

SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 3rd August, 2022,
6.15 pm

The logo for Somerset West and Taunton, featuring the text "Somerset West and Taunton" in white on a teal background with a white swoosh.

The John Meikle Room - The Deane
House

Members: Sue Buller (Chair), Ian Aldridge, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, John Hassall, Nicole Hawkins, Marcus Kravis, Libby Lisgo, Simon Nicholls, Nick Thwaites, Danny Wedderkopp, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Agenda

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 6th July 2022.

(Pages 5 - 14)

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.

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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](#).

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| <p>5. Corporate Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan</p> <p>To receive items and review the Forward Plan.</p> <p>6. Executive and Full Council Forward Plan</p> <p>7. Corporate Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers</p> <p>To update the Scrutiny Committee on the progress of resolutions and recommendations from previous meetings of the Committee.</p> <p>8. Matters Arising - Updates from Officers on Written Answer Tracker Queries</p> <p>Due to the number of items outstanding on the 21/22 written answer tracker, it was voted unanimously by the Committee for those officers to attend the August Corporate Scrutiny meeting to provide a verbal update on their work.</p> <p>9. Taunton Garden Town Work Update</p> <p>This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mike Rigby (Economic Development, Planning and Transportation)</p> <p>This item will take the form of a presentation and verbal update delivered by Jenny Clifford, Taunton Garden Town Implementation Manager.</p> | <p>(Pages 15 - 16)</p> <p>(Pages 17 - 20)</p> <p>(Pages 21 - 38)</p> |
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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 Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 6 July 2022

Present: Councillor Sue Buller (Chair)

Councillors Nick Thwaites (Vice Chair), Ian Aldridge, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, John Hassall, Libby Lisgo, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Amy Tregellas, Sam Murrell, Chris Hall, Paul Fitzgerald, Kerry Prisco, Malcolm Riches, Graeme Thompson
James Barrah and Alison North (via zoom)

Also

Present: Councillors Federica Smith Roberts (6.55pm) Dixie Darch (7.11pm)

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

12. Apologies

Apologies were received from councillors Marcus Kravis and Nicole Hawkins, Portfolio Holder for Resources, Cllr Benet Allen.

13. Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee

The Committee resolved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 1 June 2022.

14. 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 I Aldridge	All Items	Williton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	SCC & West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoked and voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	SCC & Clerk to	Personal	Spoke and voted

15. **Public Participation**

There were no requests for public participation.

16. **Corporate Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

The Chair was pleased that the trackers had been brought up to date for the new municipal year and were clearer to understand. She had concerns however about the number of questions that had not elicited a written response from officers despite repeated reminders.

Due to the number of items still outstanding on the 21/22 written answer tracker, it was voted unanimously by the Committee for those officers to attend the August Corporate Scrutiny meeting to provide a verbal update on their work. Some of these questions were asked back in December 2021 and despite repeated reminders had not been responded to.

17. **Corporate Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

“Business of Cities” report be brought forward to discuss. This was facilitated under the previous Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration; Cllr Marcus Kravis and it was requested that this be aired to the public to provide clarity. The Committee wants to know how the money which was used to fund the report has been spent. Reference made to the Innovation Report from Catapult that was recently circulated to members. Could this be brought to Scrutiny to follow up and debate the findings? A suggestion was made for August as the diary was empty.

Chris Hall agreed to go away and follow this up with the team as it doesn't currently sit on any of the forward plans, and thus has missed the standard reporting cycle for August.

Prop: Farbahi / Sec: Firmin to bring forward the Catapult report to Corporate Scrutiny in August for the Committee to debate.

It was suggested that a monthly report on progress on Local Government Reorganisation would be a beneficial item for the committee to review. It was asked that the PFH attend for a 10-minute slot so that members of the public could be informed. (The Chair is happy for this to be done as a standing item via zoom if the PFH, Sarah Wakefield can accommodate).

The Committee was informed that the monthly LGR briefings are due to be reconvened and this would provide timely updates to members.

Flood prevention and finance – Can officers provide an update on what work is currently being done and how funds are being spent regarding flood prevention work? This is specifically in the Taunton Deane area, and not coastal defence. An

overview of current SWT strategic schemes and projects was suggested, with officers requested to attend in October 2022.

Garden Town Status – Following the £2m funding received from central government how is this project progressing? Can an overview be provided again at the August meeting to show how the money is being spent?

Chris Hall advised that subject to annual leave commitments a show and tell type format could be used to update Committee on the project at the August meeting. There would not be enough time to produce a full written report.

The Committee noted the Corporate Scrutiny forward plan.

18. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plan**

It was asked what was meant by “placeholder” on the Forward Plans?

This term is used to identify that an item of a confidential nature will be coming forward to that Committee in the future. It acts as a reservation so that the agenda allows for it and doesn't become too full. The two items listed on the forward plan as “placeholder” will be discussed with the relevant Chairs outside of the meeting.

Cllr Aldridge raised the point that the term “placeholder” was misleading and appears to hide the business of the Council, rather than being open and transparent. The Monitoring officer agreed to follow this up with colleagues and stated that as soon as appropriate report titles were available, they would be added on all the Forward Plans. These will be updated to ensure they follow the correct democratic pathway and reporting cycles and would be re-circulated to Members.

