

**Wednesday, 25th January, 2023,
6.15 pm**

**The John Meikle Room - The Deane
House**

Members: Libby Lisgo (Chair), Dave Mansell (Vice-Chair), Simon Coles, Tom Deakin, Ed Firmin, Roger Habgood, Steve Griffiths, Dawn Johnson, Richard Lees, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Martin Peters, Andy Pritchard, Ray Tully and Vivienne Stock-Williams

Agenda

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 30 November 2022.

(Pages 5 - 18)

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.

We are now live webcasting most of our committee meetings and you are welcome to view and listen to the discussion. The link to each webcast will be available on the meeting webpage, but you can also access them on the [Somerset West and Taunton webcasting website](#).

5. Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers (Pages 19 - 34)

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

6. Community Scrutiny Forward Plan (Pages 35 - 36)

To receive items and review the Forward Plan.

7. Executive and Full Council Forward Plans (Pages 37 - 40)

To review the Forward Plans of the Executive and Full Council.

8. Annual Update of Progress of the Climate Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan (Pages 41 - 52)

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor for Climate Change, Councillor Dixie Darch

Report Author: Jonathan Stevens, Assistant Director Climate Change, Regulatory Services and Asset Management.

9. To consider Reports from Executive Councillors - Councillor Dixie Darch (Pages 53 - 56)

To consider reports from Executive Councillors on their respective Portfolios;

i. Councillor Dixie Darch – Climate Change

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 black ink, appearing to read 'A Pritchard', with a horizontal line underneath.

ANDREW PRITCHARD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group. These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room. Full Council, Executive, and Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

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SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 30 November 2022

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Simon Coles, Tom Deakin, Roger Habgood, Dawn Johnson, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Ray Tully and Vivienne Stock-Williams

Officers: James Barrah, Simon Lewis, Kerry Prisco, Paul Fitzgerald, Sam Murrell and Marcus Prouse.

Also Present: Councillors, Francesca Smith, Caroline Ellis and Brenda Weston.

(Hazel Prior-Sankey, Sarah Wakefield and Norman Cavill joined via zoom).

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

53. Apologies

Cllr Andy Milne, Cllr Steve Griffiths, Cllr Richard Lees, Cllr Andy Pritchard (subs Cllr Loretta Whetlor) joined via zoom and Cllr Martin Peters.

The Chair made the comment that it was shame that substitutions had not been found to fill the vacant seats for the meeting.

54. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee

The Minutes of the previous meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 26 October 2022 were confirmed as a true record.

Prop: Coles / Sec: Habgood - Unanimous

55. 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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC & Shadow	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Taunton Town		
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

56. Public Participation

Two requests for Public Participation were brought to the committee from Mr Martyn and Mr Taylor on the subject of Blenheim Gardens Café, Minehead. Mr Martyn attended in person, whilst Mr Taylor asked that his written statement was read out by the clerk. Their submissions are below.

1) Mr Steve Martyn

Why this is an issue for Community Scrutiny

The future of Blenheim Gardens is an issue of significant public concern for the people of Minehead and it's surrounding areas. Any decision to sell or lease all or part of the asset should involve consultation with the Minehead community. This did not happen. The Executive Cllrs decision to invite private investment is not something we would disagree with however we have raised real concerns about how the process of selection was handled and the lack of transparency in answering our questions. In the two years since the lease was decided lack of progress and actions by the applicant should by now be ringing alarm bells about their suitability and we strongly recommend that the lease is not signed while a full investigation is carried out.

It came as somewhat of a surprise last week when Executive Cllr M Kravis who decided the lease 3/11/20 voted to support Minehead Town Council's motion to take back control of Blenheim Gardens and cafe'. We recommend viewing this meeting which was digitally recorded 22/11/22

The Jewel in The Crown

- Blenheim Gardens Café falls within the Wellington Square conservation area of Minehead. Covenants protecting the gardens have been in place since 1911. These state that the gardens are a public park for the pleasure of the people of Minehead. No permanent buildings are allowed. The buildings that are there are of timber construction and include a band stand, café, shelter and toilets. Alcohol may not be consumed within the gardens and the gates are locked at dusk.*

The Café:

- *There had been a café in the gardens for 50 years, run by one family. Suzanne Dean was the last tenant who gave SW&T notice in 2018 following a rent increase which she said was unaffordable. There was great sadness when it closed particularly among young families with children and the elderly who used the café as a quiet and peaceful meeting place in contrast to the busy Avenue. The café has now been empty for 4 years and it's condition has visibly deteriorated.*

In 2020 SW&T chose to go to tender

- *Executive Cllr M. Kravis*
- *Five Expressions of interest*
- *A 20 year lease? Why?*
- *Applicant to repair building*
- *Applicant to propose rent*
- *We ask whether any of the applicants were known to the Executive Councillor before the tender?*
- *Has the Executive Councillor had business dealings with any of the applicants before or after the tender?*
- *Has the Executive Councillor rented or occupied premises owned by any of the applicants before or after the tender?*
- *Did the Executive Cllr declare any prejudicial interests before conducting the tender?*
- *Did the five applicants receive the same brief on the same date?*
- *Can we see the brief?*

The Lease - decision 30/10/20

- *The lease was awarded by Cllr M Kravis to Mr W Wynn, Ms L Pegler and Ms J Sherwood of Bar21 in the Avenue Minehead. We have since learned that Ms J Sherwood has left the group following an employment tribunal 29/4/22 claiming breach of contract by Ms L Pegler.*
- *Cllr Kravis stated that the award was based on the financial value, quality and deliverability of the applicant's submission. After two years the café is still closed and without Ms Sherwood a question is raised about the applicant's ability to deliver on the lease.*
- *So who is Bar21? Bar21 along with other large pubs in Minehead caters for the year round holiday business and particularly Butlins. Bar21 has a large outside area of raised decking installed without planning permission. It plays very loud music every day of the week. It's a magnet for groups of young men and is a popular venue for stag and hen parties. It backs onto Blenheim Gardens and is very noisy, not in keeping with the Wellington Square conservation area. Local people complain about the noise which*

can be heard right across Blenheim Gardens and up North Hill, but nothing is done to stop it. When residents met in Blenheim Gardens for the minute of silence on the Sunday before the Queen's funeral, loud music continued from Bar21. Ms Sherwood in the Tribunal stated that that she was increasingly unhappy in her role at Bar21 because of arguments between Ms Pegler and Mr Wynn, which frequently took place within the hearing of customers.

- Did the Executive Cllr consider the way Bar21 is run to be compatible with the operation of a café in a quiet park when making his decision?*
- Bar 21 has a history of planning breaches. There were 6 planning enforcements at the time the tender was decided including it's raised decking.*
- Did the the Executive Cllr take account of Mr Wynn's planning enforcements when making his decision?*
- According to Mr Wynn and his agent the brief was to extend the cafés seating area. Was this the case?*
- Was a requirement to extend the café included in the brief to the other applicants?*
- Mr Wynn's bid £5875 pa x 20 years was 3 times higher than the rent paid by the last tenant, Suzanne Dean who could not make the café pay.*
- Did the Executive Cllr question how the applicant arrived at such a high figure? Was due diligence undertaken to determine a realistic market rent and the applicants ability to deliver on the terms of the lease?*
- Did Mr Wynn's bid not raise questions about the offer being financially viable given that the café would have to operate within the gardens opening hours and adhere to strict no alcohol rules?*
- More than two years have passed since awarding the lease to Mr Wynn during which time the café has remained empty and the agreed refurbishment by Mr Wynn has not been completed.*
- Does the Executive Cllr still feel that Mr Wynn's bid represents the best financial value, quality and deliverability? As Cllr Kravis voted with Minehead Town Council 22/11/22 to take back control we conclude that he has changed his mind.*
- The lease dictated that Mr Wynn should repair the café and get it open. Instead Bar21 submitted a planning application 10/08/22 to turn the café into a 100 seat restaurant open from 7am to 11pm. This application doubled the footprint of the cafe well beyond the area included in the lease. It proposed removing mature trees and laying raised wood decking like Bar21. Over 60 objections were posted on the planning website and a petition against the development with 200 names was presented to MTC. The planning application was withdrawn. We expect another planning application will soon follow unless the lease is stopped.*

What Next?

