

SWT Scrutiny Committee - 14 October 2020

Present: Councillor Gwil Wren (Chair)

Councillors Ian Aldridge, Norman Cavill, Dixie Darch, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Dave Mansell, Derek Perry, Phil Stone, Nick Thwaites, Sue Buller, Simon Coles and Ray Tully

Officers: Andrew Randell, Marcus Prouse, Dawn Adey, Chris Hall, Andrew Pritchard, Graeme Thompson and Sue Tomlinson

Also Present: Councillors Janet Lloyd, Peter Pilkington, Francesca Smith, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Sarah Wakefield, Alan Wedderkopp and Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

63. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Hunt, Lisgo and Wheatley.

Councillor Tully attended as a substitute for Councillor Wheatley. Councillor Buller attended as a substitute for Councillor Hunt.

Councillor Coles was appointed as Vice-Chair of the committee for the meeting in absence of Councillor Lisgo.

64. Minutes of the previous meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 30 September (attached) and 7 October (attached).

(Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 30th September and 7th October 2020 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 30th September and 7th October 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

65. 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 N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	Taunton Charter	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Trustee		
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Councillor Wren, Perry and Farbahi declared personal interests as they had both undertaken site visits to Blue Anchor.

Councillor Mansell declared a personal interest as a member of a community renewable energy co-operative.

66. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

67. **Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy and SWT Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan**

The item was introduced by Councillor Pilkington and further statement read out by Councillor Whetlor setting out the work undertake by the Climate Change working group and what the strategy sought to address working in partnership with County and District colleagues.

The Strategy Specialist presented the report.

The Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy (the Somerset-wide Strategy) had been produced in partnership between SWT, Sedgemoor, Mendip and South Somerset District Councils and Somerset County Council together with expert inputs from a number of external bodies. The purpose of the Strategy was to provide a strategic overview of the key issues facing Somerset and the Councils in relation to the climate emergency and the shared ambition to work towards carbon neutrality for the county of Somerset by 2030 and to provide a strategic basis for partnership working going forwards on addressing the issues together, where a shared approach would be appropriate and improve the chances of delivery. The Strategy included three strategic goals, a number of proposed outcomes relating to nine workstreams/sectors and a high level action plan to guide the direction of travel. The Strategy mentioned that each district would produce its own detailed action plan to supplement/complement the strategic one. For SWT, this was the Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience (CNCR) Action Plan.

The Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan (the CNCR Action Plan) had been produced as the Council's own response to declaring a Climate Emergency in February 2019 and inclusion of addressing climate change as the Council's number one priority in the Corporate Strategy. The CNCR Action Plan identified a total of 345 potential actions to progress over the next ten years based on current understandings, but focused on a Y1 action plan with Y2+ routemaps, with an intention for the plan to remain iterative and to be reviewed on an annual basis, which will evolve as the understanding of what was necessary and possible improved. The CNCR Action Plan sat alongside the Somerset-wide Strategy as the detail for how the Council proposed to address the specific issues, meet the goals and deliver on the outcomes that the Somerset-wide Strategy identified.

The Council has already committed to working towards carbon neutrality by 2030, and as such, the Somerset-wide Strategy and CNCR Action Plan adds detail as to what is

necessary, the actions and projects to be developed and help to identify the places where we can look to focus partnership working going forwards. The CNCR Action Plan is already informing internal resourcing and project development. The formal adoption of both the Somerset-wide Strategy and CNCR Action Plan is now being sought to improve corporate and public visibility and inform the 2021 budget setting

During the debate the following points and comments were raised.

- The District action plan was considered positive and received strong praise for the work undertaken to produce this from the strategy officer.
- The taskforce and group still needed to be set out to inform members of the governance channels of the climate change agenda in the future.
- Further detail was requested of exactly what this is, members were reassured that they would be part of the governance going forward.
- Additional Leadership was considered necessary to acknowledge the scale of challenge in the future.
- Further details around the budget were requested. £500k of funding was achieved from a rebalancing of reserves but in future years there was a commitment made that this would be hardwired into budget setting.
- More certainty was encouraged on the budget going forward, to provide an indicative breakdown when the report is considered at Full council.
- The local multi agency climate emergency task force had been set up to involve all councils to be included.
- Somerset wide strategy was considered, this would include details around the Somerset Waste Partnership and their initiatives in tackling climate change.
- Further information was requested in the Full Council report to provide more details on the working groups to take forward the strategy and action plan, including member involvement. As an alternative the committee were happy for this information to be brought back to a future scrutiny meeting before it is finalised.
- Further guidance was requested over the priority of the list of actions and what the impact and achievement was for these actions
- Tree planting proposals and increasing woodland was requested, recognition of this was understood along with the importance and enthusiasm for tree planting from the public.
- Councillor Stone referred to a previous statement circulated to the committee in advance of the meeting setting where both strategy's didn't go far enough in addressing tree planning and developing community woodlands and orchards. A formal request was made to make an allocation of £50k out of the £500k climate change budget for the purposes of tree planting.
- Work was being encouraged with parish councils support to consider areas that could be earmarked for rewilding schemes.
- Awareness of Carbon neutrality along with the need to absorb more carbon than what's emitted was an area of concern. More details of the plan of addressing carbon reduction and absorption was requested.
- Various workstreams across the organisation would be factored in, with the need to work towards phosphate replacement and neutrality. Further innovation would be needed to address the implementation of new green initiatives.
- Provisions in the local plan to increase strategic natural green space in housing developments were discussed, alongside promoting a more natural environment with additional open spaces for residents.
- It had been established that 8 out of 10 members of the countywide Task and Finish Group supported the strategy.