Constitutional items are going to Audit and Standards, and then on to Full Council. Two reports are regularising Constitutional and Code of Conduct matters across all 5 councils prior to the move to Unitary. This should make the transitional arrangements much more transparent.

Community Governance Review – Parishing of Taunton. Currently in the second phase of consultation with feedback and results due to go to Full Council in September. Full Council will also consider the Statutory Change Order at that time. This will then need to be passed onto Somerset County Council for official sign-off, due to the transitional arrangements. Following on from this will be the “implementation stage” which will involve getting the Council up and running prior to April 1, 2023. The report going to Full Council in September will outline how this will all happen in a safe and legal manner.

The Committee noted the Executive and Full Council forward plans.

Cllr Federica Smith Roberts joined the meeting at 6.55pm

19. **Connecting out Garden Communities - Public Consultation**

Graeme Thompson presented his consultation report to the Committee for consideration.

An email had been submitted from the Taunton Area Cycling Campaign in support of the Connecting Garden Communities Consultation. This was read out by Cllr Buller as follows: -

“We would like to express our general support for the work in this report. Whilst we may differ on some details, we believe that the work is extremely important in filling the many gaps in SCC's original Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), which was not integrated with major development sites.

It is also important that the work is embodied in the thinking of the new unitary authority. A mechanism for doing this needs to be agreed. One option would be for it to be a supplement to the LCWIP, which is a DfT recognised document (although not statutory).

We are pleased that TACC's contribution in terms of volunteer time is recognised in the report. To date, we have found the officers' process for developing the active travel network to be open and professional. We would be grateful if this email could be circulated to the rest of the Committee.

Mike Ginger (for Taunton Area Cycling Campaign)”

During the debate the following points were raised:

- Officers were commended for the work and collaboration that had gone into the consultation report and the positive outcomes for everyone.
- Sustainable transport needs to start further out in the rural areas and needs to be more than just aspirational, it needs to be delivered! It should also include those communities such as Ruishton that are split by the A358 or the M5 motorway and would benefit from safe travel routes into town.
- How is the network of routes arrived at, when there appear to be some obvious omissions, such as the canal path? This is already a busy walker's route, but the pathways are exceedingly narrow. Could the towpath be widened to accommodate more users?
 - *The canal is an asset that is owned by the Land and Rivers Trust, so any work would need to be undertaken in partnership, with full consultation with all user groups. Whilst this doesn't prohibit the work from happening it does prevent challenges that make it unlikely.*
 - *Associated costs would also be considerable. For instance, widening of canal tow paths along the Bridgwater/Taunton canal would be extremely expensive and would have a detrimental impact on other areas of the environment and ecology.*

- How is demand determined, to understand who wants to travel where?
 - *The LCWIP is very data led with good historical information about the pathways of travel for usual routes to schools, employment and business. It also uses the existing Local Plan to determine where development will be in the future, and the likely impact this will have on existing routes and networks. This plan is used to negotiate with developers to ensure that they factor this information into their travel plans.*
- Cllr Lisgo expressed concern that the Equalities Impact Report indicated that the proposed changes would have a positive outlook for everyone, which may not be the case for those who are reliant on a car. This has been previously demonstrated during the road closures in East Street last year, when disabled vehicles were prohibited from parking in the town centre.
 - *The Equalities Impact Assessment is working on the premise that the networks will be accessible for all and will deliver on the Government's priorities, without any user group being disadvantaged.*
 - *This will include wide enough footpaths to accommodate two-way cycling, wheelchairs and pushchairs etc. This consultation report is not about the detail in the design but more about the overall network and connectivity.*

Cllr Darch joined the meeting at 7.11pm

- Overall, the impact of the report is good for all users as it will improve air quality for those people who suffer respiratory problems, will reduce congestion by limiting cars, and will make walking and cycling routes safer and more user friendly for those travellers. This will have a positive impact on those who are car reliant as there will be less traffic on the roads, and fewer hazards to negotiate.
- Cllr Darch also made the point that the strategy is enabling for those people who cannot afford to buy or run a motor vehicle as it allows for alternative methods of active travel.

Cllr Ed Firmin left the meeting at 7.15pm

- What work is being done to involve local landowners, promoters, stakeholders and developers etc in the early stages?
 - *There are different stages of progress dependent on the project, but they are all being approached when plans are submitted.*
- There is also a need to negotiate with existing landowners about how to make existing infrastructure safer. For instance, making better use of the underpass by Sainsburys which would assist with bicycle travel into the town centre. There is currently a stile on the footpath, but if the landowner

could be persuaded, perhaps a more accessible alternative could be considered?