- *Despite numerous requests for answers to our very reasonable questions nothing has been provided. The process should have been transparent, instead we have met with a shroud of secrecy. We think it warrants scrutiny*
- *And what's happened to the chosen tenant? Wynn, Pegler and Sherwood have fallen out, the repair and reopening of the café has not happened and residents worry with good reason that Bar21 with a lease will re-apply to turn the cafe into a large licensed bar/restaurant operating within Blenheim Gardens, in contravention of its covenants and the will of Minehead's residents.*
- *Such an important and historic public building demands that the people of Minehead must now be consulted to decide it's future.*
- *We understand there was a consultation document circa 2012 which concluded that Blenheim Gardens should remain unchanged. We would like to see this document*
- *On 22/11/22 Minehead Town Council's Full Council Meeting Cllrs M Kravis, T Venner, C Palmer voted in favour of taking back control of Blenheim Gardens including its cafe.*
- *In conclusion the lease must be stopped.*
- ** The information contained in this document has been sourced from local newspapers, online media and discussions with local residents and has not been fact checked. SW&T Asset Management refused to our FOI request for information concerning the lease.*

2) Mr Steve Taylor

Dear Members of the Scrutiny Committee

I and my colleagues would be grateful if you would investigate/scrutinise the process undertaken by Somerset West and Taunton to find a custodian for the café in Blenheim Gardens.

This process has been objected to by numerous MTC councillors (who represent 12000 SWAT residents) and was again a hot topic at the full MTC meeting on 22/11/22. At this meeting a motion had unanimous support to stop SWAT from what they are doing at the café and to take back control of the café.

I believe a viewing of the recording of this meeting will be useful in understanding the strength of the feeling of the Town Councillors

1/ In the Autumn of 2020 Swat were faced with two options to take over the café in Blenheim Gardens:-

- a/ Minehead Town Council with a track record of developing and running community projects and
- b/ William Wynn/Bar 21 who have a track record of planning breaches

SWAT chose Bar 21 over MTC as the better custodian.

Whilst you could not justify this decision in a million years I and the electorate in Minehead would like to know:-

A/ How and why this decision was made and

B/What are they now doing to put that right particularly considering the recent MTC motion.

C/ Why was a history of planning breaches specifically excluded from the assessment matrix

2/ Our MP Mr Liddell-Grainger in his article in the WSFP refers to this process as being under a shroud of secrecy. I have faced the same problem. The current Monitoring officer won't release a single document under a Freedom of Information request. Neither do they answer any emails, I have given up trying. How are the council and its employees to be held to account when they hide from public scrutiny like this. What have they got to hide.

3/ In the 22/11/22 MTC meeting it was announced that councillors Venner, Palmer and Hadley had all made complaints that they did not agree with the procedures taking place. The Monitoring officer at the time rejected their request.

A/ Is it appropriate that the Monitoring officer should deal with objections about their own behaviour.

B/ Can you check whether their objections were investigated properly and by an appropriate person.

4/ The free press and Cllr Allen at the MTC meeting 22/11/22 have confirmed that the current executive officer renegotiated the arrangement with Bar 21 in September converting it to an internal refurbishment from a full refurbishment, and is once again renegotiating the agreement. If I was one of the original bidders I would feel betrayed by these actions. If bar 21 can't perform according to its bid then SWAT should go back to open tenders so we are all able to bid for it, a deal being done in secret behind closed doors is not transparent or fair. I would welcome your views on whether this is:-

A/ open and transparent government and

B/ Legal.

5/ MTC has now made an expression of interest to SWAT to take over the running of the café. Surely the next step under the 2011 localism Act is to go to open bids, can you let me know please. Either way to continue renegotiating an agreement with a third party to undermine this process must be considered questionable. Can you investigate please.

6/ The executive officer in 2020 has now decided his decision was an error as he also voted for the resolution for MTC to take back the café.

7/ I have asked the Leader of the council and Amy Tregellas for their assurance that the executive officer in 2020 was impartial, I have yet to receive that assurance.

8/ It seems unlikely from the information to hand that the Public Services(Social Value) Act 2012 has been taken into consideration at any point in this process. Can you check please?

Whilst your investigations are being undertaken I believe it would be inappropriate for SWAT to continue renegotiating the agreement with Bar 21 and I ask that these are paused. This is even more appropriate when SWAT are in receipt of the Expression of interest under the 2011 Act from MTC.

The Chair, Cllr Lisgo thanked Mr Martin for his participation and bringing his concerns to the attention of the committee. It was unfortunate that there were no Councillors representing Minehead at the meeting. It was apparent that the condition of the café was causing great concern amongst Minehead residents and all parties wanted to bring this matter to a resolution. Cllr Lisgo was unaware when she corresponded with Mr Martin previously that this matter had already been through several channels in the SWT administrative process including Corporate Complaints, Freedom of Information requests, an appeal to the Leader and public participation at the Executive meeting held on the 16 November. A written response from the PFH for Planning, Transport and Economic Development, Cllr Mike Rigby is here: -

“The issues that have been presented to us this evening have already been responded to by the Service, and by the Leader of the Council, and responded to through our complaints procedure at both stage 1 and 2, and through Freedom of Information requests. None of the information this evening is new and has been clearly responded to.

Whilst we welcome public participation in our decisions the responses provided have always been clear and transparent but I will reiterate the headlines for the benefit of the committee.

- The council made the decision to publicly market the opportunity to run the Blenheim Gardens Café, this was advertised in an open fair and transparent manner all documentation was provided equally and in the same timeframe.*
- Information was constant with viewings held for parties that requested them so they could assess the building condition.*
- The timeline for responses was extended to accommodate Minehead Town Council’s request for more time, all parties were notified of this extension of time which was provided to anyone wishing to bid. We also publicised this extension.*
- Potential applicants were not selected to bid, the marketing was public and available to any interested party, there were no exclusions and so to suggest Minehead were not consulted is inaccurate.*

- *The bid responses were assessed by a panel of officers and the Assets portfolio holder.*
- *The lease lengths were put forward by the bidders on the basis of the time they felt necessary to recover their refurbishment costs, none of the bids meet the trigger points under the Localism Act so there is no breach in our duties.*
- *The Council has a duty to achieve best value and has taken a proactive and transparent stance to achieve investment in a property where there was no council budget to make the necessary improvements. It will also achieve an income from this process. The alternative option may have been a permanent closure and demolition.*
- *To suggest that the council lacked judgement and have executed the process poorly suggests a misunderstanding of the entire process despite the council's clear, consistent and robust responses. For clarity this is a process that have been successful elsewhere in the district, you only have to look at the café in Goodland Gardens to see how private investment can enhance a public space.*
- *We are aware that a successful bidder made a planning application that was contrary to their bid submission. The application was not supported by the Assets team who act as landlord. Members will be aware that anyone can make a planning application on any land with the planning authority being required to consider the application on its merits. From our role as a landlord we are clear that should the application have been approved we would not allow this work to be delivered as we remain the landowners and our consent would have been required.*
- *There have been various suggestive statements made about the Executive Member involved in the tender process. This is not the way to raise concerns over the behaviour of a councillor. If the public speaker wished to raise a concern or make a complaint there is a process to do so which we would be happy to provide to you*
- *This scheme has not been without its problems, works were paused while an acceptable solution was being sought to create a refurbishment which would comply with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards.*
- *We have received an acceptable certificate which means they can continue with works.*

Considerable officer time and resources have gone into responding to these matters and I hope this to be the last contact we receive, however those involved in the complaints have the right to contact the local government ombudsman if they remain unhappy and we are ready to defend our position and share all information with the LGO."

In light of the above position, Cllr Lisgo advised Mr Martin to pursue his complaint independently via the Ombudsman. This was not a matter that could be dealt with via Community Scrutiny even though the committee had sympathy with the concerns. She accepted that this was a matter of great frustration for all parties, and SWT would be doing its utmost to ensure that the situation with the café was brought to a successful conclusion. Minehead Town Council had recently written

to SWT and asked that a mutually agreeable solution could be found to benefit the residents of Minehead.

Cllr Lisgo thanked Mr Martin for attending and speaking with such passion. On behalf of the Committee she wished him a safe journey home.

57. **Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

There were no new items on the recommendation tracker to report. The Written Answer Tracker had been updated.

Members approved the trackers – *Prop: Johnson / Sec: Habgood (Unanimous)*

58. **Community Scrutiny Forward Plan**

The Chair advised that due to the Minutes of all Council meetings having to be signed off at the last Full Council meeting on 28 March 2023, there would be no Community Scrutiny Meeting in March. It was likely therefore that there would be a lot of items brought forward for the two remaining meetings in January and February.

Cllr Dawn Johnson requested that a report was brought to Community Scrutiny to update the Committee on the Canonsgrove Decant/ Rough Sleeping programme, and how this was progressing. Also to include any remedial works/costs that were required to restore the accommodation that had been vacated, and to talk about the future and next steps. It was agreed to add this to the February meeting.

