 3 months shows clear and sustained improvement. A more detailed update is provided in Appendix 2.

Number of FOI requests responded to in 20 working days Again this has been an area of focus in view of the poor performance identified earlier in the year. However, this indicator also needs to be considered against the backdrop of the Covid crisis and the steer from Government that local authorities could relax their response times to FOI requests in order to focus on immediate Covid related priorities. The figures for the last three months demonstrated continued improvement and for December 2020 were within target. More detail is provided in Appendix 2.

Percentage of Licensing Requests processed within timescales Despite falling short of the target, the Licensing service have met all statutory obligations. The majority of applications not completed within the target timeframe were made in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 and received tacit consent; this is where a licence is treated as having been granted if the objection period passes without an objection or the Licensing Authority does not determine the application within a prescribed time period. Tacit consent is something the Licensing service is wary of as it can, in some cases such as caravan site and pavement licensing, result in the granting of a licence without conditions which are required to uphold the principals and objectives of those regimes. This is not the case with applications made in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003, where conditions do apply whether that application receives tacit consent or not.

The delay in completing these Licensing Act 2003 applications was at the end of the process; issuing the licence document following the completion of all initial steps i.e. their being logged on the Licensing back office system, circulation to responsible authorities and determination following the objection period. This was part of a deliberate prioritisation and balancing of work pressures. The backfilling of vacant roles within the team has enabled the service to catch up and clear the bulk of this backlog, with only a small amount remaining. Performance in Q4 is therefore expected to be better.

Business Rates & Council Tax Collection Rates The cumulative collection rates for both are showing as amber for the end of Q3 because both were below target. The targets shown in Appendix 1 are for the end of year position, but we also track progress against monthly targets. For the end of Q3 the targets and actuals were as detailed below:

Realistically we are unlikely to hit the collection targets for either this year. We have remained surprisingly close to our end of month targets despite the economic impact of the Covid crisis. We have been unable to take any court action for unpaid debts this financial year. We have undertaken limited pre-court action, but this has been impacted by resourcing constraints resulting from the need to process business grants. In addition, we have quite consciously taken a more lenient approach to recovery activity this year in order to try and help both Business Rate and Council Tax payers experiencing difficulty (many for the first time) through the economic impact of the crisis.



The Government's response to Covid has also had a significant impact on the amount of Business Rates actually collectable. At the point of undertaking annual billing in February 2020 we raised a net collectable debit of £60.1m. In March 2020, in response to Covid, Government extended relief to 100% for all small, retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. This had the effect of reducing the collectable debit to £38m and makes a meaningful year-to-year comparison between collection rates difficult

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

- Waste and recycling collection rates and fly tipping were discussed, it was acknowledged that there had been a reduction in rates as a result of the pandemic and a change of contractor coinciding with the time of the first lockdown.
- Accurate performance statistics based on productivity across the organisation were requested. Measures of performance were requested going forward such as time recording.
- The Somerset Waste Partnership was made up from all partners and should be recognised as part of the council services. The change of contractor experienced some challenges which had largely been resolved, there still remained the risk of staffing levels through the remainder of the pandemic.
- A number of staff and operators had to self-isolate leaving a disruption to some collections.
- 200 applications in planning had been held up due to habitat assessment regulations as a result of the ongoing phosphate levels across the district.
- It was requested if there was a timeframe to the improvement of the complaints process and recognising complaints needed to be treated as a priority. It was recognised there had been a cultural attitude to complaints which was being addressed to give greater priority.
- It was questioned what impact the business rates holiday had on the service.
- Increasing the target for a green criteria to a higher percentage level was questioned.
- Reassurance was provided that no customers have suffered due to licensing application, the delays were due to the completion of paperwork and had not impacted on customers. Licensing visits had been restricted due to the pandemic and there also had been staff absence matters due to the pandemic.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the Quarter 3 Corporate Performance Report.

### 153. **2020/21 Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 3 (31 December 2020)**

This report provided an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Council for the financial year 2020/21 (as at 31 December 2020).

The position this year is significantly affected by COVID – both in terms of large additional sums spent on issuing financial assistance to local businesses and council tax payers, and direct impact on the Council's service costs and income. Additional COVID related financial pressures, through additional costs and income losses, are forecast to be £7.3m for the year. This is partly offset by projected £5.4m emergency grant funding from Government, but has also required the Council to reprioritise funds and support the annual budget from reserves. The net impact of COVID on the Council's own resources

is therefore projected to be £1.9m for the year. Despite this, the Council remains financially resilient and continues to forecast adequate reserve balances.

The current Revenue Budget forecast was summarised:-

General Fund Revenue:- Projected £1.466m underspend (£245k overspend relating to COVID and a net underspend of £1.711m for non-COVID)

Housing Fund Revenue:- Projected £274k underspend

Although services were projecting fairly large underspends with the General Fund, this is largely due to timing of spend. Based on the Q3 projected year end position, budget holders have indicated proposals to carry forward £1.277m of expenditure into next year's budget, which if approved would effectively reduce the underspend to £189k. These proposals will be finalised at the year end.

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

- External Operations and Climate change set out in table 1 was considered, a comparison with the budget considered in February and a possible disparity was raised.
- The increase in the budget could have been in relation to capital charges and depreciation, this would be taken away for a response to be provided following the meeting.
- Page 143 detailing the senior management budget was questioned with the reasoning for difference in costs compared to the budget report.
- Page 145 – more information was requested relating to the contribution towards capital cost to investment properties. This was as a result of overachieving on net budget in this financial year.
- Page 146 – a significant backlog of arears was questioned, with more information requested.
- Capital budget and HRA budget changes and adjustments as reported at the end of December compared with the new financial year were questioned.
- A senior management underspend was reported in the budget due to the senior management restructure the budget was not being needed to support staffing costs.
- Work to carry over budgets was being undertaken, there remained a budget for IT member training which would be utilised for Councillors shortly.
- Review of IT heritage systems was questions along with the systems changes planned and required for the future.
- Major systems had been in place with future planning and timing priority of this being planned currently. This could be shared with the Committee if helpful.
- Having large underspends was a concern and was not considered good financial management in future years. It was acknowledged that this was a significantly difficult year but and underspends would be avoided in future years.
- A long term asset maintenance programme was being created, this was acknowledged as a risk with the potential for unforeseen maintenance going forward until the programme has been completed.

The Scrutiny Committee reviewed and noted the Council's forecast financial performance and projected reserves position for 2020/21 financial year as at 31 December 2020.

154. **Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2020/21**

It was a great honour to have been re-appointed as Chair of the Somerset West and Taunton Scrutiny Committee by my Councillor peers at the Annual General Meeting of Council in May last year.

I had hoped that the 'transition' we had embarked on in 2019/20 would continue but as we all know the Covid pandemic severely disrupted normal life including this Council. As a result we had to move to virtual meetings on Zoom and this took some adjusting to. However once we had established a remote working pattern things bedded down quickly and the Committee was able to get to grips with business without too much difficulty.

In 2019 the Government had published new Guidance for Scrutiny Committees which aimed to clarify and broaden their role and influence. Both I and the Vice-Chair have always been keen to ensure that Scrutiny Councillors gained a greater oversight of their work programme than was done previously. This was to give us a stronger voice over the Executive reports we wished to look at in detail and enable maximum influence to be exerted. We also wanted to be more proactive and investigate external matters which had a bearing on the residents of our area.

The Leader of the Council continued to encourage transparency and the involvement of members and the programme of Briefings to provide information and background on Council business was able to continue successfully online. This allowed these matters to be aired and questioned without impinging on the committee process where time is limited.

As a Scrutiny Committee formulating our programme of work and getting updates on our suggestions and recommendations is a key way that this Council can demonstrate the transparency and accountability that the residents of Somerset West and Taunton expect from their decision-makers. Scrutiny's role as critical friend of the Executive is vital in ensuring that the voice of the community is heard and should result in more inclusive decision making.

The Scrutiny Committee formally resolved that the report is considered at Full Council and thanked the Chair for his Annual Report.