Cllr John Hassall left the meeting at 7.30pm

- Visitors from outside Taunton need to use vehicles to get to the town centre but are not supported on arrival. Car users and persons with limited mobility still need to rely on the car for essential journeys and this needs to be recognised.
- Will this consultation and report align with strategic priorities from the Dept of Transport and other partners and stakeholders?
 - *This consultation is NOT a transport strategy as its primary focus is on connecting the garden communities, but it will influence future strategies in such areas as the town centre, leisure and tourism.*
 - *20mph restrictions and other traffic calming measures can be considered as part of the overall strategy but it would be down to partners such as SCC and the parishes to embed these measures. This falls outside the remit of this consultation.*
 - *Working with partners such as the SCC Highways Team and outlying parishes is very positive and there is a collaborative approach to delivering the strategy's aspirations.*
 - *The consultation is designed to tease out some of the community aspirations so that there is a focus on what the parishes prioritise when it comes to funding. The delivery on projects will be costly, so it is important when dealing with limited funds to determine which projects take centre stage, and which are considered less needed.*

Cllr Lisgo proposed a recommendation that an additional paragraph is added to the report prior to progress onto the Executive: *As routes are developed through the design stages, officers need to revisit the Equalities Impact Assessment and ensure that they are not disadvantaging some of the different groups.*

It was agreed by Graeme Thompson that this would be incorporated into the report before the onward path to the Executive.

20. **Corporate Performance report, Out-turn, and Quarter 4 2021/22**

Cllr Federica Smith Roberts introduced the report in the absence of the PFH Cllr Benet Allen.

Annual Plan: 31 commitments under the RAG status of the report. 23 were flagged as green and 8 are amber. There are none showing as red.

Key Performance Indicators: 22 are green, 1 is amber and 6 are red. The appendices provide the main commentary on these statuses and give an explanation and the reasons why performance has fallen below target.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- Concern was expressed over the high number of planning appeals that had been overturned by the planning inspectorate. Cllr Coles as chair of the planning committee did try to answer this query, but it was referred to the [Written Answer Tracker](#) for a fuller response.
- Page 264 Environment and Economy. Number 1 priority is high quality employment opportunities. Is it possible to provide examples of companies being attracted to SWT in the last year? [Written Answer Tracker.](#)
- Page 272 Homes and Communities – Why are these flagged green when communities and development has been adversely affected by the phosphates issue over the last 2 years.
 - *In excess of 100 applications are being held, which relates to approximately 2,300 properties being delayed.*
- Page 280 Concern was expressed about the delay in producing the Local Plan for 2023 due to Unitary.
 - *Evidence based work is ongoing and all five councils are currently working on their Local Plans, which will feed into collective unitary plans.*

Questions were asked around the delays in processing planning applications.

- *There is currently an issue around recruitment and retention in the planning roles and in planning administration. This is not unique to SWT but is being discussed across all 5 councils in this LGR workstream. The planning sections are stretched due to unfilled vacancies, sickness and planned annual leave. These pressures result in delays and backlogs.*

21. **Access to Information - Exclusion of Press and Public**

A vote was taken to move into confidential session if necessary.

Prop: Whetlor / Sec: Coles – unanimous

22. **General Fund Financial Monitoring - Out-turn position 2021/22**

Cllr Federica Smith Roberts introduced the report in the absence of the PFH Cllr Benet Allen.

It has been an immensely challenging year in financial terms due to the pressures from Covid, interest rates, inflation, supply chain issues, global conflicts as well as adjusting to Brexit. Despite being a relatively small local authority, SWT has successfully managed those risks, which is credit to the hardworking finance team. In year underspends have been used to absorb some of these financial pressures.

Planned spend of just over £2m has been rolled into 22/23 with budget carried forward so that SWT can continue to deliver its activities.

Hinkley B stayed open which contributed to a windfall fund at the end of the year.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- Page 319 – Economic Development Initiatives 769 – what is the outcome? Regeneration Project 2.9m - Where is this specifically?
- Employment Land Schemes 575 – Clarity on this.
 - *The answer was deemed confidential, so Committee moved into private session to discuss this. Recording and webcasting was suspended.*

Meeting was adjourned to go into private session at: 8.17pm

Meeting resumed at: 8:26pm

- How do we record payments to consultants?
 - *These are accounted for within the relevant budget heading and are not split out. Cllr Farbahi requested a list of consultants used, and this was agreed by Paul Fitzgerald. To be followed up in the [Written Answer Tracker](#).*
- Page 322 – Payments to Taunton Bus Station?
 - *16K was set aside for the Bus Station and this was to cover the security arrangements such as fencing whilst it was empty, and the compliance works to get it up to the required standard prior to renting to the NHS for vaccinations.*
- Phosphates 14K, 2 mil land acquisition for current year. What is happening with this? Land purchased over a year ago but because the money is still unspent does not appear to have progressed!
 - *More in-depth member briefing is being planned at the end of July to discuss phosphates in more detail.*
 - *Money will be spent in the current financial year, but this is commercially sensitive and not yet publicly available.*
 - *Schemes are currently being investigated to consider phosphates credit purchase to offset the calculator. There is currently a very small pilot project underway at Cotford St Luke to deliver a wetlands scheme, but SWT is looking at alternative methods of delivery.*
- What are Section 31 grants – Collection Fund?
 - *Government funding to cover deficits incurred during the financial year due to Covid.*

The Chair made closing comments on the impact of current issues on this year's budget, the first Quarter of which would be brought forward to Corporate Scrutiny in September.