The Committee approved the Community Scrutiny Forward Plan

Prop: Lloyd / Sec: Stock Williams (unanimous)

59. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plans**

The Executive and Full Council Forward Plans were both approved.

Prop: Coles / Sec: Whetlor (unanimous)

60. **Housing Revenue Report - Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 2 (30 September 2022)**

The report was introduced by PFH for Housing, Executive Cllr Francesca Smith.

The report author Kerry Prisco made the following comments in support of her written submission.

During the Qtr 1 report it was requested that where savings were identified, these were referenced in Qtr 2. These are indicated as follows:-

- Para. 5.10 on capitalising material costs c£250k, e.g., identifying jobs that were initially considered revenue in nature but once works were completed ended up being capital related expenditure;
- Para. 5.11 on capitalisation staff costs £254k, e.g., if hypothetically the capital programme did not exist then this team would not be required.
- Para. 5.14 on central recharges £320k, e.g., a full and detailed review of shared costs has been undertaken this year resulting in a reduction in cost to the HRA;
- Para. 5.17 on capital charges / net interest payable re reduction in capital spend, e.g. if we spend less on the capital programme then less of our capital financing reserves are used and thus earn interest instead; and
- Para. 5.18 on depreciation charges vs VRP. E.g., the increase in depreciation charges is a combination of where external audit advised us last year to reduce our useful life from 100 to 70 years plus the increase in house prices inflating the value of our assets. We have proposed to offset this pressure in part against the voluntary repayment of debt (funding this from a different pot of money i.e. existing capital receipts) though this still leaves a pressure of c£400k.

The Finance team appreciate that these are mainly technical financial adjustments or updated forecasts, but the ability to make any immediate savings on essential services is incredibly difficult. The service is working on some operational improvements such as progress towards a new material supply contract to deliver efficiency savings and an updated review of service charges to maximise income.

Comments from the committee as follows:-

- The Chair congratulated the finance team on finding ways to reduce the pressure on the HRA and working hard to reduce the projected overspend.
- The benefit of capitalising salaries means that the HRA can be given a breather during this period of heavy financial pressures. This has arisen due to the inflationary expenditure being experienced due to the Cost-of-Living crisis and the war in Ukraine. Income is not able to meet the expenditure within the ring-fenced HRA. This moves the money around, but may not be a permanent fix.
- Cllr Lloyd asked what would happen if an overspend remained at the end of the financial year? The deficit would be made up from the General Reserves which are in a healthy position. The SWT HRA would be combined with Homes Sedgemoor to become a new single HRA within the new council. The new combined business would have an operating turnover of approximately 47million and would hopefully have greater capacity and resilience.
- Why have staff costs exceeded the budget? This was partly due to the estimated pay-rise which was set at 2%. The actual figure came in higher which impacted on the budget forecast.
- It was questioned whether the Cost-of-Living crisis was already impacting on tenants ability to pay their rent, and whether rent arrears had increased. Simon Lewis reported that this was an area where SWT was in the top

quartile of Council's and had a good record on rent recovery. There are two dedicated financial support officers who work with tenants to help with income generation and rent collection. A lot of communications go out via SMS and social media reminding and encouraging tenants to pay their rent over the Christmas period.

61. **Executive Portfolio Holder Session - Cllr Francesca Smith**

The Chair welcomed the Executive Councillor for Housing to Community Scrutiny Committee to answer updates on her portfolio. It was acknowledged that the meeting had fallen between two full council meetings and therefore there were two portfolio updates that had been published.

Members asked questions on the following issues:-

- There are now specific teams in place who deal with damp and mould in council housing. There is also a tenant group working specifically on this project. It is very important that concerns are reported as in most cases it gets worse due to being a hidden problem! Simon Lewis accepted that there will always be issues as 20% of the housing stock is of a traditional build and this is an inherent problem in older type housing. It has also been acknowledged that the current financial crisis will encourage tenants to use alternative forms of heating over the winter, which may lead to increased condensation and other associated problems.
- Members can help with this by promoting how to report mould and damp and general housing repairs. This can all be done online via the housing repairs portal. More information can be found on the council's website. This is also due to be updated with operating instructions on the different heating types within the SWT housing stock. This should help tenants to get the best use out of their heating systems.
- It was asked whether there was still a delay on the delivery of the Disabled Facility Grants which were delivered via Somerset Independence Plus (SIP). Simon Lewis explained that a backlog had arisen due to pressures on the service due to: SIP were the nominated organisation who were responsible for inspecting the suitability of sponsor, Homes for Ukraine properties. (This was obviously emergency work and took priority). Secondly, South Somerset had joined the partnership, which meant that any high-risk properties that were brought in from their housing stock, took priority over existing cases. Add to this the problems associated with gaining access to properties due to COVID-19, and then there was an inevitable backlog. The SIP team were now slowly catching up.
- Financial support for hosts of Homes for Ukrainians has caused significant pressure on the private sector rented housing market. Sponsorship comes to an end after 12 months by which time, the hosted families need to find their own independent accommodation. This places additional challenges on an already limited supply of rented accommodation.

- Cllr Habgood thanked Simon Lewis and his team for the work with Homes for Ukraine and asked how many families are being assisted? (Somerset is accommodating approximately 1200, with 400 being situated in the SWT area). Hubs have been set up across Somerset to provide support and assistance with such things as language classes and finding employment. Numbers are manageable at the moment, but sponsorship money will eventually come to an end. This was priced at £1K per room to cover costs and a slight uplift has been added for take into account the cost-of-living crisis and additional expense incurred during the winter. This will place sponsors under additional financial pressure as this money comes to an end. (The £1k per room was calculated to ensure an incentive to sponsors who were effectively renting to a high risk/unknown tenant and encourage participation).
- Cllr Mansell asked if the items collected during the SWT Skip days were recycled. Simon Lewis stated that this had been tried in the past but was unsuccessful due to the need to separate the waste. Tenants don't tend to split into the necessary recyclables, so it ends up being mixed which is not eligible for collection. If items can be recycled as part of the kerbside collections then households were encouraged to do this.
- The Council do encourage tenants to install smart meters so they can monitor their energy usage. The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) has also been reporting back on private sector tenancies.
- The retrofit programme has gone out to tender. The Woolaway project has also been re-tendered due to the high level of risk within the contract and due to escalating costs for supplies. Two tenders have now been combined into one in the hope it will encourage contractors to apply.
- Cllr Habgood asked how tenants who were unable to manage their large gardens could be helped to maintain them? It was advised that Link Power were already undertaking such jobs in parts of Taunton, and they had also requested more work. Simon Lewis would follow this up.
- It was asked if the Cost-of-Living Crisis was influencing Right To Buy take up. James Barraah confirmed that 35 homes were sold in the last financial year, but this had slowed considerably due to the Cost of Living having an impact on incomes. The prediction is for 55 to be sold right across Somerset next year.

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

The Committee voted to move into confidential session for the final item.

Prop: Lloyd / Sec: Whetlor (Unanimous)

63. **Confidential Item - Cultural Grant Provision**

(The Meeting ended at 9.01 pm)

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL
COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION TRACKER 2022/23

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Recommendation	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Final Decision/ Response to recommendation/	Date of response	Implemented?	Officer Comments/Update
31/08/2022	The Chair put forward the recommendation that the Community Governance Review (CGR) Report was brought to Scrutiny on the 28 September to debate the issue before the Special Full Council on 29 September. It was agreed unanimously to follow up this request.	Cllr Sarah Wakefield (PFH CGR) Internal Operations	<p>The Council resolved to set up the Member Working Group to work on the Community Governance Review and then to report back to Full Council.</p> <p>Section 1.2 of the Member Working Group protocol (within the Constitution) sets out that the Working Group does not have decision-making powers and can only make recommendations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body from which it was formed (parent body) – in this case Full Council • Such other body as the parent body decides; or • An officer <p>Nothing has been taken to Full Council to request that the Community Scrutiny Committee consider the report of the Working Group before it goes to Full Council on 29 September.</p>	20/09/2022	No	A member briefing took place on September 20, to give Cllrs an opportunity to ask questions on the CGR report. A recording of this briefing is available.