(The Meeting ended at 7.43 pm)



**SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION TRACKER 2020/21**

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Recommendation	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Final Decision/ Response to recommendation/	Date response of	Implemented?	Officer Comments/Update
03/06/20	<b>Resolved:-</b> The Committee resolved to establish a task and finish group to examine the current provision in relation to public transport in the district and what is required to increase provision and improved modal links including consideration of carbon neutrality	Scrutiny Cttee	N/A	N/A	YES	Task and Finish Group has been established and expects to conclude its work with a final report before the end of the municipal year.
01/07/20	<b>Resolved:</b> - The Scrutiny Committee recommend that the Council does not sign the Charter of compassion at Full Council.	Cllr Chris Booth – PFH Community	Report withdrawn from consideration by Council.	07/07/20	YES	N/A  Agenda Item 5

02/09/20	<b>Requested</b> that the Director of Development and Place and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, in consultation with Taunton Councillors, consider including Visit Taunton in addition to the Taunton Chamber of Commerce as the grant distributing bodies for Taunton.	Council / Cllr Marcus Kravis – PFH Asset Mgt and Economic Development	Agreed that the Director of Development and Place and Economic Development Portfolio Holder consult with councillors from the Taunton Charter Trustees alongside the Taunton Chamber of Commerce as part of the Working Group for Taunton.	29/09/20 at Council	YES	N/A
30/09/20	In the light of the recent adoption by Council of policy on an Affordable Employment Land Local Development Order, the Scrutiny Committee recommend to the Executive a new fund of £575,000 is allocated towards Employment Site enabling schemes to support that policy.	Executive/ Cllr Ross Henley – PFH Corporate Resources	SMT and the Executive will explore this proposal as part of the budget and medium term financial plan preparation.	28/10/20	TBD	External Economic Development confirm. Ops to

07/10/20	<b>Firepool - 2.9</b> The committee request that a risk assessment be put in place recognising the recent Natural England advice around phosphates and potential impacts on the projects.	Exec and Council/ Cllr M Kravis – PFH Asset Mgt and Economic Development	The (Scrutiny) committee request that a risk assessment be put in place recognising the recent Natural England advice around phosphates and potential impacts on the projects.	04/11/20 - Council	YES	N/A
14/10/20	<b>Climate Strategy - 2.5</b> The Committee request that the report to full council gives more details for proposals on the groups to take forward the strategy and action plan, including on member involvement, or that these details are brought back to a future Scrutiny meeting before they are finalised.	Executive / Cllr P Pilkington – PFH Climate Change	N/A	20/10/20 and 26/10/20 Exec and Council	NOT AGREED	N/A

14/10/20	<b>Climate Strategy</b> - 2.6 £50k of £500k Climate Change fund (referred to in 2.4) to be allocated for tree planting.	Executive / Cllr P Pilkington – PFH Climate Change	5) A report on allocations for the £500k “Climate Change Fund” budget be taken at an early stage to Scrutiny Committee for comment.	26/10/20 – Council 09/02/21 & 17/02/21	AGREED	At the Budget meetings of the Executive and Council it was agreed to add into the budget proposals:- £100,000 towards further tree planting across the district.
14/10/20	<b>Coastal Works B3191</b> - The committee wished to support moves to protect the coastline and coastal communities, there were significant concerns expressed in relation to the potential for responsibility and long term liability and recommend Executive and Full Council fully understand and request details on the long term liabilities going forward to ensure a full understanding of the longevity of the scheme and mitigate long term liability and risk.	Executive & Full Council – Cllr S Wakefield PFH Environmental Services	Scrutiny committee’s concerns were discussed by the Executive Members and it was considered that whilst there may be risks in the longer term for asset maintenance the offer presented to Council by SCC and the Environment Agency is more favourable then we could achieve from other sources and requires no financial investment from SWT at this stage or for many years to come. Executive Committee supported the recommendations as presented by the portfolio holder.	20/10/20 & 01/12/20 Exec and Full Council	AGREED IN PART	N/A



04/11/20	<p><b>Rough Sleeper Accommodation:</b> The Scrutiny Committee expected the Executive to take full regard of the comments and concerns raised at Scrutiny and to take these into account when making a full decision on this matter. In particular, 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 Comeytrove Parish Councils as well as local residents.</p>	Executive / Cllr F Smith – PFH Housing	<b>Resolved</b> that the Executive noted the proposed steps and timeline outlined in 4.16 including the resource requirements to undertake the options appraisal proposed to bring back a recommended solution.	18/11/20 Executive	AGREED IN PART	Officers in the Housing Directorate to update on the mechanics of the appraisal and how Scrutiny's recommendation was taken on board.
04/11/20	<p><b>EV Charging Strategy:</b> 2. Requested that the Report to Full Council contains more detail on how the Strategy will be delivered in the SWT area.</p>	Executive & Full Council / Cllr P Pilkington PFH Climate Change	N/A	18/11/20 Exec & 15/12/20 Full Council	AGREED	Officers did provide further detail in the Full Council report

02/12/20	<p><b>VCS Grants Review:</b> As part of the review of the Voluntary and Community Sector Grants, the increased workload for the two Citizens Advice Bureaus that cover the SWT area must be recognised accordingly with a grant increase in line with their objectives to meet increased demands due to Covid, and that this support is equalized across population areas that they cover, but not to the detriment of other organisations being funded by SWT.</p>	Executive / Cllr C Booth PFH Community	<p>An appendix was included with the report to Executive which explained that; It can be seen that Taunton CAB receives £125,610 for a population of 120,000, of which £42,000 is debt and benefit advice for tenants of SWT Council, giving a net figure of £83,610. West Somerset Advice Bureau gets £30,600 for a population of 35,000. The conclusion that can be drawn is that there is no inequality in funding between the two bureaux. However, Taunton CAB gains a specific funding input for advice to tenants who exclusively live within Taunton CAB catchment and which comes from their rental payments, there being no SWT tenants in the former West Somerset area.</p>	16/12/20 Executive	PART AGREED	N/A
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02/12/20	<p><b>Extension of Public Space Belvedere Road:</b> The Committee consider that the historic importance of the building to Taunton in the long term requires that its future needs to be secured and the decision of its future needs to be taken at Full Council.</p>	Executive / Cllr M Kravis PFH Asset Management and Economic Development	<p>1) The creation of a cross party working group to consider the options available for Flook House and the surrounding area. With a recommendation from this group being presented to Executive committee on the 21 April 2021; and</p> <p>2) That delegated authority be granted to the Portfolio Holder for Asset Management, along with the Director for External Operations and Climate Change to appoint Members to the working group and to agree the terms of reference for that group.</p>	16/12/20	NOT AGREED	The Executive commissioned a cross-party Working Group, it is unclear if this will report to Council as requested by Scrutiny.
27/01/21	<p><b>HRA Revenue and Capital budget setting 21/22, including Dwelling Rent setting 21/22 and 30 year Business Plan Review 6.</b> 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</p>	Scrutiny Committee	<p><b>Scrutiny Committee</b> – That the Scrutiny Committee resolved to establish; 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.</p>	03/03/21	Yes	Task and Finish Group to be established.

03/03/21	<p><b>Options appraisal for delivering future single rough sleeper and homelessness accommodation in SWT</b></p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee, therefore recommend that, the Executive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only consider <b>option 1</b>, 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Provide better management, community safety measures by communicating with the residents to allay</li> </ul>	Executive / Cllr F Smith (PFH Housing)	<b>Executive -</b>	17/03/21		TBC
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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.
- Create a joint liaison Committee to improve

	two way communication between the Council and relevant local stakeholders.					
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**Total Recommendations for 20/21:**

**Agreed:**

**Agreed in Part:**

**Not Agreed:**

**TBD: 1**

**SCRUTINY**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Draft Agenda Items</b>	<b>Lead PFH/ Lead Officer</b>	<b>Executive Report?</b>
<b>7th April 2021</b>	Executive Cllr PFH Session (Cllr F Smith - Housing)	Executive Members various	No
Virtual	Phosphates Update	Cllr M Rigby / P. Browning	No
	Climate Change Delivery Partnership	Cllr P Pilkington / C. Hall	Yes
<b>28th April 2021</b>	Post Office Ltd (Richard Hall - External Affairs Manager South England and Wales / Jason Collins Network Team)	N/A	No
<b>Special</b>	<i>No other items</i>		
<b>19th May 2021</b>	Executive Cllr PFH Session - Leader of the Council	Executive Members various	No
<b>June 2021</b>	Executive Cllr PFH Session - Cllr Wakefield and Cllr Allen	Executive Members various	No
	Single Homelessness Accomodation Strategy	Cllr F Smith/ M. Leeman	Yes
<b>July 2021</b>	Belvedere Road Public Space/ Flook House	Cllr M Kravis / C. Hall	
<b>August 2021</b>			
<b>September 2021</b>			
<b>October 2021</b>			
<b>November 2021</b>			
<b>December 2021</b>			
<b>January 2022</b>			





<b>Executive Meeting</b>	<b>Draft Agenda Items</b>
<b>21 April 2021</b>	Member Training and Development Policy
Exec RD = 9 April	Anti-Fraud Framework
Informal Exec RD = 16 March	Climate Change Delivery Partnership
SMT RD = 3 March	Council Governance Arrangements Working Group Update
<b>26 May 2021</b>	Risk Management Report
<b>venue =</b>	
Exec RD =	
Informal Exec RD =	
SMT RD =	
<b>16 June 2021</b>	Single Homelessness Accommodation Strategy
<b>venue =</b>	
Exec RD = 4 June	
Informal Exec RD = 11 May	
SMT RD = 28 April	
<b>21 July 2021</b>	Belvedere Road Public Space
<b>venue =</b>	
Exec RD = 9 July	
Informal Exec RD = 15 June	
SMT RD = 2 June	
<b>18 August 2021</b>	
<b>venue =</b>	
Exec RD = 6 August	
Informal Exec RD = 13 July	