(The Meeting ended at 8.36 pm)

	CORPORATE SCRUTINY	
Meeting	Draft Agenda Items	Lead PFH/ Lead Officer
3 August 2022	Corporate Scrutiny Written Answer Tracker - Follow up on questions	Directors / Assistant Directors / Relevant Officers
SRD - 22 July	Garden Town Status Update	CLlr Rigby / Chris Hall / Alison Blom Cooper
Exec RD - 5 August		
Informal Exec RD - 5 July		
SMT RD - 22 June		
7 September 2022	GF Financial Performance 2022/23 Q1	Kerry Prisco / PFH Corporate Resources - Benet Allen
SRD - 25 August	Corporate Performance Report Q1	Malcolm Riches / PFH Corporate Resources - Benet Allen
Exec RD - 9 Sept	Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan	Graeme Thompson / PFH Planning & Transport - Mike Rigby
Informal Exec RD - 9 August	NO MORE ITEMS	
SMT RD - 27 July		
5 October 2022	Flooding projects (Scrutiny request Jul 22)	Chris Hall / External Operations Directorate
SRD - 23 September	Update on LGR	PFH Sarah Wakefield
Exec RD - 7 Oct		
Informal Exec RD - 6 Sept		
SMT RD - 24 August		
2 November 2022	Update on Somerset County Cricket Club	CEO Gordon Hollins SCCC
SRD - 21 Oct		
Exec RD - 4 Nov		
Informal Exec RD - 4 Oct		
SMT RD - 21 Sept		
7 December 2022	GF Financial Performance 2022/23 Q2	Kerry Prisco / PFH Corporate Resources - Benet Allen
SRD - 25 Nov	Corporate Performance Report Q2	Malcolm Riches / PFH Corporate Resources - Benet Allen
Exec RD - 9 Dec	Update on LGR	PFH Sarah Wakefield
Informal Exec RD - 8 Nov		
SMT RD - 26 Oct		
4 January 2023		
SRD - 15 Dec		
Exec RD - 6 Jan		
Informal Exec RD - 6 Dec		
SMT RD - 23 Nov		
1 February 2023		
SRD - 20 Jan		
Exec RD - 3 Feb		
Informal Exec RD - 3 Jan		
SMT RD - 14 Dec	Update on LGR	PFH Sarah Wakefield
1 March 2023	GF Financial Performance 2022/23 Q3	Kerry Prisco / PFH Corporate Resources - Benet Allen
SRD - 17 Feb	Corporate Performance Report Q3	Malcolm Riches / PFH Corporate Resources - Benet Allen
Exec RD - 3 March		
Informal Exec RD - 1 Feb		
SMT RD - 18 Jan		

EXECUTIVE

Executive Meeting	Draft Agenda Items	Lead Officer
17 August 2022	CANCELLED	
venue =		
Exec RD = 5 August		
Informal Exec RD = 5 July		
SMT RD = 22 June		
21 September 2022	GF Financial Performance 2022/23 Q1	Kerry Prisco
venue =	HRA Financial Performance 2022/23 Q1	Kerry Prisco
Exec RD = 9 September	Corporate Performance Report Q1	Malcolm Riches
Informal Exec RD = 9 August	Proposal to increase Taxi Fares	John Rendell
SMT RD = 27 July		
	NO MORE ITEMS	
19 October 2022	Windfall HRA Phosphate Credits	Chris Brown
venue =	Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Action Plan	Chris Brown
Exec RD = 7 October		
Informal Exec RD = 6 September		
SMT RD = 24 August		
16 November 2022	CCTV	Sally Parry/Scott Weetch
venue =	Connecting our Garden Communities	Graeme Thompson
Exec RD = 4 November	Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan	Graeme Thompson
Informal Exec RD = 4 October		
SMT RD = 21 September		
21 December 2022	GF Financial Performance 2022/23 Q2	Kerry Prisco
venue =	HRA Financial Performance 2022/23 Q2	Kerry Prisco
Exec RD = 9 December	Corporate Performance Report Q2	Malcolm Riches
Informal Exec RD = 8 November		
SMT RD = 26 October		
18 January 2023		
venue =		
Exec RD = 6 January		
Informal Exec RD = 6 December		
SMT RD = 23 November		

15 February 2023		
venue =		
Exec RD = 3 February		
Informal Exec RD = 3 January		
SMT RD = 14 December		
15 March 2023	GF Financial Performance 2022/23 Q3	Kerry Prisco
venue =	HRA Financial Performance 2022/23 Q3	Kerry Prisco
Exec RD = 3 March	Corporate Performance Report Q3	Malcolm Riches
Informal Exec RD = 1 February		
SMT RD = 18 January		