Total Recommendations for 22/23: 1

Agreed: 0

Agreed in Part: 0

Not Agreed: 1

TBD:

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN ANSWERS TRACKER 2022/23

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Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Cttee Request for information	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Response to request for information	Date of response	Scrutiny Officer Comments/Update
29/06/2022	Query raised about the grant money from the Taunton Youth Community Centre (TYCC) legacy fund which was earmarked to be spent on the youth of Taunton. How was this money distributed to worthy causes and who decided who benefitted?	Cllr Chris Booth / Housing Directorate	<p><u>Local groups awarded funding for youth support work</u> somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk..</p> <p>Comments from Christine Gale forwarded to the Committee.</p> <p>Somerset Community Foundation as administrator of the fund recommended both YMCA and Conquest as main recipients because they both operate within two miles from the Taunton Town Centre, with a focus on youth work.</p>	30/06/22	Scott Weetch / Christine Gale provided an update on the process for distributing this fund. (Legacy money had been held for 20 years).
29/06/2022	<p>How has the underspend in relation to staff salaries come about?</p> <p>Assets Staff (para 6.14)</p>	Cllr Fran Smith / Housing Directorate	Assets - The underspend in relation to several staff vacancies during the year across the capital investment and asset management teams is due to staff leaving and periods of the posts being vacant during the recruitment process. This has been exacerbated during the year with difficulty in recruitment to sufficiently experienced technical staff.	05/07/22	Simon Lewis / Chris Brown

	Develop and Regen (para 6.11)		<p>Development and Regeneration -</p> <p>The underspend was due to two main reasons – a) staff turnover has and often does lead to budget savings as there are often periods of vacancy during the recruitment period. There has been a turnover of staff especially at project officer level over the past 12 months. b) one post has been held back from recruitment until the service is clear on delivery priorities. The post is a senior post earmarked for new build however the emerging low carbon retrofit strategy means this post may be retitled to support this area of work. During 2021/2022 the funding associated with this post was used to offset additional costs in the capital programme team.</p>		
29/06/2022	Why was there a lack of investment in air source heat pumps and insulation in Appendix A?	Cllr Fran Smith / Housing Directorate	The emerging low carbon retrofit strategy and delivery plan is seeking to align the capital decent homes programme and retrofit strategies to deliver works at pace, efficiently and within the resources the council has. The emerging strategy will be explored at a member briefing 1 st September and the strategy will be refined as it progresses to full Council in December 2022. This is three months earlier than previously proposed. The emerging strategy does prioritise fabric improvements over renewable heating systems in	05/07/22	Simon Lewis / Chris Brown

			<p>the early years as these measures can reduce more CO2 than changes to heating systems and reduce heat demand leading to more affordable warmth. It is important to note that grants are essential to ensure the council can move forward at pace on its retrofit and zero carbon ambitions and most grants for social landlords' support fabric first approaches rather than gas replacement. The service is discussing one grant scheme which could install some ASHP and solar PV and reduce the council's capital requirement which in turn could be used to speed up fabric measures or the replacement of gas and solid fuel systems to ASHP and Solar PV on well insulated council homes. In advance of the whole member briefing the housing service intend to discuss the emerging retrofit strategy with Cllr Mansell as the recent chair of the Community Scrutiny Committee working group on retrofit, Dixie Darch as portfolio holder for Climate Change and Cllr Fran Smith as portfolio holder for housing in August.</p>		
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31/08/2022	<p>The Energy Plan and work on Net Zero Strategy were welcomed. It was suggested that there could be a business case for more solar panels at the centres with involvement from both Everyone Active and SWT. Officers agreed to investigate this. Can updates please be provided and recorded here.</p> <p>Requested on 31/08/22 by Cllr Mansell.</p>	<p>Cllr Dixie Darch / Cllr Perry and Cllr Rigby External Operations Directorate</p>	<p>There are currently solar panels at the tennis centre and pool at Blackbrook, and on the roof of Taunton pool. SLM are entitled to use all the electricity generated, and SWT are entitled to sell any surplus.</p> <p>Solar panels are being considered as part of the wider project to decarbonise Wellington Sports Centre. There is a bid going to the next round of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and includes provision for panels on the roof.</p> <p>Currently, officer time is being prioritised on the Wellington scheme, and installation of solar panels on the Council's Westpark depot in Wellington. A decarbonisation survey on this building identified a 110% energy return, and funding is in place to progress this during 22/23.</p> <p>Whilst officers appreciate that this is a logical suggestion, priority currently needs to be given to the Wellington Sports Centre project, which would return a greater carbon saving, and the Westpark depot solar scheme, as this would be a big step forward to decarbonisation of that building.</p>	20/09/22	Jonathan Stevens / Chris Hall
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31/08/2022	<p>Feedback on the Town Centre Health Checks – very little information has been fed back to the participating parishes and towns on the findings of the High Street health checks from Stantec. Members are having difficulty finding this information on the Council’s website.</p> <p>Query raised by Cllr Janet Lloyd 31/08/2022. Supported by Cllr Whetlor.</p> <p>Can the Stantec Reports please be sent to the clerks of the relevant parishes for information.</p>	Cllr Mike Rigby – Economic Regeneration /	<p>With agreement from the Chair of Community Scrutiny Committee, a member briefing will take place on Thursday 13 October to provide an update on the Town Centre Health Check Report. Details have been circulated in the meeting diary.</p> <p>This will enable members to receive the information and ask any questions as they arise, rather than waiting for a written response.</p> <p>A link to the report can be found below for reference. SWT Town Centre Health Report May 2022 (somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)</p>	01/09/22	<p>Chris Hall / Alison Blom Cooper.</p> <p>To be delivered by Laura Higgins, Principal Planning Policy Officer.</p>
31/08/2022	<p>CCTV Upgrade Do Wellington Town Council still contribute to the maintenance and upkeep of the CCTV? If so – how much? If it has stopped, when did this happen?</p> <p>Query raised by Cllr Janet Lloyd 31/08/2022</p>	Cllr Chris Booth, Community / Housing Directorate James Barra	Neither Wellington Town Council or Somerset West and Taunton have any record of a payment having been made/received within the last 3 years. Neither can trace any evidence that such payments took place, so we are unable to establish when they stopped or how much it was.	20/09/22	Scott Weetch / Sally Parry

31/08/2022	CCTV Upgrade How many successful prosecutions have taken place in Taunton due to CCTV? Query raised by Cllr Andy Pritchard 31/08/2022	Cllr Chris Booth, Community / Housing Directorate James Barrah	It is not possible to accurately attribute the number of successful prosecutions due to CCTV cameras as there are usually several pieces of evidence which will be involved in a prosecution. Equally, we do not have access to the information to support which arrests have led to a prosecution. What we can advise is that in the last 9 months CCTV has been involved in 39 arrests (some of which may still be going through the Court system). These figures do not include arrests that have taken place later, as that will of course happen sometimes days or weeks after the event and such information is not fed back to the CCTV Control Centre.	20/09/22	Scott Weetch / Sally Parry
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31/08/2022	<p>Housing Qtr1 Report</p> <p>Where potential savings have been identified in the HRA budget, can these please be made apparent in the report. Committee would like to see this referenced in the Qtr2 update.</p> <p>Requested by Cllr Habgood 31/08/2022</p>	Cllr Fran Smith, Housing / Housing Directorate James Barrah	<p>Referenced in Q2 report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • para. 5.10 on capitalising material costs c£250k, eg identifying jobs that were initially considered revenue in nature but once works were completed ended up being capitalised. • para. 5.11 on capitalisation staff costs £254k, e.g. if hypothetically the capital programme did not exist then this team would not be required. • Para. 5.14 on central recharges £320k, e.g., a full and detailed review of shared costs has been undertaken this year resulting in a reduction in cost to the HRA • para. 5.17 on capital charges / net interest payable re reduction in capital spend, e.g. if we spend less on the capital programme then less of our capital financing reserves are used and thus earn interest instead • Para. 5.18 on depreciation charges vs VRP. eg the increase in depreciation charges is a combination of where external audit advised us last year to reduce our useful 	26/11/22	Kerry Prisco
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			<p>life from 100 to 70 years plus the increase in house prices inflating the value of our assets. We have proposed to offset this pressure in part against the voluntary repayment of debt (funding this from a different pot of money i.e. existing capital receipts) though this still leaves a pressure of c£400k.</p>		
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26/10/2022	<p>HRA Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy – Is there a cut-off date when existing gas boilers will not be replaced within the housing stock?</p> <p>Requested by Cllr Hazel Prior Sankey.</p> <p>Can KPI's be added to the housing stats detailing what type of heating each dwelling uses?</p> <p>Requested by Cllr Dave Mansell</p>	Cllr Fran Smith / Housing Directorate, James Barrah	<p>The strategy does not propose a specific year for ending the installation of new gas boilers. However, gas boilers have an assumed life of 15 years, and the strategy is to work effectively with the decent homes programme. In principle this would mean installing only electric systems after 2035 to efficiently help achieve zero carbon.</p> <p>Yes, the service collects information on heating systems, and this can be a measure added to the KPIs.</p>	01/11/22	Chris Brown
26/10/2022	<p>Cost of Living Crisis Update – As the hardship fund money was not allowed to be spent on debt or arrears, what was the main ask of the fund? Up to how much was each applicant granted, and what did they use the money for.</p> <p>Requested by Cllr Dawn Johnson.</p>	Cllr Chris Booth / Housing Directorate, James Barrah	The SWTC Hardship Fund was available for support of up to £200 for repair or contribution toward replacement of essential white goods, kitchen appliances-clothes iron, kettle, microwave or technology (laptop computer for example), shoes, clothing or travel card/petrol or shoes for interview, school uniform, car repairs (if needed for employment). Bedding, essential clothing items (underwear) or sanitary goods.	07/11/22	Scott Weetch / Christine Gale