SMT RD = 30 June	
<b>15 September 2021</b>	Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town – Feedback
<b>venue =</b>	Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide
Exec RD = 3 September	
Informal Exec RD = 10 August	
SMT RD = 28 July	
<b>20 October 2021</b>	
<b>venue =</b>	
Exec RD = 8 October	
Informal Exec RD = 14 September	
SMT RD = 1 September	
<b>17 November 2021</b>	Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review
<b>venue =</b>	
Exec RD = 5 November	
Informal Exec RD = 12 October	
SMT RD = 29 September	
<b>15 December 2021</b>	
<b>venue =</b>	
Exec RD = 3 December	
Informal Exec RD = 9 November	
SMT RD = 27 October	

<b>19 January 2022</b>	
venue =	
Exec RD = 7 January	
Informal Exec RD = 7 December	
SMT RD = 24 November	
<b>Budget - Dates TBC</b>	
venue =	
Exec RD =	
Informal Exec RD =	
SMT RD =	
<b>16 February 2022</b>	
venue =	
Exec RD = 4 February	
Informal Exec RD = 11 January	
SMT RD = 22 December	
<b>16 March 2022</b>	
venue =	
Exec RD = 4 March	
Informal Exec RD = 8 February	
SMT RD = 26 January	
<b>20 April 2022</b>	
venue =	
Exec RD = 8 April	

Informal Exec RD = 15 March	
SMT RD = 2 March	
<b>Items to be Confirmed</b>	

**FULL COUNCIL**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Report Deadline</b>	<b>Draft Agenda Items</b>
<b>30 March 2021</b>	<b>18 March 2021</b>	Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategies 2021/22
		Pay Policy
		Constitution Update Report
		Community Governance Review for the Unparished Area of Taunton
		Political Allocation
		Capital Loan to Third Party (confidential)
		Scutiny Chair Report
		Audit Chair Report
		PFH Annual Reports
		<b>NO MORE ITEMS</b>
<b>11 May 2021</b>	<b>29 April 2021</b>	<b>Annual Council Meeting</b>
<b>Potentially could move to 27 April 2021</b>	<b>15 April 2021</b>	Heritage Update - Confidential
		Council Governance Arrangements Working Group Update
		Decisions taken under the urgency rules
		Review of the Commercial Property Investment Activity and Performance Report
<b>6 July 2021</b>	<b>24 June 2021</b>	Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town – Feedback
		Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide
<b>7 September 2021</b>	<b>25 August 2021</b>	Annual Review of the Commercial Property Investment Strategy

<b>7 December 2021</b>	<b>25 November 2021</b>	Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review
<b>8 February 2022</b>	<b>27 January 2022</b>	
<b>Budget Full Council</b>	<b>Dates TBC</b>	
<b>Budget Only</b>		
<b>29 March 2022</b>	<b>17 March 2022</b>	
<b>10 May 2022</b>	<b>28 April 2022</b>	Annual Council Meeting

<b>ITEMS TO BE CONFIRMED</b>	Skate Park Petition Update to be brought back in July 2021	





# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

## **Scrutiny Committee 7<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

### **Climate Change Delivery Partnership**

**This matter is the responsibility of: Cllr Peter Pilkington Lead Member for Climate Change.**

**Report Author: Chris Hall – Assistant Director Climate Change, Regulatory Services and Asset Management**

#### **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Council has the opportunity to create a climate change delivery partnership with Sedgemoor District Council for the benefit of both organisations.
- 1.2 The Partnership if approved will be established with Somerset West and Taunton leading on its delivery. The employees from Sedgemoor District Council will be seconded to SWT with SDC continuing to pay the associated costs of these employees and their proportion of the projects delivered.
- 1.3 A Member Consultation Panel would be created to represent the needs of both councils.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Scrutiny support to Executive:
- 2.2 That Somerset West and Taunton lead the creation and operation of a Joint Climate Change Delivery Partnership.
- 2.3 That impacted employees of Sedgemoor District Council will be seconded from Sedgemoor District Council to Somerset West and Taunton Council.
- 2.4 That a legal agreement is created for the partnership setting out cost and resource allocations, with delegated authority to the Director of External Operations and Climate Change, the Assistant Director for Climate Change, Regulatory Services and Asset Management, in consultation with the Climate Change portfolio holder to negotiate the final detail.
- 2.6 The creation of the Joint Consultation Panel with delegated authority to the Director of External Operations and Climate Change, the Assistant Director for Climate Change, Regulatory Services and Asset Management, in consultation with the Climate Change portfolio holder to create the Terms of Reference.

### **3. Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 If this Partnership is not supported, the opportunity to combine resources and share knowledge will be lost.
- 3.2 Consideration was given to offering this same service to other Districts, however, negotiating on wider working would likely delay the delivery options and we are very much focused on this being a climate emergency. The connectivity with Sedgemoor District Council also supports the Stronger Somerset model of two Unitary Authorities. Once up and running we will share our experience with the other Districts and the option for them to join will be considered on a case by case basis.
- 3.3 There is a risk that the Partnership may have its resources at Assistant Director and Programme Manager level spread too thinly in establishing this Partnership, and the ongoing running of it. It is considered that the benefits of a successful delivery partnership will outweigh any initial resourcing pressure.

### **4. Background and Full details of the Report**

- 4.1 Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) and Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) have been in discussion at an officer level as to the potential benefits of joining up their Climate Change delivery activity.
- 4.2 Both Councils have approved the Somerset wide Climate Emergency Strategy and have an adopted localised action plan.
- 4.3 Many of the delivery ambitions are the same for both Councils and by sharing the project delivery resource creates an environment to centralise knowledge and experience, minimise duplication, and potentially deliver ambitions more quickly with the benefits of economies of scale.
- 4.4 The joined up service would acknowledge the sovereignty and prioritisation of both Councils as well as their independent finances. The attached governance diagram and section 5 of the report provides more detail on this.
- 4.5 The proposal has considered the ways of achieving financial transparency. Through this process officers have excluded the option of the seconded resourced from Sedgemoor District Council only working on SDC project delivery. This option has only limited benefits to both organisations as there would remain a segregation of the works rather than combination and removal of duplication.
- 4.6 The proposal is for the team to work as a whole on the delivery of the agreed actions. This enables a crossover of knowledge and skills and prevents

duplication. The proposed funding mechanism would see the contribution from SDC considered as a proportion of the new total and the work across the agreed priorities is delivered with that proportion back to SDC. The proposed contribution from SDC would be for two Project Delivery employees, this combined with SWT's three would produce an allocation of 60% to SWT and 40% to SDC. This allows all resources to be shared and the benefit of the activities increase.

- 4.7 The proportional option is also considered to have greater benefits and clearer lines of responsibility for actions being delivered.
- 4.8 Under this option Somerset West and Taunton take on line management responsibilities. There would be no change to the employees' terms and conditions of employment for secondments.
- 4.9 This would require an increase to the Somerset West and Taunton establishment number to accommodate the secondments and other roles identified.
- 4.10 The SWT Climate Change Programme Manger would work with the appropriate SDC Strategic Manager to agree on the areas of focus, whilst we anticipate these will broadly be the same we see benefit in the approach as being able to flex to suit a particular authority need or interest. We further consider that this joined up service would review the two authorities exiting plans and bring them together as a central list for monitoring and review. This could be a quick win for the delivery partnership and prevent duplication of works for both authorities whilst retaining transparency.
- 4.11 On 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020 Somerset West and Taunton Council declared an Ecological Emergency, as part of this declaration we have committed to recruit an Ecological Strategist to enable the council to create an Ecological strategy and action plan, the post holder will also review our Carbon Neutrality Climate Resilience plan to ensure that carbon reduction or off setting measures do not inadvertently cause ecological harm. SDC as potential partners were offered the opportunity to jointly fund and receive the benefits of the new Ecological Strategist role, they see this as a further opportunity to them and have agreed to fund this SWT post on a 50/50 basis, with a 50/50 split of the work once the partnership is in place.
- 4.12 The work of the new joint team would be focused on the delivery of activities under their direct control as well as collation of data from delivery activities across the wider organisation. It is recognised that the action plans of both councils have activity that is best delivered by the wider corporate team. A good example of this might be the work to council housing stock. Whilst this delivery work sits outside of the Climate Team structure the delivered actions against the CNCR plan are within the Climate teams' remit, this ensures the Council can lay claim to the positive benefits in a centralised way, but without the team taking undue credit for the delivery of works by others. The team will

not interfere with the approval or governance of projects that sit elsewhere in the organisation.

- 4.13 Funding opportunities come up with increasing regularity, many of these are speculative and can divert attention and slow delivery of agreed priorities due to the level of information required and the uncertainty of success. The joint team will actively engage with funding opportunities or grants where there is a direct link to an agreed priority project allocated “current” status, beyond that the team will not submit speculative bids unless additional resources are specifically provided.
- 4.14 Somerset West and Taunton are proposing a funding Bid Writer to focus on climate change activity as set described above, this is proposed as a pilot funded from the CNCR budget for 12 months with the aim of it becoming self-financing through successful bid activity in the longer term, if this cannot be achieved within the 12 month period then the role will not continue.