FULL COUNCIL

Meeting	Report Deadline	Draft Agenda Items	Lead Officer
06 September 2022	24 August 2022	PFH Reports	
		Constitution Update - Somersetwide Member Code of Conduct	Amy Tregellas/Kevin Williams
		Community Governance Review for the Unparished Area of Taunton	Marcus Prouse/Kevin Williams
		Heritage at Risk	Joe Wharton
		Watchet Marina Operator Lease (Confidential)	Jonathan Stevens
TBC	TBC	Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan	Graeme Thompson
		SPECIAL MEETING - TO BE CONFIRMED	
06 December 2022	24 November 2022	PFH Reports	
		Review of the Commercial Property Investment Activity and Performance Report	Joe Wharton
		Appointment of Returning Officer for Taunton Parish Council Elections	Marcus Prouse/Kevin Williams
		CCTV	Sally Parry/Scott Weetch
		Windfall HRA Phosphate Credits	Chris Brown
		Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Action Plan	Chris Brown
		Connecting our Garden Communities	Graeme Thompson
		Treasury Management 2021/22 Annual Report and Q1 2022/23	John Dyson
07 February 2023	26 January 2023	PFH Reports	
		Delegation of Returning Officer for Potential Parish Election 2023	
28 March 2023	16 March 2023	PFH Reports	
		Scrutiny Annual Reports x 2	
		Audit and Governance Annual Report	

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL
CORPORATE 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
06/07/22	Prop: Farbahi / Sec: Firmin to bring forward the Catapult report to Corporate Scrutiny in August for the Committee to debate.	Portfolio Holder for Econ Dev, Planning and Transportation – Cllr Mike Rigby	Members have had an opportunity to understand and discuss the report at a member briefing which was conducted on the 8 March 2022. It was agreed that the report would be circulated following that briefing via mod.gov. The report contains general recommendations for all Innovation leaders and businesses in SWT – There is no requirement for SWT Council to make a key or budget decision	20/07/22	No	Following a discussion with the PFH, Cllr Rigby wants the team to focus on the upcoming Innovation Conference and therefore does not support this coming back to Scrutiny for a re-run of the Member briefing, a recording of which is available for anyone who was not present.

Total Recommendations for 22/23:

Agreed:

Agreed in Part:

Not Agreed:

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN ANSWERS TRACKER 2021/22 - UPDATED

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Cttee Request for information	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Response to request for information	Date of response	Scrutiny Officer Comments/ Update
<div>1 Dec 21</div> <div>Page 23</div>	<p>QC) It was questioned how many quality employment opportunities the Council had attracted in the last few years, in terms of productivity what was the percentage increase and in which sector?</p>	<p>Former PFH Cllr Marcus Kravis / Development and Place</p>	<p>Responses provided to members by Malcolm Riches</p> <p>Although the objective for the 'Our Environment and Economy' priority does include reference to attracting high quality jobs, there is <u>not</u> a specific commitment to deliver a particular quantity of such jobs. The actions over the 4 years of the strategy are in many cases enabling actions, such as creating a business plan for Wellington Station, the delivery of the Digital Innovation Centre at Firepool and securing funding for the development of Tone Dale Mill.</p> <p>Creation of jobs is captured as a net figure in the Council's annual Authority Monitoring Report. The practical difficulty is that with a net figure, jobs will be created and lost, in many cases for reasons outside of SWT's direct control. The 2020/21 report is available on the SWT website shortly.</p> <p>Authority monitoring report (AMR) (somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)</p> <p>The Development and Place Directorate however does measure square footage of employment land directly created by the Council (such as the square footage created via the Coal Orchard and Minehead employment site including the new Snazaroo building) on a quarterly basis as an indicator of increasing the potential for the creation of high-quality jobs.</p>	<p>13/07/22</p>	<p>Lisa Tuck</p>

26/01/22	<p><i>Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23</i></p> <p><i>Enabling Innovation</i></p> <p>Q) It was questioned what the enabling innovation funding mentioned in the budget report was for? Officers responded that a response would be given after the meeting.</p>	Former PFH Cllr Marcus Kravis / Development and Place	<p>The Capital Budget 2022/2023 presented to Scrutiny proposed a Capital budget of £100k for Employment site enabling and Innovation to promote Growth (budgeted on a Capital cost centre shown as funded from borrowing).</p> <p>The Council agreed to a specific budget in 2022/23 to support Innovation (i.e. £50k to support the Innovation Conference).</p> <p>The Development and Place Finance Business Partner agreed to return the £100k Capital budget (awaiting confirmation from Paul McClean).</p>	13/07/22	Lisa Tuck
26/05/22	<p><i>Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23</i></p> <p><i>Bus Station</i></p> <p>Q) An update on Taunton Bus Station was requested. Officers responded that a response would be given after the meeting.</p>	Cllr Mike Rigby/ Development & Place	<p>The main building and car parking area at the old bus station is now being used by the NHS as a Vaccination Centre and is open to the public. Their license runs for 6 months until end of September 2022.</p> <p>To get the building ready for use, the NHS have refurbished much of the main building to a high standard. This has involved knocking down partition walls, resolving drainage issues, decorating, painting railings and windows, cutting back overgrown foliage, and making general adaptations so that nursing teams can operate safely and securely. The top floor is being used for office space and a staff area with kitchen, whilst downstairs there is the vaccination centre, storage areas and 1-2-1 consultancy rooms. The NHS are keen to extend the license once it expires.</p> <p>Following a joint application to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, SWT and Minehead Town Council were awarded £96,360 to support the installation of two Changing Places facilities – one in the office building at the Old Bus Station in Tower Street, and one</p>	25/05/22	Response provided by Robert Downes

in the Coop Car Park in Minehead. To take this project forward, work is required to remove asbestos from the office buildings and realign drainage and utility services. Once done part of the office building can be converted. The intention is to start developing the Changing Places facility in 2022/23.