26/10/2022	<p>Cost of Living Crisis Update – Were the statistics presented indicative of the SWT demographic as whole? Why did older people not seem to engage with the Hardship Fund? Was there evidence of any gaps and how could we be sure that we were hitting hard to reach people?</p>	Cllr Chris Booth / Housing Directorate, James Barrah	<p>This was an emergency fund which by its nature operates on a first come basis and those who presented and were eligible were funded. (See eligibility guidance below).</p> <p>Eligibility To be eligible to apply for this one-off grant applicants must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a permanent resident in Somerset West and Taunton • Be over the age of 16 and living independently of parents or carers • Be on a low income-threshold to be determined • Be unable to pay for essentials due to lack of sufficient funds • Having exhausted recourse to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local assistance scheme • Surviving winter fund • Foodbanks • Any other assistance scheme for which they might be eligible <p>Following evidence will be required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proof of identity • proof of age • proof of residency in Somerset West and Taunton 	07/11/22	Scott Weetch / Christine Gale
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- proof of income - bank statement (no older than previous month)
- proof of need – what the grant is needed for

The comparison of take up versus population, per age group below indicates that older people did engage in applying to the Hardship Fund.

	% of fund	% of population
Under 25	9	10
25-34	38	13
35-44	29	13
45-54	12	16
55-64	10	17
Over 64	2	31

26/10/2022	<p>Cost of Living Crisis Update – How was the scheme advertised and promoted. Has this highlighted any lessons for the future?</p>	Cllr Chris Booth / Housing Directorate, James Barra	The scheme was announced in the local press, the SWT and both advice service websites, staff and tenants' newsletters, SWT staff intranet and information sent by direct email to relevant staff members. There was also an announcement on local radio. This scheme was particularly well promoted with the aim of reaching all groups; there were no highlights for future learning.	07/11/22	Scott Weetch / Christine Gale
26/10/2022	<p>Cost of Living Crisis Update – Can the percentage split between TD and WSC be better explained. Is this how the Fund was spent, or does it indicate the number of applicants?</p> <p>Requested by Cllr Libby Lisgo</p>	Cllr Chris Booth / Housing Directorate, James Barra	It was agreed that an initial 50/50 split would be applied, to be reviewed when one locality had disbursed it's 50% allocation. Taunton got there first, and because proportionately uptake was broadly mirroring the populations, the processing of applications continued in chronological order. Indeed, the final split supported the same with Taunton's applicants collecting 71.6% of the fund and West Somerset's 28.4%. According to the mid-2019 population estimates on Somerset Intelligence Network, the respective populations were 77.4% and 22.6% of the total.	07/11/22	Scott Weetch / Christine Gale

30/11/2022	<p>Housing Update – Does the Council recycle the waste collected on the Estate Skip Days?</p> <p>Requested by Cllr Dave Mansell</p>	Cllr Fran Smith / Housing Directorate James Barrah	<p>SWT has tried to place skips for different types of waste to encourage recycling but in practice our tenants are not very diligent and at the end of the day each skip was contaminated with mixed waste and therefore this did not work.</p> <p>Our Estates Officer calls several skip providers to seek the best price for the large skips we need. She has committed to check the next time we do this to ask what their recycling policies are and to seek one that can endeavour to recycle the majority of the content.</p>	22/12/22	Simon Lewis
30/11/2022	<p>Housing Update – What is the “Winter Plan” as referenced in Christian Trevelyan’s SIP report</p>	Cllr Chris Booth / Communitues. Housing Directorate James Barrah	<p>The Winter Plan is driven by Somerset County Council through Public Health – it is a partnership approach to help people struggling with heating over the Winter. Partners include SCC, GPs, NHS, Centre for Sustainable Energy and others. It includes advice on heating and insulation as well as signposting financial support. Getting ready for winter (somerset.gov.uk)</p>	22/12/22	Simon Lewis

	COMMUNITY SCRUTINY		
Meeting	Draft Agenda Items	Lead PFH/ Lead Officer	Exec Report?
25 January 2023	CNCR Update	Jonathan Stevens	
SRD = 13 Jan	Executive PFH Session - Climate Change	Cllr Dixie Darch	
Exec RD - 3 Feb			
Informal Exec RD - 3 Jan			
SMT RD - 14 Dec			
22 February 2023	Health and Wellbeing Board Update	Cllr C Booth/ M. Leeman	
SRD = 10 Feb	(SLM) Everyone Active Bi-Annual Report	Steve Hughes / PFH Cllr Derek Perry	No
Exec RD - 3 March	Canonsgrove Decant Report	Cllr Fran Smith / James Barraah / Simon Lewis	
Informal Exec RD - 1 Feb	HRA Financial Performance 2022/23 Q3	Kerry Prisco	Yes
SMT RD - 18 Jan	Chair's Annual Report	Cllr Libby Lisgo	

Executive Meeting	Draft Agenda Items
18 January 2023	NTWP - Purchases
venue =	CNCR - supplementary capital budget - urgent item
Exec RD = 6 January	
Informal Exec RD = 6 December	
SMT RD = 23 November	
15 February 2023	Taunton Garden town: Delivering our Vision
venue =	Local Labour Agreements
Exec RD = 3 February	
Informal Exec RD = 3 January	
SMT RD = 14 December	
15 March 2023	GF Financial Performance 2022/23 Q3
venue =	HRA Financial Performance 2022/23 Q3
Exec RD = 3 March	Corporate Performance Report Q3
Informal Exec RD = 1 February	Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan
SMT RD = 18 January	Taunton Heat Network Feasibility Study
	Wellington Place Plan – Adoption
	Commercial in Confidence: “Commercial Incentives Ear Marked Reserve

FULL COUNCIL

Meeting	Report Deadline	Agenda Items	Lead Officer
07 February 2023	26 January 2023	PFH Reports	
		Connecting our Garden Communities	Graeme Thompson
		Review of the Commercial Property Investment Activity and Performance Report	Joe Wharton
		Political Allocation	Amy Tregellas
28 March 2023	16 March 2023	PFH Annual Reports	
		Scrutiny Annual Reports x 2	Chair of Committee
		Audit and Governance Annual Report	Chair of Committee
		Sign off of all SWT Minutes	
		Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan	Graeme Thompson
		Wellington Place Plan – Adoption	Sarah Povall
		Funding Key Decision	Paul Fitzgerald
		Contract Key Decision	Chris Hall
		Commercial in Confidence: “Commercial Incentives Ear Marked Reserve	Joe Wharton

Report Number: SWT 3/23

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Name of Committee – Community Scrutiny Committee, 25th January 2023

Annual Update of Progress of the Climate Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Dixie Darch

Report Author: Jonathan Stevens, Assistant Director Climate Change Regulatory Services and Asset Management

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides the second annual update on Council progress against the Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience (CNCR) Action Plan.
- 1.2 Actions in the CNCR plan are defined as immediate, short, medium or long term. There are 180 'immediate' Year 1 actions and 150 Year 2-3 actions. This report focuses progress against these actions.
- 1.3 The report is not an exhaustive overview of every action included in the CNCR plan, rather a summary of main areas of progress within the first two years, and reflections on some of the challenges the organisation has faced in delivering the actions.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 There are no recommendations associated with this report.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 There are no risks associated with this report.

4. Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency in February 2019 and appointed an Executive Member for Climate Change.
- 4.2 SWT approved its own Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience (CNCR) Action Plan in October 2020. The plan provides an overview of the key issues facing Somerset in relation to the climate emergency and a strategic basis for working towards addressing these issues over a 10 year period.

- 4.3 The plan is owned by the External Operation's Climate Change team, but actions attributed to SWT are delivered by services across the Council and not just by the climate team.

The plan is divided into 8 workstreams: built environment, energy, industry, farming and food, natural environment, waste, water and transport.

- 4.4 The plan does include actions to address nature recovery, but a separate vision and action plan to reflect the Council's Ecological Emergency declaration in October 2020 was approved by Full Council in July 2022.