## **5. The Delivery Partnership and Governance**

- 5.1 The proposal would see Sedgemoor District Council resources seconded to SWT and fit within our existing organisational structure for Climate Change shown at Appendix A1. This allows the benefits of working together to be established early, and bring forward the connectivity of our priorities preventing duplication.
- 5.2 Officers from both councils recognise the importance of Member engagement within this delivery partnership. The proposal being put forward is that the Somerset West and Taunton establish a joint Member Consultation Panel with appropriate cross party representation from each Authority.
- 5.3 The Panel is proposed to provide a means of engaging with each authority on a more detailed level, Appendix A2 shows a diagram of the proposed governance structure both for officers and Members.
- 5.4 The proposed make-up of the cross party Consultation Panel would consist of the Climate Change and relevant portfolio holder from SDC and SWT and two other Member nominations as approved by Full Council of each authority.

## **6. Resourcing / Employee consultation**

- 6.1 The proposed structure is identified as Appendix A1 It combines the existing Climate Change Team for Somerset West and Taunton Council with new vacant roles that have been approved by SLT for an Ecological Specialist, a Funding Bid writer, and a multi-District role to support the delivery of the Somerset Wide Implementation Board, in addition to the roles that would be seconded from Sedgemoor District Council.
- 6.2 The current Somerset West and Taunton Posts are funded.

6.3 The Ecological Specialist role is to be funded 100% by SWT until the partnership is in place at which point it will shift to 50% from Somerset West and Taunton’s CNCR budget, and 50% from Sedgemoor District Council.

6.4 The Multi District Project Management role is to be funded equally by the four Districts and represent our combined needs within the Somerset wide Implementation Board and Senior Management Group.

**7. Links to Corporate Strategy**

7.1 Environment and Economy:

7.2 Shape and protect our built and natural environment, supported by a refreshed Local Plan and develop our heritage, cultural and leisure offer including a clear vision and delivery plan for the Taunton Garden Town

7.3 Encourage wealth creation and economic growth throughout the District by attracting inward investment, enabling research and innovation, improving the skills of the local workforce and seeking to ensure the provision of adequate and affordable employment land to meet different business needs.

**7. Finance / Resource Implications**

7.1 A budget increase would be required to create this Partnership these new costs will be offset by the Partnership contributions received from SDC and the contributions to the Multi District Project Manager role as set out in Table 1. All costs for SWT will be met by the CNCR money as already planned.

7.2 For the period of secondments SDC will continue to pay their employees and the associated employment costs.

7.3 Our Council's existing posts are already funded.

7.4 Our Council’s share of the new posts (Ecological Strategist, Multi District Project Manager, Funding Bid Writer) will be funded from our CNCR budget in accordance with the existing approval process.

7.5 Each council will continue to be responsible for funding actions within the approved list based on their location, e.g. Tree planting within SWT will be funded by SWT etc. There may be economies of scale that can be achieved and these too will be applied on the volume and geography of the work.

**Table 1**

Role	SWT Salary inc. oncosts budget Increase	Funding
Climate Change Project Manager	No change	100% SWT
Climate Change Project Manager	No change	100% SWT

Climate Change Project Manager	No change	100% SWT
Climate Delivery Officer	£38,790	100% SDC
Climate Change Project Manager	£48,710	100% SDC
Project Support	No change	100% SWT
Ecological Strategist	£49,752	50% SWT 50% SDC
Multi District Project Manager	£49,752	25% SWT 25% SDC 25% MDC 25% SSDC
Funding Bid Writer	£37,523	100% SWT

## **8. Legal Implications**

- 8.1 Legal advice will be sought for the creating of the agreement, this will need to set out a range of matters that include funding, governance, liabilities, exit arrangements etc.

## **9. Climate and Sustainability Implications**

- 9.1 The report proposed to create a Partnership to enhance the delivery of each Authorities Climate Emergency declarations.

## **10. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

- 10.1 There are no negative implications identified of this report.

## **11. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 11.1 There are no identified implications of this report.

## **12. Social Value Implications**

- 12.1 There are no identified implication of this report.

## **13. Partnership Implications**

- 13.1 Approval of this report would give authority for officers to enter into a new Partnership with Sedgemoor District Council as set out in the body of the report.

## **14. Health and Wellbeing Implications**

14.1 There are no identified implications of this report.

## **15. Asset Management Implications**

15.1 There are no identified asset management implications from the creation of this Partnership.

## **16. Data Protection Implications**

16.1 There are no identified implications from the creation of this partnership.

## **17. Consultation Implications**

17.1 Consultation with impacted employees will be necessary for those being seconded to Somerset West and Taunton.

### **Democratic Path:**

- **SMT – 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021**
- **Scrutiny Committee 7<sup>th</sup> April 2021**
- **Executive Committee - April 21<sup>st</sup> 2021**

**Reporting Frequency: One off**

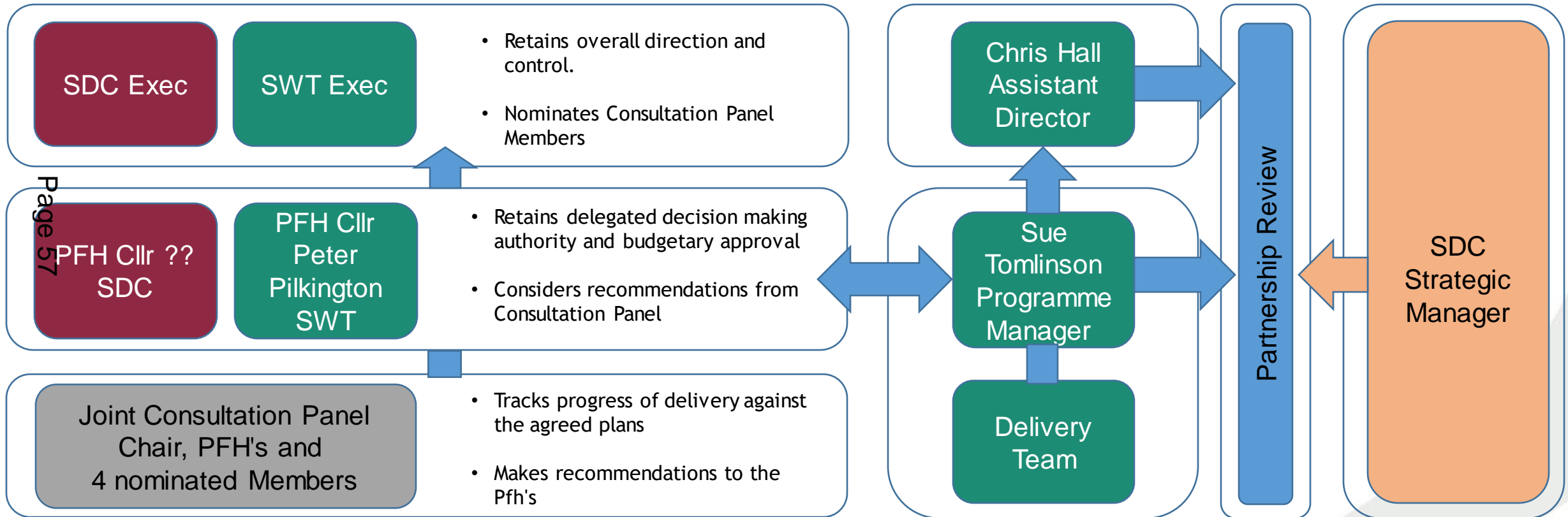
### **Contact Officers**

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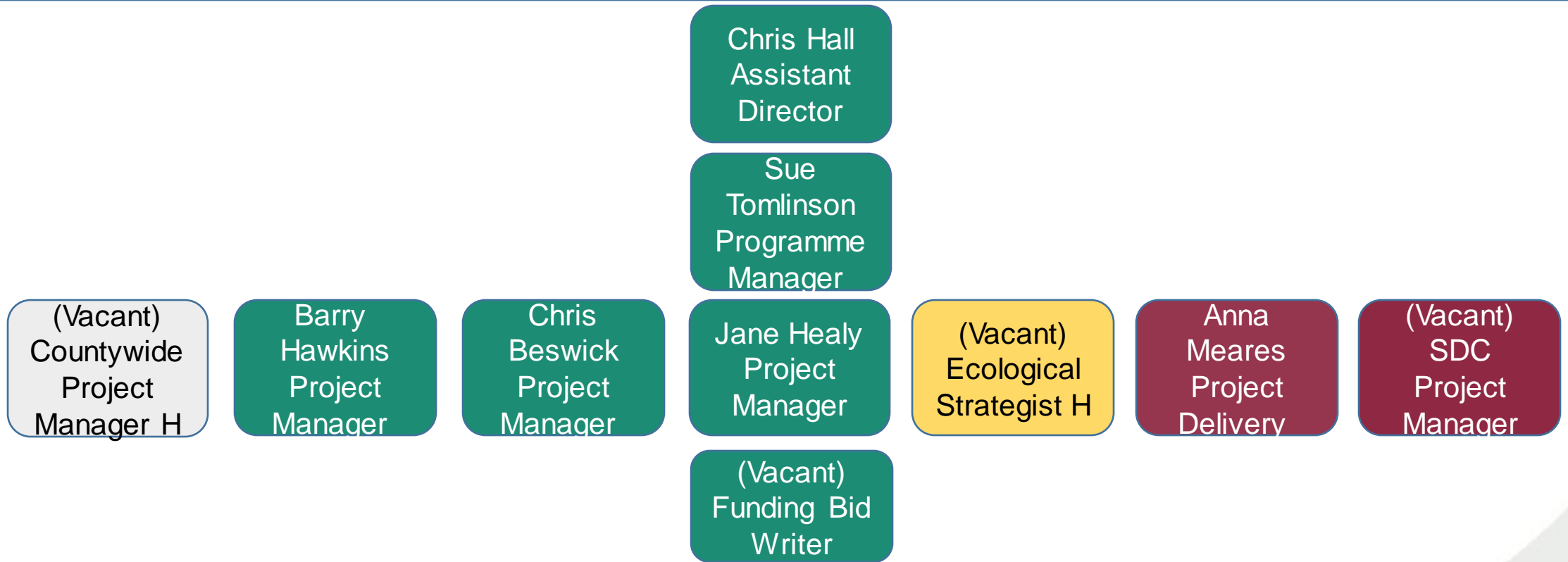
# Climate Change Partnership Joint Governance