Work is also continuing to define the longer-term use of the site. The focus of which has been on the inclusion of the old bus station site in proposals put forward by Somerset County Council to the Department for Transport for funding under the Bus Service Improvement Plan process. It was recently announced that Somerset has been awarded indicative funding of £11.9m. Although more work is required to refine proposals, they did include an allocation of funds for a Taunton Mobility Hub utilising the old Bus Station site. The project team is currently waiting to hear whether this specific proposal will progress further.

Finally, it is worth noting that Natalie Kirbyshire, the Project Manager working on the plans for the Tower Street site, has now left SWT. A new project manager has been recruited and will start in July. In the meantime, if you have any queries, please contact Joe Wharton or Robert Downes (r.downes@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) in the Major and Special Projects Team.

03/2/22

Community Engagement Hubs

Q) What is the budget for the community engagement Hubs?

How does SWT assess value for money?

Is 34 live cases good or bad?

Was there ever a target set?

Are the live cases only linked to the two open sites?

Former PFH Cllr Marcus Kravis / Development and Place

The Community Employment Hubs are fully funded via grants obtained by the Economic Development Team from the following organisations.

- Department for Work and Pension
- Somerset County Council Business Rate Retention Fund
- HPC s106 Funds ringfenced for Skill and Training. V

The funding covers reopening and set up costs, running costs, 2 part-time Employment Hub Coordinators, management costs and volunteer expenses. The funding covered the period of 1 September 2020 to 31 May 2022.

Value for money is assessed by the grant bodies as part of the funding process.

The funding organisations set targets for the period as follows:
To open 5 new hubs across the district by 17 April 2022.
To engage with 300 individuals through direct contact and events arranged through the work of the hubs (e.g., careers fairs, meet the employer events).

Location	Delivery model	Planned opening date	Opening times/dates
Priorswood Community Centre	Face to face/virtual	29 March	4 th Tuesday in the month 10-12
Halcon Link Centre	Face to face/virtual	31 March	4 th Thursday in the month 12.30-2.30

13/07/22

Lisa Tuck

Page 26

Wellington The WHERE Centre	Face to face/virtual	2 March	1 st Wednesday in the month 10-12
Taunton United Reform Centre	Face to face/virtual	5 April	1 st Tuesday in the month 10-12
Minehead EYE (Youth hub)	Face to face	10 February	Every Thursday 1.30-3.30

Challenges to delivery:

The pandemic and restriction to contact has resulted in additional challenges for the project as follows:

- Ability to open hubs in the community for face-to-face support.
- Ability to recruit and train volunteers to support the hubs.
- Limited capacity to provide virtual support to clients.

An additional challenge to the project was the initial absence of SWT Volunteer Recruitment and Management policies and processes.

03/2/22	<i>Innovation Centre / Team</i> Q) Who is on the Innovation Team? Who is the SWT Officer Lead?	Former PFH Cllr Marcus Kravis / Development and Place	A summary of the members of the Innovation Leadership Group was made available to members on mod.gov provided by Mark Wathen shortly after the Scrutiny meeting. Innovation District Members Info.pdf Mark Wathen	13/07/22	Lisa Tuck
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2/3/22	<i>General Fund Financial Performance Report for Quarter 3 of 2021/22</i> Q) It was asked how much the Council had received in grants from the government over the past two years.	Finance / Internal Operations	COVID GRANTS TO SUPPORT SWT	2020/21 £'000	2021/22 £'000	01/06/22	John Dyson, Corporate Finance Manager.
			New Burdens	-306	-		
			Surge Enforcement Funding	-74	-		
			Community Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)	-	-210		
			Outbreak Management Fund	-47	-		
			Coronavirus Response Fund - Rough Sleepers	-102	-		
			Protect & Vaccinate	-	-116		
			Vulnerable Renters	-	-93		
			Test and Trace New Burdens Admin	-58	-96		
			Covid 19 Grant	-	-813		
			Covid-19 LA Support Grant	-2,386	-		
			Sales, Fees and Charges	-3,135	-415		
			New Burdens	-196	-190		
			Sub Total	-6,304	-1,933		
2/3/22	<i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i> Q) It was asked if figures were available for how many repeat calls were received for issues which were not dealt with in the first instance.	Customer Services / Internal Operations	Unfortunately, this isn't currently possible. Our phone system doesn't log calls against a customer record so repeat contact isn't identifiable. This will be raised as part of the Unitary work with the Telephony workstream, as a requirement for any Customer Relationship Management software we use in the future. It may be possible to analyse Firmstep to identify repeat requests for the same address and the Business Intelligence team are looking into the feasibility of this.			01/06/22	Malcolm Riches