Nature recovery actions within the CNCR were moved across to the Council's Ecological Vision and Action Plan but progress on this area is included in this report for the purpose of the update.

- 4.5 Delivery of the CNCR Plan is split into 4 timescales: 'immediate' year one actions, short term year two and three actions, medium term year four to six actions and long-term year seven to ten actions.

Immediate actions were identified as those that could be carried out either in whole or may commence within 12 months of the plan's approval by Council. Short term actions are those that were expected to be carried out either in whole or commence within years 2-3 of the plan.

- 4.6 Since the last report to Scrutiny Committee, a Climate and Ecological Emergency workstream has been created as part of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

A summary of SWT's progress within each of the different workstreams is as follows:

4.7 **Built Environment**

4.7.1 Planning Services

In April 2022, the Council updated its interim planning guidance with regards to consideration for the Climate and Ecological emergencies.

Originally approved and published in February 2021, the Climate Positive Planning: Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate and Ecological Emergency supports the Council's CNCR plan and the countywide approved Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy by ensuring that consideration for climate and ecological factors have been applied when submitting and approving development proposals.

Intended as a temporary measure, it seeks to clarify related policies adopted within the Council's existing Local Plans until successive policies can be implemented by the new unitary authority for Somerset, following its formation in April 2023.

SWT were commended at the 2022 RTPI SW Awards for Climate Positive Planning document.

Included in the April 2022 updates was the approval of a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit intended for building professionals and homeowners, which sets out best practice approaches in designing, specifying, constructing and fitting out a Net Zero compliant new build or retrofit project.

The Toolkit complements Climate Positive Planning, and provides additional guidance to help articulate how some of the design processes within the Districtwide Design Guide supplementary planning document (SPD) might be executed in order to deliver Net Zero buildings.

The toolkit provides additional guidance to support the council's aspirations towards net zero and is a material planning consideration in considering and determining planning applications and proposals. Whilst the Council does not have planning policies which explicitly require zero carbon buildings at present, the Toolkit can provide a useful resource for officers and members in understanding whether development proposals are being ambitious enough in responding to relevant existing planning policy requirements, and in responding to the Climate Emergency as a material consideration.

It is also worth noting that LAs remain bound by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Whilst the National Planning Policy Framework does stipulate standards for sustainability and promote the use of low carbon energy and heat, LAs are also required to ensure that policy requirements do not put the viable development of the area and the Local Plan at risk, i.e. that sufficient level of housing is planned for and delivered. This is measured through demonstration of a 'five year housing land supply' and compliance with the Housing Delivery Test.

4.7.2 Asset Management

Building decarbonisation surveys on all main Council building are now complete. This has identified what is required to decarbonise each property, and can be used to inform future years capital programmes and applications to external funding sources such as the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

For 22/23, two bids for funding towards decarbonisation have been made; for Wellington Sports Centre and the Alcombe Children's Centre in Minehead. It should also be noted that PSDS criteria limits bids to buildings where components are nearing end of life.

A project to install solar PV panels and battery storage at the Westpark Depot is currently out to tender.

4.7.3 Social Housing

The Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery Plan was approved by Full Council in December 2022. The strategy sets out the baseline position of the Council's housing stock and sets targets which will help SWT towards achieving zero carbon for its homes.

The strategy and delivery plan sets out a pathway to achieving EPC by 2030 for all SWT homes, or have an alternative investment option identified, as well as reducing heat demand by 30% by 2040.

The plan also details what is required to replace fossil fuel in SWT homes with electric based heat and power by 2050 at a pace to ensure affordable energy for tenants and in line with available funds.

The delivery plan proposes a number of schemes over the next 10 years, and these are currently contained within the proposed HRAs 10Year Capital Programme and 30Year Business Plan assumptions from 2022/23. The delivery plan has highlighted a number of grant opportunities 2023-2026 which are as yet unconfirmed and therefore at risk of not being achieved.

The retrofit strategy does not achieve Net Zero until 2050, and successful delivery of this strategy will be highly dependent on additional and external grant funding.

SWT was successful during 2022/23 in securing £385k of funding from the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, as part of a bid with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA). A second bid has been submitted to the latest round of funding, and we await the outcome.

Phase A of SWT's North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) is underway and will deliver 47 of the project's 227 new homes. Each home will be highly energy efficient, with a range of measures being installed to each property including PV panels, triple glazing and air source heat pumps.

A further ten Woolaway homes in Oake are to be refurbished during 2023. The refurb will include installation of air source heat pumps (ASHP) and photovoltaic panels (PV). These homes will be 2050 zero carbon ready and require no additional retrofit work.

The Council's Seaward Way development in Minehead has also begun and is due to be completed next Autumn. The 54 new homes will be zero carbon and incorporate comprehensive data gathering to benchmark energy and carbon use.

4.8 Transport

During 2021/22, SWT secured a government grant worth £136,000 to boost the roll-out of on street Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points in council-owned car parks. This programme of works has now been completed, with 22kW fast EV charge points now installed in Minehead, Porlock, Taunton, Watchet, Wellington, Williton, and Wiveliscombe. A charge point in Dunster was initially deemed prohibitively expensive, but that has been revisited this year and officers are now exploring the installation of a EVCP in the village via the ESPO framework.

We relaunched our EVCP Grant Fund scheme for parish and town councils and community groups and received 4 new applications which have been all been approved and are now progressing to the installation stage.

EVCPs were also installed on Council premises at Deane House, the Wellington Depot and at Kilkenny House in readiness for Council's transition to an electric fleet. This has begun with the Council's pool and supervisor fleet with orders placed for a further 23

EVs on top of the two that are already in use. By the end of 2023, all small SWT vehicles will be EVs.

Previously, technological limitations have prevented vans and towing vehicles being replaced with EV equivalents, but now the technology is advancing SWT will explore the available options.

SWT has extended its existing e-scooter trials until 31 May 2024, to enable the Department for Transport (DfT) to gather further evidence where gaps are identified and to build on the findings of the current evaluation. The trials have been running since 2020, and we are now beginning to see good returns on data.

Since launching in October 2020, Taunton's e-scooter trial has seen 126,375 rides by over 15,200 riders travelling over 235,100 miles, removing an estimated 31.4 tonnes of atmospheric carbon compared with fossil fuel powered vehicles. Minehead's trial has seen over 30,500 rides by over 12,600 riders travelling over 44,000 miles, removing an equivalent 6 tonnes of carbon since launching in June 2021.

SWT provided match for funding the Taunton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which has now been completed by Somerset County Council. SWT has also provided match funding for a LCWIP in Wellington which is now underway and has committed the same funding for a LCWIP in Minehead.

SWT is delivering elements of the 'Red' route, identified within the Taunton LCWIP, from the railway station to Vivary Park, as part of the Future High Streets Fund. Schemes to be delivered in summer 2023 include a new cycle and pedestrian bridge over the River Tone, cycle hubs, and two town centre crossings to enable safer cycling, walking and wheeling.

SWT was awarded £15,900 from the SCC public health fund specifically for Active Travel projects, and we are using this money for the installation of additional cycle parking within Taunton

Steam Coast Trail projects continue to move forward, with two new connections in varying stages of discussion with landowners and key stakeholders.

£50k has been allocated from SCC's Public Health Fund for Active Travel to produce a Strategic Outline Business Case for sustainable transport options between Wellington and Taunton, required to evidence a case for investment. This work will be carried out in the first half of 2023.

The Connecting our Garden Communities (CoGCs) Plan has taken consideration of LCWIP routes and supplemented with additional routes designed to meet the needs of the Garden Community developments in Taunton. The majority of routes included in CoGCs have been subject to audit and scoping out of potential interventions, with some progressed to initial concept planning.

The Council is now in the process of adopting the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan. The plan is going to Full Council on 7 February and again this will be a material planning consideration in considering proposals and plans and will support future bids for funding.

SWT facilitated the DfT Connected and Automated Vehicle trial in Taunton working with Britain Thinks, an independent research agency in partnership with University College London and Aurrigo. We hope to be involved in future DfT trials.

4.9 **Natural Environment**

The Council approved the adoption of an Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan in July 2022. This was a joint piece of work developed with the SWT and Sedgemoor District Council. The Vision sets out our ambitions to address the ecological deterioration within our districts and to lessen our global impact on the natural world. It is accompanied by a comprehensive action plan that provides the practical steps to deliver ecological recovery. It builds on previous work to address the Climate Emergency, but with a specific focus on wildlife and habitats.

The EEVAP includes a number of actions from the CNCR Plan and is the Council's direct response to its Ecological Emergency declaration from September 2020. The plan includes 21 high level actions, a number of which are already being implemented.