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# Climate Change Joint Delivery Partnership Proposal

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Franc Parreira Project Support

Funding Split

- SWT 100%
- SDC 100%
- SWT & SDC 50% Each
- All Districts 25% Each



# **Full Council Meeting – 23 February 2021**

## **Report of Councillor Fran Smith – Housing**

### **Introduction**

Since the last report in November our main focus continues to be COVID-19 and in particular since the New Year, re-adjusting the services to respond to the latest lock down measures. I would like to acknowledge the flexibility of the team, our partner organisations and contractors who once again have made substantial changes to what services we offer; and also our tenants who have been so accommodating and understanding. We will continue to monitor issues closely.

Since the New Year we have not seen any significant impact from Brexit with our supply chains holding up, however we are starting to hear accounts of price increases on some supplies such as timber.

Elsewhere our project to replace our main housing management IT system has kicked off, this is a major piece of work and will run for around 16 months.

Lastly it was pleasing to see improvements in our STAR survey results (Survey of Tenants and Residents); particularly that in the last two years we have been through major organisational changes and have experienced nearly a year of COVID-19 impacts.

### **Housing Development and Regeneration Team**

#### **Housing Strategy**

- Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy - The service is producing an accommodation strategy to respond to the Government aspiration to maintain accommodation support to reduce or end rough sleeping by 2025. The strategy will help inform the Council's partnership and investment decisions.
- The Homelessness Reduction Board is progressing to commence its work during 2021.
- LHA Housing Advisors Programme – Somerset councils and ARK consultancy have submitted the draft report into Better Futures for Vulnerable People in Somerset. This sets out how Somerset authorities work to support the most vulnerable people, provides examples of good practice and sets out under six themes opportunities to delivery better outcomes. The report will support the Homeless Reduction Board set its priorities and action.
- A Delivery Officer is being recruited to the team to deliver and oversee the Hinckley point C Housing Action Plan, unfortunately our first recruitment process was unsuccessful.
- The revised Private Sector Renew Policy was considered and supported by full council in December.

#### **Housing Enabling**

- 2020/21 completions are currently estimated as: 128 affordable homes by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, 265 completions are forecast in 2021/22.
- Although completions are low, this year has seen significant start on sites across our Council area including: 42 affordable homes at Cornhill, Wellington; 60 affordable homes at Allers Mead, Williton and 19 affordable homes at Paddocks, Bishops Lydeard.
- SWT was recognised as a High Affordability Area by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in December and is now eligible for social rent grant funding in addition to Affordable Rent and Shared Ownership tenures within the 2021 – 2026 Affordable Homes Programme.
- Viability and Self Build seminars have been hosted through the Enabling Team and have been well received by both Members and Officers.

### HRA New Homes

- Laxton Road Development completion and handover took place 15<sup>th</sup> January providing 8 new HRA homes. Here are a couple of photos of the build just before the finishing touches were put in place.



*Laxton Road development, Taunton*

- Zero Carbon Pilot – The procurement of a volumetric modular contractor was not successful. The Development Team are progressing zero carbon through a more traditional approach. Although some time has been lost, the specification and approach to be adopted is established and the lessons learned have already been adopted on this and other projects. Lessons are also being shared with other local authorities, community led housing and registered provider partners.



- Oxford Inn – This scheme gained support from Members in December and will provide new zero carbon homes by Spring 2023.
- Seaward Way, Minehead – The community has recently been consulted on this scheme of 54 units, through social media and other formats. The planning application was made on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February. This scheme will be zero carbon and delivered by Autumn 2023. Here are some images of how the site will look:



*Proposed view of Seaward Way development, Minehead*

- North Taunton Woolaway Project – The final designs for phase A are complete and contract costs are being finalised through the Pre Construction Services Agreement

(PCSA). Members supported the scheme at Full Council in December and a cross-party working group is being formed to ensure the Council's new build housing programme has the focus and support which its scale merits. An approach is being adopted initially for phase A to achieve 80% zero carbon at first letting and 100% zero carbon when the grid decarbonises. This approach means a moderate investment in fabric and technology will reduce the carbon produced by the new homes by nine times compared to a standard (part L) new build home; and by twelve times compared to a Woolaway home. Fuel savings to the customers are calculated to be 70%-80%. A report has been placed in the Member library on the approach and assumptions.

### **Housing Property Team**

Following the government's recent lockdown/Tier 5 announcements, we have undertaken a review of services and those listed below have been deemed essential to our customers and therefore need to be maintained. This decision has been taken with an awareness of continuing COVID-19 challenges, in particular the recent high number of positive COVID-19 cases in Taunton and Wellington. Our Risk Assessments and Method Statements (RAMS) are being reviewed to ensure the ongoing safety of our staff and residents whilst these works are undertaken.

- Responsive Repairs - Emergency works, and all external works (i.e. both emergency and non-emergency works) only. We will continue to log all requests for repairs and make contact with residents to arrange appointments when appropriate to do so.
- Property Safety Compliance checks and works all to continue – including gas safety checks (LGSR's), water risk assessments and remedial works, electrical inspections (EICR's), asbestos surveys and re-inspections, fire risk assessment and remedial works & fire safety checks, and lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works.
- Compliance includes ongoing block inspections and estate walkabouts where officers will focus on identifying safety hazards.
- Asset Management visits: Stock Condition Surveys (SCS) and Energy Assessments to cease (other than SCSs and Energy Performance Certificates [EPCs] in Voids).
- Voids repair works to continue (with updated Risk Assessment Method Statements [RAMS] in place); pre-void visits to pause.
- Capital Programme – Roofline, external painting, door replacement, roofing, and door entry systems to continue. All other planned capital works programmes to be put on hold.

### **Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs**

- The hold placed on non-emergency internal responsive repairs will inevitably lead to an increasing backlog of works. This will be monitored closely and options for tackling this will be considered during the 'lockdown' period. Residents will be advised of the situation via communications on the Council's website and when they contact us with a repair request.

- Void repairs are likely to take longer due to updated COVID-19 RAMS (for example, fewer trades working in the property at one time to reinforce social distancing).

### **Property Safety Compliance**

We are maintaining ongoing progress on property safety compliance activities, including:

- A review of all common areas for blocks of flats to validate existing safety actions.
- Asbestos management surveys and re-inspections.
- Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs).
- Remedial actions from previous FRAs, and maintenance inspections.
- Gas Safety checks.
- Water Risk assessments and remedial actions.
- Electrical checks to both communal areas and dwellings.
- Passenger lift and stair-lift safety checks.

### **Capital Programmes**

- Additional procurement for future capital programmes is being undertaken.
- Only the works as listed above are to continue at present. We are contacting all residents affected by capital programmes placed on hold, and will closely monitor to see when it is possible to recommence some, or all, of these programmes when it is considered safe to do so.
- We will not now be able to complete all planned capital works programmes by the end of March 2021. We are evaluating the financial and service delivery implications of this situation and the impact on next year's budgets.

### **Housing and Communities Teams**

#### **Extra Care Housing**

- SWT continue to work with Way Ahead Care (commissioned by Somerset County Council) in our Extra Care Housing sites. We have revisited the lockdown arrangements to ensure we keep residents safe, whilst still allowing support to be delivered safely. This has necessitated the cessation of visitors to the schemes to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection.

#### **Sheltered Housing**

- The Sheltered Housing Team have been working across the whole of sheltered housing, making welfare calls to tenants, updating their personal and health information and making home visits where necessary, to complete aids and adaptations assessments, tenancy sign ups, install Lifelines and support tenants who find using the phone challenging due to hearing impairment for example.
- Due to lockdown we will be ensuring that face-to-face visits are only done by exception when a telephone call cannot resolve the issue. During any visits, staff will wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and are required to follow the relevant risk assessment guidance for these visits.