2/3/22	<i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i> Q) It was asked in which areas the higher numbers of complaints were being received and if these were the usual areas higher numbers of complaints were seen in.	Customer Services / Internal Operations	<table><tr><th>Directorate</th><th>Number of complaints up to end of Dec 2021</th><th>Answered within 10 working days</th><th>%</th></tr><tr><td>Internal Ops</td><td>218</td><td>160</td><td>76%</td></tr><tr><td>External Ops</td><td>318</td><td>285</td><td>90%</td></tr><tr><td>Housing</td><td>305</td><td>208</td><td>68%</td></tr><tr><td>Dev and Place</td><td>38</td><td>29</td><td>73%</td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>879</td><td>682</td><td>78%</td></tr></table> The number of complaints received continue to be significantly higher than in the previous financial year.	Directorate	Number of complaints up to end of Dec 2021	Answered within 10 working days	%	Internal Ops	218	160	76%	External Ops	318	285	90%	Housing	305	208	68%	Dev and Place	38	29	73%	Total	879	682	78%	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches
Directorate	Number of complaints up to end of Dec 2021	Answered within 10 working days	%																										
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2/3/22 Page 30	<i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i> Q) It was asked whether, excluding the increase in housing complaints, the number of complaints had increased.	Customer Services / Internal Operations	A breakdown of complaints is shown above	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches																								
2/3/22	<i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i> Q) It was asked how many planning enforcement orders were currently out and active versus had been closed.	Internal Operations	In total in 2021 we had 310 Enforcement Cases across SWT. So far in 2022 we have had 87, which if this rate continues would be an increase for the year as whole. For open cases still open on the system the numbers are as follows 2020 = 25 2021 = 178 2022 = 77 Total – 280	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches																								

2/3/22	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked if any comparisons were available for call wait times with other Somerset authorities.</p>	Customer Services / Internal Operations	<p>We have compared service standards between the other councils as part of our work to prepare for the new Somerset Council. Regarding call waiting times, SWTs performance is currently equal to or in many cases better than those of our peers.</p>	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches
2/3/22	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i></p> <p>Q) It was requested that long-term and short-term staff sickness be separated out in the report and asked whether Covid had had a big impact on staff sickness.</p>	Human Resources / Internal Operations	<p>The sickness data does not currently categorise sickness into long-term or short-term sickness, but this is being developed.</p> <p>The overall turnover data includes permanent and fixed term staff but not temporary or agency.</p> <p>A report is being prepared for SMT which will be available in mid-April and will be shared with Members.</p>	05/03/22	Malcolm Riches
2/3/22	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked if staff turnover figures could be provided, particularly for planning staff.</p>	Planning / Development and Place	<p>There is currently a national issue around recruitment and retention for qualified planning staff.</p> <p>Within the planning service in SWT there are professional planning staff covering the following posts: 17 DM Planning posts; 9 planning policy and implementation posts, a Phosphates Planner post (covered by way of a secondment) and an Assistant Director. Note – not all of the posts are full time. In addition, the service has business support officers and enforcement officers.</p> <p>During 2021/22 there were new starters covering the following posts: Garden Town Implementation Manager (post transferred from the Major Projects team and funded by Homes England) Assistant Director,</p>	25/07/22	Alison Blom Cooper

Planning Officer trainee, Senior Planning Officer DM, Principal Planning Officer DM, Principal Planning Policy Officer, Infrastructure Planning Officer and Planning Policy Officer. Leavers were a Team Leader, 2 Development Management Officers and 1 Assistant Director. We have in place at the current time agency cover for the Team leader and 2 Development Management Officer posts.

This followed a national recruitment exercise for the Team Leader and Development Management Officer posts in March/April 2022 which resulted in no applicants and as a result we have had to use agency cover. We have a 0.6 post vacant whilst the postholder is seconded to a temporary NSIP role. In addition, the Service Manager has now resigned, and her last day of service is 5 August 2022 – similarly we have been out to external recruitment for this post and sought to recruit via recruitment agencies but have received no applications. This reflects the national shortage of planners and the difficulties in recruiting to all posts requiring RTPI membership and experience

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL
CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN ANSWERS TRACKER 2022/23

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Cttee Request for information	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Response to request for information	Date of response	Scrutiny Officer Comments/Update
01/06/2022	Decision taken under the Emergency Rule – <i>Further information requested regarding costings etc</i>	Cllr Benet Allen / Chris Hall	Questions relating to the Coal Orchard Development. Due to commercial sensitivity these will be made available to Councillors confidentially after the public meeting.	06/06/2022	Answers provided by Joe Wharton and uploaded to MOD.GOV.
01/06/2022	Committee asked for further updates on the phosphate situation. <i>Would like a special Scrutiny meeting to highlight these issues.</i>	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall	<p>A members briefing has been set up to take place on 28 July to look at Phosphates and the current five-year housing land supply. The slides from the briefing will be made available afterwards for those who are unable to attend. Chris Hall has also highlighted that the Phosphates on the Somerset levels and moors (somerwestandtaunton.gov.uk) webpage does address most of the concerns.</p> <p>The correct platform for debating phosphate issues is the SWT Phosphates Planning Sub-Committee.</p>	08/06/2022	Answers provided by Chris Hall and Sam Murrell.