These include the Council's new grassland management strategy, produced by the Somerset Wildlife Trust. The strategy seeks to support wildlife and habitat within its existing open spaces, whilst ensuring continued amenity access for all. Officers estimate that the grass cutting teams are now cutting 25% less grass than before the Ecological Emergency declaration.

SWT have also funded a new Treescapes Officer in partnership with Exmoor National Park Authority. The post will work directly with landowners including the ENPA themselves to create large scale woodland projects within the boundaries of ENP and SWT. ENPA currently have approximately 110ha of planting on course to be completed this winter and next.

The Treescapes Officer is also producing planting plans for all of SWT's open spaces, and this will form the basis of a bid to the 2023 Urban Tree Challenge Fund.

SWT supported national tree planting week again this year by offering free trees, this was our third consecutive year and most successful with 580 trees provided to 27 parish and town councils and community groups.

4.10 **Energy**

Working in partnership with the other Somerset authorities, a tender for a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) was published in December 2022. This is a key piece of work for the county to meet renewable energy generation targets within the CNCR.

The plan will include a high-level assessment of renewable energy generation opportunities, identifying suitable sites to support the development of the new Somerset wide Local Plan and outlining how to work alongside community energy organisations, the private sector and various other stakeholders to invest and grow renewable energy generation in Somerset. This will ensure the necessary evidence is in place to allow the new Somerset Council to take opportunities forward directly or in partnership and have the evidence available to bid for potential future funding.

Technologies assessed will focus on Solar PV and thermal, wind, run of river hydro, heat pumps, geothermal, heat recovery, storage batteries, hydrogen and anaerobic digestion. A general overview of tidal & wave and the potential overlap this may have with terrestrial land use and planning is included.

Although this work will provide a planning evidence base, it will also enable the proliferation of renewable energy in Somerset more generally. The energy system in the county requires holistic consideration to facilitate electrification of transport and heat. Although beyond the traditional remit of local authorities, it is important that we act as an enabler for bringing the different bodies together to meet renewable energy targets.

SWT has also been investigating potential heat networks within Taunton following a successful grant application to the Government's Heat Network Delivery Unit. The project looks at energy demands, heat supply opportunities, energy centre locations, and initial techno-economic feasibility and has identified potential for an energy centre within Firepool. This has been included in the Draft Firepool Masterplan identifying potential for an energy centre within the site and we await a final report from consultants.

4.11 **Water**

SWT continues to progress 3 key flood alleviation schemes within Taunton, following the Council making £6 million available from a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund in February 2020.

The raising levels of the lockgates at Firepool (TTC10) will prevent flows entering the canal, and reduces flood risk for Priorswood and Crown Industrial Estates and Bathpool. This remains on course for completion in 2023/24.

A combination of repair, replacement or new flood defences between Frieze Hill and Town Bridge (TTC5) will provide reduced flood risk to key transport routes including the A3027 bridge street, A3027 Staplegrove road and the A3087 station road, and the North Town and Firepool areas of Taunton. This also remains on course for 2023/24 completion.

Optimisation of the existing flood storage area at Longrun Meadow (LRM) aims to reduce flood risk in Taunton town centre and further downstream including areas of North Town, Firepool, Priorswood and Crown Industrial Estates, Bathpool. This has been in the SWT project pipeline but has now been assigned a project manager and is in the project initiation stages.

This scheme focusses more on soft infrastructure and natural flood management and offers wider environmental benefits. We are working with key stakeholders such as Friends of Longrun to try and achieve this.

Working with Wessex Water all three of our water refill stations (Taunton, Wellington and Minehead) have gone live during the last 12 months.

4.12 **Waste**

The CNCR plan includes several actions to help facilitate the ease with which people can recycle. This includes supporting the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) with the implementation of the Recycle More programme, which was successfully rolled out in West Somerset in February. This completed the implementation across the SWT district.

SWT also implemented the Recycling on-the-Go pilot, installing 130 combined public litter and recycling bins across the district. The configuration of the new bins enables plastic bottles and aluminium or tin cans to be deposited separately, making recycling easier when out in rural and urban public spaces. The roll out coincided with a competition for schools to design posters to promote the scheme.

4.13 **Challenges in Progressing CNCR Actions**

The CNCR is an ambitious plan in that it targets a Net Zero transition for the whole of the district, rather than focussing purely on the Council's operations. Therefore, there are areas in which the Council has limited influence or is reliant on other organisations to deliver. Of the outcomes within the plan, only around 50% are within the Council's direct control.

This is a particular challenge within the Food and Farming and Industry workstreams, where opportunities around land use and circular economies are outside of the Council's usual remit. These are the workstreams where the least progress has been made against CNCR actions.

Small steps can be taken to support these sectors, such as the Council's new grant scheme in partnership with Sedgemoor District Council to help small and micro businesses become greener as part of their commitment to reaching net zero emissions by 2030. Using funds from the Hinkley Point C developer contributions, carbon cutting grants worth up to £2,500 have been made available to businesses with up to nine employees to help fund energy reduction and net-zero transition projects.

- 4.14 Many of the shifts required for the county to meet its Net Zero target also require significant Government policy intervention. This is happening, with examples including the Environment Act, and the phasing out of new internal combustion engine (ICE) cars by 2030 and gas boiler installations in new build homes by 2025, but clearly these are huge changes where SWT's only influence is that of lobbying together with other organisations.
- 4.15 Funding transition to Net Zero is also a significant challenge. The CNCR remains un-costed, but work is now underway via the Climate LGR workstream to integrate all district climate plans into the countywide Climate Emergency Strategy and produce a refreshed, costed plan for the new Somerset Council. This will likely equate to hundreds of millions in Somerset alone, and although the transition will be made over a number of years, there will be heavy reliance on external funding. The Council has proven itself excellent at producing high-quality bids to external funds, and the new Council will need to be sufficiently resourced to continue this in an increasingly competitive environment.

4.16 Partnership working will clearly be vital in Somerset's journey to Net Zero, especially given that so many of the CNCR outcomes require the support and cooperation of others. SWT recognises the importance of partnership working and has actively worked with the other authorities within Somerset this year, as well as organisations such as Exmoor National Park Authority, the Somerset Wildlife Trust, Zipp Mobility and the Environment Agency.

4.17 **SWT/SDC Partnership**

Following a successful first year working in partnership with SDC, we have extended the agreement taking us up to vesting day of the new council.

The main successes of the partnership have been the installation of EVCPs at the Northgate Development in Bridgwater, the development and subsequent approval the joint EEVAP and working together across both authorities to the gather the data required to calculate our carbon emissions for 2020/21, preparing the technical report and infographic for publication. Prior to this SWT contracted Exeter University to do this work on our behalf.

4.18 **Local Government Reorganisation**

The Climate and Water LGR workstream has brought the five authorities much closer together than before on climate, and this has resulted in some significant progress on key outcomes.

As well as the Local Area Energy Plan, joint activities such as producing a carbon baseline for the new authority by bringing together emissions data from the five existing Councils, and the development of a countywide tree strategy have been big steps forward.

A new carbon baseline is the foundation for understanding the carbon footprint for the new authority, where our efforts are best focussed, and building pathways to Net Zero in each area of operations.

The tree strategy has been funded by the five authorities and is being developed with partners from Exmoor National Park Authority, the Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills AONB services, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Woodland Trust, Forestry England and others. It has been the foundation of a successful bid worth £300k to the DEFRA Woodland Accelerator Fund to help deliver the strategy.

Other areas of focus for the Climate and Water workstream include merging existing district activities into the countywide Climate Emergency Strategy, producing a comms plan for climate change within the new authority, creating a carbon impact assessment tool for Council decisions and projects and designing and implementing a new governance structure for the climate and nature recovery work.

4.19 Despite the challenges, SWT continues to recognise the role of leadership on Climate Change. Following the Council's success in ranking first nationally in the Climate Emergency UK council scorecard last year, SWT was awarded a score of A- (Leadership) for its 2022 disclosure to the Climate Disclosure Project (CDP).

CDP is a not-for-profit charity that runs a global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states and regions to manage their environmental impacts. Achieving a score of A (Leadership) is a CNCR outcome to be delivered by 2023.

- **Links to Corporate Strategy**

Actions within the CNCR Plan contribute to the following priority strategic themes and outcomes:

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 (for example installing electric vehicle charging points across the District)

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

Improve recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste material that is not recycled through working with other Councils in the Somerset Waste Partnership

Provide and maintain green open spaces and parks, enhanced public spaces, as well as additional opportunities to safely walk or cycle in order to encourage active and healthy lifestyles

Support the delivery of strong sustainable transport infrastructure links including greater provision of public transport across the district, as well as solutions which remove barriers to people using public transport to access work, training and leisure opportunities

Seek additional funding for new strategic infrastructure and regeneration projects from developers, investors, Government and other funders, which support or enable existing or new communities within our district

- **Finance / Resource Implications**

This report contains no financial or resource implications.

Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications

This report contains no Unitary Council financial implications or S24 Direction Implications.

7 Legal Implications

This report contains no legal implications

8 Climate, Ecology and Sustainability Implications

This report contains no climate, ecology or sustainability implications.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

This report contains no safeguarding and/or community safety implications.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications

This report contains no equality and diversity implications.

11 Social Value Implications

This report contains no social value implications.

12 Partnership Implications

This report contains no partnership implications.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications

This report contains no health and wellbeing implications.

14 Asset Management Implications

This report contains no asset management implications.

15 Data Protection Implications

This report contains no data protection implications.

16 Consultation Implications

This report contains no consultation implications.

Democratic Path:

1. Community Scrutiny, 25/1/23

Reporting Frequency: Annually

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Full Council Meeting – 6 December 2022

Portfolio Holder Report for Climate Change.

Electric Vehicle Charge Point Update

SWT has approved grant funding for 4 more parish/town councils to the value of £5,850 to enable Electric Charge Point installation for community use.

SWT has been working with Sedgemoor District Council as part of our Climate Change Partnership on EVCP roll out in Sedgemoor. 4 x 22kw EVCPs have now gone live at the new Northgate development in Bridgwater.



SWT has been involved in the Somerset wide EV charging strategy. A report taken to SCC Environment Scrutiny on 26 October set out the challenges and opportunities in supporting the National EV infrastructure vision for 2030, exploring options to solve the issue of trailing cables to enable residents without access to off-road parking to be able to safely charge their EV.

Self-driving vehicles visit Taunton

From 24 to 27 September, Taunton residents had the opportunity to experience cutting edge technology, riding in self-driving vehicles as part of an innovative study lead by the Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles, a joint Department for Transport and Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy unit.

The self-driving pod and shuttle carried out a total of 140 trips over the two days, with a total of 447 passengers taking part. The shuttle which was based at Somerset County Cricket Club travelled an overall distance of 68.8km and the pod which was transporting passengers in Vivary Park travelled 48.5km overall.



Extension of Taunton and Minehead E-scooter trial

Self-driving vehicle technologies could help to improve everyone's access to transport wherever they live, whatever their income level, and whether they have a disability that currently limits their ability to access transport services.

Zipp Safety

⚡ Users must be over 16 years old & have a valid driver's licence

⚡ Do not use scooters under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

⚡ 1 person per scooter at a time.

⚡ Users must park in the designated bays.

⚡ Do not ride on pavements.

⚡ Wear a helmet.

⚡ Zipp

E-scooter trials in Minehead and Taunton are to be extended following public consultation and approval from the Department of Transport (DfT).

It was announced in June that participating Local Authorities could extend existing e-scooter trials until 31 May 2024, enabling the DfT to gather further evidence where gaps are identified and to build on the findings of the current evaluation.

SWT held a consultation to survey public opinion on safety preferences and potential future trial enhancements. The consultation was aimed towards the Minehead trial and was launched at the end of August for a period of one month.

364 responses were received in total, of which 252 (69%) of respondents were local to Minehead and 192 (53%) had experience using the trial's e-scooters. In response to opinions on the trial being extended, with the exception of two abstentions, 199 (55%) were either satisfied, more than satisfied or very satisfied, compared with 163 (45%) being partly satisfied or not satisfied.

Since launching in October 2020, Taunton's e-scooter trial has seen 121,750 rides by nearly 15,000 riders travelling over 228,500 miles, removing an estimated 31.4 tonnes of atmospheric carbon compared with fossil fuel powered vehicles. Minehead's trial has seen almost 30,000 rides by over 12,000 riders travelling over

43,000 miles, removing an equivalent 6 tonnes of carbon since launching in June 2021.

Energy Efficient Grants for businesses

Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) and Sedgemoor District (SDC) councils have launched a new grant scheme to help small and micro businesses become greener as part of our commitment to reaching net zero emissions by 2030.

Carbon cutting grants worth up to £2,500 are available to businesses with up to nine employees to help fund energy reduction and net-zero transition projects.

The EDF fund for business support is to mitigate the impact on the local community from the development of two new nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point C. There are many ways in which businesses can reduce their carbon footprint, from reducing waste (by re-using and recycling) to limiting energy use at night and replacing fuel powered vehicles with electric cars and bikes.

Applications opened Wednesday, 16 November and will close 8 December.

Guidance and Support for home retrofit

Householders wishing to make their homes more energy efficient can access information through the Somerset Retrofit Accelerator project, a joint initiative with the other Somerset councils and Somerset Independence Plus.

The Somerset Green Directory has been created to help householders find local businesses and services to help with eco retrofit projects. Using the Somerset Green Directory, you can search local businesses for your retrofit project including architects, construction companies, insulation, and renewable energy installers (there are currently over 90 listings). You can also learn about energy efficiency and low carbon retrofit through the Retrofit resources [Retrofit Resources - useful links to help your retrofit project \(retrofitsomerset.info\)](https://retrofitsomerset.info)

Find out what some Somerset homeowners have already done to retrofit their homes, along with other news, in the Retrofit Stories [Retrofit Stories - Retrofit Somerset](https://retrofitsomerset.info)

For more information email Retrofit Somerset website@retrofitsomerset.info

Carbon emissions baselining

All Somerset Local Authorities are working together to produce a carbon emissions baseline for the new council. This project went out to tender and the contract has been awarded to CGI. Gathering accurate baseline data is crucial for mapping our progress on reducing carbon emissions.

SWT corporate carbon emissions for 2020/21

The 20/21 Corporate Carbon Emissions Report for SWT is complete and will be published shortly.

Carbon Disclosure Project Feedback Report 2022

SWT has been recognised as a leader in responding to the climate emergency by the not-for-profit charity CDP.



The Council achieved a score of A- (Leadership) for its 2022 disclosure, an improvement on last year's score of B (Management).

The disclosure identifies the ways in which SWT are working to mitigate and adapt to the projected impacts of climate change.

The score demonstrates that SWT has made progress towards its ambitious goals.

All councils in Somerset have been working collaboratively on climate related activities which is contributing to Somerset West and Taunton's recognition as a leader.

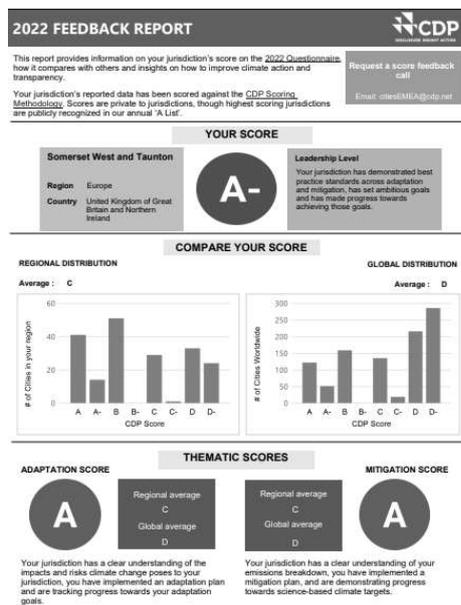
Exmoor National Park/SWT partnership tree planting project

Assessments of potential sites for urban tree planting have been completed by the ENP tree officer. Short term and long-term opportunities have been identified; short term opportunity will offer the potential to plant this winter and/or the following years whilst long term opportunities need further thought and collaboration with partners.

SWT officers are now reviewing the winter schedule to include the short-term opportunities, working with ENP to ensure that right trees /right place ethos is implemented.

Free tree giveaway to parish/town councils and community groups

27 parish/town councils or community groups will be collecting 581 trees (species include oak, beech, lime, hawthorn, silver birch, wild cherry, hazel, blackthorn and crab apple) from SWT Nursery to support National Tree Week.



Employee Volunteering Scheme launched

All SWT staff can take an additional day's annual leave to carry out volunteering which will benefit Climate Change and the Environment in the County of Somerset. The scheme is optional and allows employees to choose a voluntary activity to support SWT to continue working towards making the Council and the area carbon neutral by 2030. This could include litter picks; tree planting and beach cleans.

Climate Change Newsletter

Don't forget to subscribe to the SWT climate change newsletter, which is published monthly.

Subscribe here: [Climate change newsletter \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) where you will also find all previous editions available to download.

Cllr Dixie Darch, Executive Member for Climate Change