- We are aware that many tenants have less contact with family and friends. In some cases, this has left them feeling lonely and isolated. Where appropriate and helpful, we have continued to encourage tenants to have regular welfare calls from Deane Helpline, to check on their welfare and have a brief chat. Deane Helpline report any concerns for a tenants welfare or health back to the team, and a member of staff calls the tenant, to find out more and complete relevant referrals etc. In many cases, this includes liaising with family members and next of kin, who have also been appreciative of the follow up we have provided.
- We had planned to have a partial reopening of the meeting halls within the sheltered schemes; however the continuing evolving picture with COVID-19 means that this remains on hold.

## **Lettings**

- Property advertising and lettings that were suspended at the beginning of the first lockdown have now resumed and we plan to continue these as we re-enter lockdown again. Properties will continue to be advertised on Home Finder Somerset on the weekly cycles.
- The Lettings team are still working to COVID-19 risk assessments and procedures, ensuring they are in line with the SWT safe working practices. Verifications continue to be carried out remotely, and COVID-19 compliant viewings are taking place by the prospective tenant independently.
- The Home Moves Plus Officer (HMP) started in November. The Officer has already commenced working with both internal and external partners to collect data on those SWT tenants that fall within the downsizing remit for the role. This post will provide invaluable support to help people downsize which will reduce the burden of those struggling with 'bedroom tax' as well as releasing larger accommodation for households in housing need
- Laxton Road Flats: The new tenancies of the eight new properties at Laxton Road have all been signed up.

## **Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)**

- With the return of the third lockdown, although limited to essential assessments of people homes, we have been able to keep construction on site with expenditure on track (although below that of pre pandemic levels).
- The SIP managers have continued to keep under review the SIP Recovery Plan and are now in the fourth phase with exploratory work progressing on various projects to coin the phrase 'build back better' preparing for the ever building demand for health services and requests for assistance from the vulnerable population. Particularly will be felt when the nation moves out of lockdown.
- Somerset County Council is seeing an increasing number of clients presenting themselves, having had serious falls due to trying to cope and not asking for help. We are seeing a rise in safeguarding referrals, some of people's plight hidden during the first lockdown and exasperated by the second. Mental health is also becoming a major concern.
- Hoarding cases have not relented in either the Somerset West & Taunton area or Sedgemoor, some of which is a reflection on the pandemic. On average the



Independent Living Officers are each receiving an average of 8 complex cases a week up by 75% on this time last year on top of their 'run of the mill' referrals.

- There has been no respite for the hospital with the number of COVID-19 related admissions. Our Hospital Resettlement post is receiving 6-8 referrals a day for housing related cases, many of which are for patients who cannot be discharged due to the condition of their property. We have excellent working relationships with our partners through the agreed working practice and channels to act quickly with 48hr turnarounds. All in order to free up beds in a timely manner. We have reallocated a staff resource from another part of the service to assist and provide respite for the Resettlement post to avoid burn out.
- Adult Social Care have reported that they have 242 cases which are on their waiting list for assessments. The majority will be for moving and handling, some may transfer to a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) application.
- In terms of positive steps moving forward:
  - Putting together a new home maintenance service which will provide low level advice to assist people with maintaining their own home through our website, our interagency coffee mornings, literature, social media; a framework of contractors who will be able to assist with small works and can be referred into SIP by any of the agencies; and financial assistance to help the low income households with the repairs. We are developing small video clips which will be posted on the website providing useful tips to look out for in maintaining key components of the fabric.
  - Appointed a new Housing Options Occupational Therapist for the Children's services who will work alongside the Adult equivalent posts.
  - Appointing two Occupational Therapists solely to focus on adaptations to enable the locality leads to focus on manual handling. All the posts are funded by SIP through the Better Care Fund including the specialist Housing Options posts and employed by Somerset County Council.
  - Confirmation from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) that SIP was successful in its bid for a Green Homes Grant: Local Authority Delivery (LADS) 1b to further the work from the LADS 1a bid for retrofitting both social and private housing, adding a further £800k to the already awarded £518k from the first round.
- SIP is commissioning a study with sponsorship from the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG), Hospital Trust, NHS England and Somerset Strategic Housing Officers Group (SSHG) to look into the obstacles for a successful hospital discharge in Somerset, looking to recommendations to streamline the process, reduce inefficiencies and duplication. ARK will undertake the work with assistance from the University of the West of England (UWE).
- SIP is leading on streamlining the minor works contracts that County have for their Care Act duties and SIP's prevention work into one new framework which will be combined with the framework bundle for the home maintenance project. Simplifying the referral process, fixed prices for work and turnaround times.
- Currently putting together, a tender document for a new stairlift leasing scheme to replace the current process of applying for a DFG for a stairlift. With aims of a five-day turnaround (currently 2 – 8 weeks) and all stairlifts maintained through the contract.
- Empty homes and how SIP can assist landlords with bringing empty homes back into use by providing an architectural service working alongside Steve Perry. A draft business case is being drawn up.

- Putting together an offer to assist landlords with essential repairs through a list of contractors through the minor works framework project.

### **Rough Sleeper Delivery Plan and Cold Weather Fund:**

- We were successful in our bid to MHCLG to secure £80k funding to deliver cold weather provision to rough sleepers. This work is taking place in partnership with the YMCA Dulverton Group (YMCADG), The Albemarle Centre, The Hope Centre and Open Door. The service delivery will extend outreach provision at weekends and evenings and will provide the capacity for day centres in Taunton and Minehead to open their services for longer. This bid has allowed us to establish and develop voluntary sector partnerships that will allow us to deliver an enhanced Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) offer.
- The RSI Team worked over the Christmas break to respond to the severe weather and have succeeded in reducing the number of rough sleepers from 18 to 9. This is an exceptional achievement as this represents success with some of the most entrenched and hard to reach individuals in our district.

### **Homelessness and Rough Sleepers**

- The provisions for rough sleepers at Canonsgrove in Trull and The Beach Hotel in Minehead, Canonsgrove is currently accommodating 54 clients and there are 17 at the Beach.
- Severe Weather provisions were activated in December and January and 7 rough sleepers were brought in as part of this provision. We have used accommodation at the Beach Hotel, Canonsgrove, The Albemarle Centre, the Great Western Hotel and some B&Bs
- We have advocated for vaccinations for our homeless accommodation tenants and rough sleeper staff. On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> January all resident at Canonsgrove and 13 staff received their vaccinations. Lindley House residents were also vaccinated and further vaccinations have been booked in for the Beach Hotel.

### **Housing Options**

- Housing Options have seen 204 homeless approaches between October and December. This is a significant reduction in the numbers we would normally expect to see.
- Of these, 11 have had a full duty accepted and 55 cases have had their homelessness prevented. This is a significant increase on previous months which indicates that we are seeing the desired outcome from our prevention focus and better case management.
- We have had no families in B&B for over 6 weeks between October and December.

### **Recruitment**

We have the following vacancies across the service:

Rough Sleeper Team:

- 1 F Grade Tenancy Sustainment Case Manager fixed term until end March 2021
- 1 F Grade Cold Weather Provision Coordinator fixed term until end March 2021

Both will be advertised through matrix for agency staff or internal secondment due to the short term nature of these contracts.

Housing Options:

- 1 G Grade Senior Case Manager – Currently covered through agency, this will be extended until the new financial year.
- 1 F Grade Case Manager (Private rented Sector).
- 1 F Grade Case Manager (Tenancy Sustainment).
- 1 F Grade Case Manager (Housing Options). This has occurred due to a permanent staff member securing alternative employment elsewhere. Recruitment across the sector is a problem and this has been confirmed by other Districts both locally and nationally. Our approach to combat this is to encourage trainee and apprentice positions in order to grow our own talent.

### **Training Delivery Programme**

- It was our intention to roll out the bulk of the training programme when all vacant posts had been filled and the team is fully staffed. Due to the unexpected delay in this area we are pushing ahead with the training programme as we recognise the need for staff to be fully skilled and knowledgeable to reach a position of compliance and better service delivery. Some training will be delivered as part of the monthly team meetings and some will be as stand- alone sessions. The team have received training from the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), YMCA Tenant Accreditation Scheme (YMCA TAS) and the Armed Forces Charity SSAFA on Veterans. Second Step are scheduled to deliver training in the coming weeks. CAB will be delivering financial assessment training for officers this month.

### **Private Rented Sector**

- We have started to roll out our new incentives package to targeted letting agents. We have briefed staff within the Housing Options and Rough Sleeping team on how the scheme works so that they can set expectations with their customers on timescales and be able to confidently explain the process. In addition to this the Private Sector Case Manager is monitoring the referral process to ensure the best quality information in order to match people to properties effectively. This will underpin sustainable tenancies and a successful scheme. Pointers Estate Agents are our first successful agencies to join our panel. They are based in West Somerset which will offer a much needed foothold in this area.