06/07/2022	<p>Corporate Performance Report: High proportion of planning refusals have been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate.</p> <p><i>(Page 266 & 272 Agenda) Flagged Red.</i></p> <p><i>Can a breakdown be provided on the proportion of decisions that have been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate following appeals from applicants?</i></p> <p><i>A) Can this be split between officer delegated decisions and those that were determined by the Planning Committee.</i></p> <p><i>B) Have any successful appeals resulted in the awarding of costs to the applicant?</i></p>	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall (Planning)	<p>The Local Planning Authority has received 20 appeal decisions from the Planning Inspectorate for the period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2022. Of these 6 were allowed (equating to 30% of appeals determined in this period). This compares with the target against which performance is measured corporately of 33% which is the national average of appeals allowed.</p> <p>Of those allowed in this period, two were appeals following decisions by the Planning Committee, one of which resulted in a costs award to the applicant. The quantum is yet to be determined – the process is that the applicant must submit their costs and for the Council to determine whether they are reasonable. In the event of a disagreement, it then goes for independent taxation.</p>	25/07/2022	Answers provided by Julie Harcombe / Rebecca Miller and Alison Blom-Cooper
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06/07/2022	<p>Corporate Performance Summary: Our Environment and Economy (Page 264, Item 1)</p> <p>“A low-carbon, clean, green and prosperous district that attracts high quality employment opportunities and encourages healthy lifestyles”</p> <p><i>Is it possible to provide examples of high-quality companies being attracted to SWT in the last year?</i></p>	<p>Mike Rigby / Chris Hall (Econ Regen)</p>	<p>SWT do not currently measure the number of high-quality employment new businesses moving into the district. However, in January 2022 SWT purchased a licence to a business data platform, which will enable reporting of various statistics relating to business health and growth in the district. The Economic Development Team are exploring the reporting capabilities of the software. Currently, we are unable to provide a figure in response to the question. The Economic Development team with partner organisations, continue to market SWT to inward investors and account manage inward investment enquiries.</p> <p><i>“This period has seen the completion of a new promotional inward investment-focused website for the district and production of an investment video as part of a ‘SWITCH’ campaign, inviting potential investors to switch to Somerset West and Taunton. The campaign highlights the area’s locational, strengths as well as current growth -industries such as healthcare and med-tech, the circular economy, digital and creative, global marine and current construction opportunities in the energy sector.</i></p> <p><i>12 business ambassadors from varying sectors of the economy have also been recruited to act as business ambassadors for the area.</i></p> <p><i>A launch event with a key business audience of commercial agents and developers took place in May 2022. This has formed a key part of the delivery of the Marketing and Communications plan for Inward Investment.”</i></p> <p>(Excerpt from Cllr Rigby’s latest PFH report)</p>	25/07/22	Lisa Tuck
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Page 36

06/07/2022	Can an explanation / update be provided on the Economic Development Initiatives Ear Marked Reserve?	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall (Econ Regen)	<table><tr><td colspan="2">Economic Initiatives EMR (BE019) 2022/23</td></tr><tr><td>Opening Balance</td><td>(642,538.36)</td></tr><tr><td>Emergency Town Centre Fund</td><td>50,000.00</td></tr><tr><td>Budget 22/23 Contribution</td><td>372,000.00</td></tr><tr><td>Provision for Grant</td><td>80,000.00</td></tr><tr><td>Innovation Districts</td><td>50,000.00</td></tr><tr><td>Taunton Town Centre</td><td>50,000.00</td></tr><tr><td>Taunton Together</td><td>25,000.00</td></tr><tr><td>Closing Balance</td><td>(15,538.36)</td></tr></table>	Economic Initiatives EMR (BE019) 2022/23		Opening Balance	(642,538.36)	Emergency Town Centre Fund	50,000.00	Budget 22/23 Contribution	372,000.00	Provision for Grant	80,000.00	Innovation Districts	50,000.00	Taunton Town Centre	50,000.00	Taunton Together	25,000.00	Closing Balance	(15,538.36)	22/07/22	Kerry Prisco
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06/07/2022	Can further information be provided on what the Employment Land Schemes and Williton Shooting Club capital programmes will be spent on?	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall (Econ Regen)	The Employment Land Schemes capital programme is currently looking at potential employment sites in Minehead, but SMT have deferred any capital expenditure requests until Unitary. The Williton Shooting Club was a Hinkley funded project which was completed historically, and the unused budget was returned last year.	22/07/22	Kerry Prisco																		

06/07/2022	<p>General Fund Outturn Report: Capital Programme (Page 322). Economic Regeneration Initiatives</p> <p><i>Can a list be provided of how much has been spent on consultancy and to whom?</i></p>	Cllr Benet Allen / Paul Fitzgerald	<i>This is currently being worked through. Answer to follow.</i>		Kerry Prisco
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