- Focusing on decarbonisation was a priority over other alternatives. Emissions were the urgency in terms of the immediate impacts and tackling climate change. Adaptation techniques were being explored as well as reducing carbon.
- The countywide strategy to plant 55k trees was referred to, 1k of these trees were in the nursery ready to plant.
- The principles of tree planting was supported but the specific budget allocation was considered and questioned.
- Officers were congratulated on the strategy which was welcomed as a starting point.

The Scrutiny Committee recommend to the Executive that:-

2.1 The Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy progresses to Council for adoption.

2.2 The Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan is approved.

2.3 A local, multi-agency Climate Emergency Task Force is established to aid delivery and implementation of the Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Action Plan.

2.4 A recommendation is made to Full Council that a supplementary "Climate Change Fund" budget of £500,000 is approved within the General Fund 2020/21 Revenue Budget, funded from General Reserves, for the delivery of Somerset West and Taunton priority actions with delegated authority to the Director External Operations and Climate Change / Assistant Director Climate Change, Regulatory Services and Asset Management to agree those priority actions in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change. Council also be asked to approve the principle that any unspent balance of this Fund at the end of 2020/21 be carried forward to 2021/22 financial year.

2.5 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.

2.6 £50k of £500k Climate Change fund (referred to in 2.4) to be allocated for tree planting.

The committee voted by majority in favour of recommendation 2.6 with three abstentions.

68. **Coastal Protection Works Associated with the B3191**

Councillor Wakefield introduced the item and The Assistant Director for Climate Change and Assets presented the report.

Somerset West and Taunton Council, the Coastal Protection Authority, had received a proposal from Somerset County Council, the Highway Authority, with a view to undertaking works to protect the B3191 at Blue Anchor. If the scheme of work was accepted this council would deliver any agreed coastal protection scheme for the benefit of that community.

This proposal followed on from the previously approved request that Somerset West and Taunton Council used its status as the Coastal Protection Authority to deliver a scheme on behalf of Somerset County Council. This proposal offered the funding necessary to deliver the scheme and a commuted sum so that Somerset West and Taunton Council

could take all future ownership, inspection, and maintenance responsibilities for any newly created asset.

There was no immediate financial liability for Somerset West and Taunton Council.

This report was not a detailed review of the scheme design, this would be finalised with the designers and principle contractor as the project evolved over time. Consultation on any proposed scheme would take place with the appropriate bodies, parish councils, and impacted residents.

During the discussion the following points and comments were raised.

- It was clarified that the Council had the power but not the duty for the Coastal defence scheme.
- The road was considered an important part of the network in the area and the continued protection of this alongside solutions were supported.
- Consideration was given for diversion options and compulsory purchase of land. This had been dismissed previously on the basis of cost.
- Phase 1 of the emergency repairs had been completed. The project was awaiting further materials to be delivered via the sea. A permanent solution was expected by the end of next year.
- The continuing liability for Somerset West and Taunton was questioned following the works.
- The temporary works were estimated at £385k which were temporary concrete reinforcement funded from the environment agency, the £4million funding was estimated for a more permanent solution to protect the road. If the proposals were accepted SWT were responsible for the asset, SWT would not accept liability for the road going forward.
- Regulatory requirements that required planning consent and licence from the maritime management organisation. It was considered if this was likely delay costs. There remained an acceptable timescale for the project.
- Future issues further down the line when the viability of the road comes into question were considered there remained no liability. Longer term there remained the risk of coastal erosion in the area.
- Protection of the road was the responsibility of Somerset County Council.
- The committee broadly supported the protection of land and residents in the area but concerns were expressed in relation to taking on additional liabilities.
- The funding set out in the report was questioned. The commuted sum and paying for maintenance and not taking on extra liabilities were the preferred solution.
- The committee encouraged officers to undertake an inspection and not undertake any additional costs of future repair on the advice of the inspections.
- It was the Councils responsibility to residents in the area to support them and businesses in the area, the road was a vital link to the community.
- Support for the proposal was questioned from the committee, it was considered the proposals delivered the County's cheapest option but not sure if it was a long term solution, liability for the road and the agricultural land was at risk.
- The cliff had already eroded to the 2050 position set out in the report, officers estimated that erosion moving faster than expected.
- It had been determined that the greater emphasis and priority on the impact from Watchet. There were continued ongoing responsibilities to manage the project properly.

- Future liability of the area was considered a risk and the committee expressed concerns. The scheme protected more than the road in the area and. Liability to maintain the road would remain the County Councils.

Recommendations

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.

69. **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 considered in detail by the committee at the next agenda setting.

70. **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 considered in detail by the committee at the next agenda setting.

71. **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 considered in detail by the committee at the next agenda setting.

(The Meeting ended at 9.11 pm)