### **B&B Spend**

<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>
<b>£6509.00</b>	<b>£6954.00</b>	<b>£16012.00</b>

- Spend on Bed and Breakfast remained low for October and November but increased in December due to an increase in Duty to Refers from hospital and prison. This has been influenced by the increase in specific accommodation as reported previously but has also seen the impact of better case management, a more robust front end assessment process within Housing Options and a greater focus on prevention.

### **Homefinder**

- Homefinder currently has a backlog of work of approximately 10 weeks. Although the team are working hard to reduce this, it is challenging due to staff sickness, a high volume of calls and work into the team. We brought further capacity in and some progress was made prior to Christmas but the work that came in over the Christmas holiday period has pushed the backlog back up again. We are now looking to recruit a further member of staff to work on this as soon as possible, to bring this backlog down.
- The tenders for the contract for the procurement of the new system for Homefinder Somerset have been scored and this will be concluded in the next couple of weeks.

### **Income**

- The Rent Recovery team continue to work to help and support those tenants who are effected by a reduction in income due to COVID-19. Rent arrears have reduced to 571k (as at 04/12/20), a further £15k reduction on the previous month and £220k below the level at the start of the Lean Review in September 2019. This is a fantastic result for the team and shows the hard work and dedication they have all committed to through the pandemic.
- The team rolled out a Christmas Rent Campaign which included text messages, providing information on paying rent on the website and also taking part in the Talking Café held by the Village Agents to promote priority payments over the Christmas period.
- We have recruited a second Debt and Benefit Officer who has started and this enables us to help a larger number of tenants quicker. We want to ensure that our tenants are claiming all the benefits they are entitled to and are maximising their income.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

- Serious ASB/neighbour nuisance is still high on the team's agenda and we have a small number of serious cases that we are escalating. These cases will need to have enforcement action taken against them and this in turn is extremely work intensive.
- The previous lockdown led to minor nuisance cases coming to our attention and it is likely that this trend will continue with the new lockdown. We will utilise our

COVID-19 nuisance letters from the last lockdown to try to deal with this. If these do not settle down then we will work with the Police to carry out joint visits if necessary and take any necessary action to get the perpetrators to amend their behaviour.

- We are still exploring the option of using a mobile noise app to deal with low level complaints that we receive. We will review this at the end of a trial period to decide whether we are going to be buying into this service.

### **Tenancy/Estate Team**

- The team has restarted Estate Walkabouts and has been continuing with block inspections. Our programme of these is published on our website. We have a process and pro-forma monitoring forms and managers work closely with officers to ensure that we have consistency in all areas across the district. During a recent inspection of the area within North Taunton we have picked up that a number of pathways need to be made safe; moss needs to be cleared from some pathways; trees need cutting back from flats; new street signage is needed; pot holes in garage areas need to be repaired. Once the orders have been raised we will be providing feedback to residents of our findings. We intend to continue to do Estate Walkabouts during the new lockdown, although we will primarily be focussing on hazards and health and safety.
- The estates team and open spaces team have been working together to help improve the areas where our tenants live. These photos show a before and after of some work carried out to the front gardens at Style Flats in Wiveliscombe:





*Style Flats, Wiveliscombe*

- We have started proactive Annual Tenancy Checks with an officer visiting households to assess the condition of the tenancy and property, however these have been put on hold during the new lockdown.

### **Housing Performance Team**

Since our last report in November we have completed the following key pieces of work:

- The team produced a 16 page Christmas newsletter which was posted to tenants and leaseholders. It was also made available on the website and to 222 email subscribers.
- The Tenants' Annual Report covering the period 2019-20 has been published to our website (this was delayed due to COVID-19 lockdown but has now been completed and published).
- A Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) including tenants and leaseholders has concluded and draft reports have been received (see summary below). The STAR survey is a comprehensive satisfaction survey completed every two years by an independent company (Acuity). We will now work on our response to these survey results, communicate them to our tenants, staff and provide information on our planned actions.
- Produced a summary of the government white paper "new deal for social housing" and shared that with our staff and tenant groups.
- Linked to the white paper, we have completed a self-assessment of our complaints process against the new Housing Ombudsman code and are putting into place any actions to address any gaps.
- We have ensured that our business areas have prepared business continuity plans.

- We have supported our managers to consult our Tenants' Strategic Group on over 10 policy documents (since September 2020).
- The team have agreed terms of reference for our Tenants' Action Group, including independent assessment of the terms of reference from the tenant engagement experts, TPAS.
- We have developed new webpages to enable our tenants to access information including information on programme maintenance, walkabouts and block inspections.
- Internally we have ensured that regular governance meetings are held to oversee and manage the activities of the housing directorate e.g. programme management meetings, finance and performance and risk meetings.
- Reviewed how our internal customer contact software routes enquiries to our staff.
- During January our Maintenance Manager started an innovative pilot to complete an 'in the moment' satisfaction survey for each repair completed. The survey gives us responses to several repair related questions and also produce a net promoter score - NPS (which is a known industry standard measure for customer satisfaction). Having an immediate electronic survey allows us to be notified of any concerns straight away and deal with those promptly. It is early days in the pilot, but to date 100% of responses have been positive promoters of our repairs service which is a great start. The pilot will be used to inform our customer satisfaction survey development within Housing and the wider council.

During the next two months we will:

- Formally invite candidates for the Tenants' Strategic Group election.
- Create a response and action plan to share the final results of the STAR survey.
- Continue to support online meetings of our tenants' groups.
- Continue to develop webpages.
- Continue to consult on our housing policy documents.
- Continue to strengthen our internal governance through our meetings and reporting.
- Self-assess against the government white paper.

### **STAR Survey Summary**

Whilst we await the final STAR tenant satisfaction report our draft report indicates the following highlights:

The results from the survey are very positive, and generally a little up on the results from the previous survey in 2018. The survey recorded many high ratings including satisfaction with the gas servicing arrangements (95%), having a home that is safe and secure (91%), the rent providing value for money (88%), the neighbourhood (85%), and its appearance (84%) – all of which are reflected in the finding that 83% of tenants are satisfied with the services provided by Somerset West and Taunton.

Key Findings are:

- Over eight out of ten tenants are satisfied with the services provided by SWT (83%), the overall quality of their home (81%) its condition (80%) and the repair

service (82%). 78% are satisfied that SWT keeps them informed about things that might affect them as a resident.

- Slightly fewer are satisfied that SWT listens to their views and acts upon them (62%). Satisfaction with most aspects of contacting the council are also a little lower. 67% found it easy to contact the right person, 65% feel the staff keep their promises and 69% were satisfied with the final outcome of their contact.

Suggestions for improvements:

- There are 574 comments giving suggestions on possible improvements to the service, however, 17% of these said they are happy with things as they are. Customer contact accounts for 12% of the comments for possible improvements, with tenants wanting better customer care and for staff to answer the phones more readily and to return calls when promised. The repairs service concerns 9% of comments with tenants wanting a better, quicker service and to be kept informed of progress. Other issues mentioned include communications, grounds maintenance and dealing with neighbourhood issues.

Day-to-day repairs and maintenance service:

- There are 82% of tenants satisfied with the repairs and maintenance service, and this has increased by 7% since the previous survey. Overall satisfaction with the last completed repair is 86%, and 95% are satisfied with gas servicing arrangements.

Communication and information:

- Nearly eight out of ten tenants (78%) are satisfied that SWT keeps them informed about things that might affect them. However, fewer are satisfied that SWT listens to their views and acts upon them (62%) with 17% dissatisfied.

Further analysis:

Throughout the survey some very good levels of satisfaction have been found, and the findings are an endorsement of the commitment of Somerset West and Taunton and its staff. However, slightly lower levels of satisfaction are also found particularly related to communication issues with the final outcome of the query, listening to views and acting upon them amongst the lower ratings.

Overall, having come through major organisational change and to also be in the midst of COVID-19, it is an achievement for many areas to have increased their levels of satisfaction. Upon receipt of the final report we will communicate results with our tenants, our staff and start the process of responding to the findings to improve our tenants' satisfaction with our services.



# Full Council Meeting – 30 March 2021

## Report of Councillor Fran Smith – Housing

Below are the achievements that have taken place from 2020 and I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the staff within the directorate for their hard work in making all of these things happen for the benefit of our residents, directly and indirectly, and especially during the past year where we have been dealing with a pandemic.

During 2020/21 we were globally affected by the Covid19 pandemic whilst also realigning to a new Housing and Communities Directorate, moving and appointing new staff to our new structure (pulling together a Housing and Communities Directorate of over 200 staff). As a council and Housing and Communities Directorate we responded to the pandemic and also delivered the following activities:

### Housing Landlord

- The Sheltered Housing Team have worked across the whole of sheltered housing, making hundreds of welfare calls to tenants, particularly through COVID. They have made home visits where necessary, to complete aids and adaptations assessments, tenancy sign ups, install Lifelines and support tenants who need it. They have also undertaken annual reviews of Support Plans with sheltered tenants and are striving for 100% completion by the end of March.
- Lettings of new properties was affected by COVID, but the team quickly put in place COVID-safe measures to ensure that vacant properties could continue to be let, including our new Laxton Road flats. The Home Moves Plus Officer started in November and has already had significant success in supporting tenants downsize into smaller, more affordable properties, freeing up much needed larger properties for families.
- The Rent Recovery team has supported tenants affected by a reduction in income due to COVID-19, whilst still managing to improve rent collection. Rent arrears have reduced to £517k (as at 05/3/21), a reduction of £275k from September 2019 and with 460 fewer tenants now in debt. This is a fantastic result for the team who really invested in the new 'lean' model we introduced and have worked hard to bring some real success.
- The Homeless team takes anti-social behaviour seriously and continued to support households affected by it last year, taking enforcement where necessary. They also introduced use of a noise app, which they are piloting to see whether this improves management of issues with neighbour noise.
- Tenancy Officers supported a wide range of households over the past year, setting up new tenancies, helping tenants move, dealing with general issues and supporting people through COVID. Wider work included undertaking a full programme of block inspections, to ensure compliance for fire and other risks. They also delivered Estate Walkabouts to identify issues, defects and improvements required which were then raised for the DLO to address. Finally they introduced new annual tenancy checks to visit households and assess the condition of the tenancy and property, to ensure properties are being managed well and in line with the tenancy agreement.

## **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping**

- Last year, the Homeless Service set up Canonsgrove homeless accommodation and The Beach Hotel in partnership with the YMCA Dulverton Group to meet the government's 'Everyone In' requirement. This provision has supported close to 150 homeless people with multi-agency support. In many cases this has led to improvements in wellbeing, reduced addiction and moves in to independent accommodation. Aligned to this, we were able to bid for over £1m to purchase the Gascony Hotel to provide permanent homeless accommodation in Minehead and have also levered in significant revenue funding to support homelessness in our District.
- Officers in the homelessness service have supported a high caseload of people throughout the year with housing advice and accommodation. We are currently implementing an improvement plan that should see services continue to improve in 2021/22.

## **Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)**

- The SIP service made a number of new innovations last year including introducing a Hoarding service to support households where hoarding is an issue. Demand is significant and currently officers are each receiving an average of 8 complex cases a week. A new Hospital Resettlement post receives 6-8 referrals a day for housing related cases, which often require improvements to the condition of their property to enable a successful discharge. This service supports the patient, the hospital and the homelessness service, resulting in quicker return to home for the majority of patients accessing the service.
- The SIP was again successful with its bid to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for a Green Homes Grant. This will add a further £800k to the already awarded £518k from the first bid and will benefit homes in our District in both the private and social sector that require retrofitting.

## **Housing Property**

Listed below is a summary of the key activities undertaken within the housing property service over the past 12 months. The main focus has understandably been to maintain services as far as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, re-adjusting these to respond to each lockdown restriction level (meeting Government guidelines and taking the required measures to ensure the ongoing safety of our staff and residents whilst works are undertaken).

### **Responsive Repairs**

All emergency works have been carried out throughout the year. Different arrangements have been in place during lockdown periods for non-emergency repairs; ranging from not carrying out any non-emergency repairs, only undertaking external non-emergency repairs, and completing all works. This has been exceptionally challenging for staff, particularly our tradespersons on the 'front-line'. Inevitably a backlog of non-emergency works has arisen and this is being monitored closely and plans are in place to resolve this. Residents have been kept up-to-date via communications on the Council's website and when they contact us with a repair request.

### **Void Repairs**

Again, COVID restrictions have made it challenging to deliver this service. Works required to meet our lettable standard have taken longer due to our following updated COVID Risk Assessments and Method Statements (RAMS) - for example, fewer trades working in the property at one time to reinforce social distancing. Nevertheless, this service has been maintained throughout the year.

### **Property Safety Compliance**

Despite the COVID challenges, very considerable progress has been made in this critical area. Following a new team being set-up and key roles recruited to, an updated database of all compliance areas against every property for which the Council has property compliance responsibility has been developed and implemented to improve monitoring capability for this activity. This includes the six key areas: Asbestos management, Electrical safety, Fire safety, Gas safety, Lift and Stair-lift management, and Water Management (Legionella). Together with a validation inspection of each compliance area, this provides an increased level of assurance. Some example specific work areas delivered are fire risk assessments and remedial actions, asbestos management surveys and re-inspections to communal areas, annual gas safety checks, and electrical installation testing. In addition, we have reviewed and updated our property safety compliance policies and procedures. All compliance activities are now monitored on a weekly basis, and despite difficulties in maintaining compliance in some areas due to obtaining access from some vulnerable tenants who are shielding or are anxious about allowing people into their homes during the pandemic, a recent positive audit outcome has demonstrated the strength of our approach.

### **Asset Management**

The key to provision of an efficient and effective approach to asset management is obtaining accurate and up-to-date data, particularly for property stock condition and energy performance. There was a requirement to accelerate data capture for both of these areas during the year. However, during the majority of the year it has not been possible to undertake either Stock Condition Surveys (SCS) or Energy Assessments as these have not been considered 'essential services' in the lockdown periods, although we have continued to undertake both of these activities in void properties to enable them to be re-let. We have developed plans to recommence these surveys, using both in-house and external resources, when lockdown restrictions permit.

### **Capital Programmes**

The various COVID lockdown periods have had a significant impact on delivery of our capital improvement programmes. Whilst some have been largely able to continue; e.g. roofline works, external painting, door replacement, roofing, and door entry systems; others (mainly due to being internal works) have been more challenging to achieve; for example, heating upgrades and kitchen and bathroom upgrades. We have not therefore been able to complete all capital works programmes planned for 2020/21. We are evaluating the financial and service delivery implications of this situation and the impact on future budgets, but the overall intention is to deliver both the outstanding works and the 2021/22 planned programmes (COVID restrictions permitting) during 2021/22. We have also been carrying out substantial procurement during the year, including a focus on driving-in value for money and longer-term contracting arrangements.

## **Housing Development and Regeneration Team**

The Housing Development and Regeneration team have been working hard to deliver new affordable homes directly by the council or through partnerships in the last year. The Housing Strategy team joined the service in September and have carried out a significant amount of strategy work to support better futures for the most vulnerable residents in the district. The Development team have been progressing a pipeline of new build Council schemes including zero carbon and low carbon homes. The Enabling team have continued their partnership working and have introduced projects promoting community led housing on Exmoor.

## **Housing Strategy**

- The service produced a draft Single Homeless Accommodation Strategy to respond to the Council's and Government aspiration to reduce or end rough sleeping by 2027. The strategy, which will be considered by the Executive in March, will help inform the Council's partnership and investment decisions.
- The Homelessness Reduction Board has progressed and will start its work in April 2021.
- LGA Housing Advisors Programme – Somerset Councils' and ARK consultancy have submitted the draft report into Better Futures for Vulnerable People in Somerset. This sets out how Somerset authorities work to support the most vulnerable people, provides examples of good practice and gives opportunities to deliver better outcomes under six themes. The report will support the Homelessness Reduction Board set its priorities and action.
- The team have coordinated the delivery of the Hinkley Point C Housing Action Plan.
- The revised Private Sector Renewal Policy was considered and supported by full council in December.
- The Housing Strategy team has been working on, and will shortly conclude its study on housing demand including general need, special need and homelessness.

## **Housing Enabling**

- 124 new affordable homes are anticipated to have completed by end of 2020/2021. There are around another 400 affordable homes currently on site for completion by March 2023.
- Over 100 new affordable homes have started on site during 2020/21 with the team working on an active pipeline of over 70 housing schemes.
- The team led a proactive and dedicated Affordable Housing Development Partnership. Sovereign Housing have recently joined the partnership and work continues with all our Affordable Housing Development Partners to secure new affordable homes through both planning obligations and funding through Homes England Affordable Homes programmes. The team continue to receive positive and complementary feedback from the partners.
- The team secured a grant for circa £1m to support development of The Gascony Hotel, Minehead to provide 18 units, in support of single homeless accommodation.
- The team continue to deliver a number of special projects whilst managing its business as usual services.

- Following the successful appointment of the Exmoor Rural Housing Enabler, work started to facilitate affordable homes delivery routes within the National Park.
- Community Led Housing project is actively supporting community groups to deliver affordable homes within their communities.
- The team are leading the delivery of specialist new build affordable housing and lead the facilitation of joint officer working to deliver specialist housing.
- Informed responses have been provided during Central Government Planning Consultations held in 2020/21 which directly affect affordable housing delivery.

### **HRA New Homes**

- The Laxton Road scheme completed and were handed over on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2021, providing 8 new HRA homes. Properties were let immediately and were in high demand.
- The Development team have progressed the zero carbon Affordable Housing Pilot through a more traditional approach and are considering five sites which will be submitted for planning in the Spring.
- Work has continued on other zero carbon affordable schemes, such as Oxford Inn Taunton and Seaward Way Minehead. Both developments should be complete in 2023.
- North Taunton Woolaway Project – The final designs for phase A are complete and contract costs are being finalised. Members supported the scheme at Full Council in December and a cross party working group is being formed to ensure the Council's new build housing programme has the focus and support which its scale merits.

