SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 1 February 2023

Present: Councillor Sue Buller (Chair)

Councillors Ian Aldridge, Simon Coles, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin,

John Hassall, Nicole Hawkins, Marcus Kravis, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd,

Nick Thwaites and Gwil Wren

Officers: Sam Murrell, Marcus Prouse, Chris Hall, Lisa Tuck, Hattie Winter, Alison

Blom Cooper and Colleen Blake.

Also Councillors Brenda Weston, Dave Mansell and Sarah Wakefield (Via

Present: Zoom), Cllr Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.18 pm)

87. **Apologies**

Cllr Loretta Whetlor (subs Cllr Janet Lloyd).

Cllr Whetlor attended the meeting in her capacity as Chair of the Public Transport Task and Finish Group.

88. Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee

The Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Meeting held on Wednesday 4 January 2022, were approved as a true record.

Prop: Hassall / Sec: Coles Unanimous

89. **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 S Coles	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoked and Voted
Cllr M Kravis	All Items	SCC & Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town		
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	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 Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

90. **Public Participation**

There were no questions or comments submitted for public participation.

91. To receive an update on the Local Government Review (LGR) and Community Governance Review (CGR).

Cllr Sarah Wakefield and Alison North joined the meeting via zoom to provide a verbal update. The key milestones which have been achieved with regard to moving to the unitary council are:-

- The ICT cutover had taken place on the weekend of the 19-23 January which had transferred all SWT systems onto the SCC platform, to enable a smooth transition in April. All ICT staff worked collaboratively and extremely hard over the weekend, to ensure that all systems were working and ready to go on the Monday morning. There were still some teething problems but in the main, the process had gone well.
- Service readiness Core teams are working through their change lists and product workstream notes to ensure that their services are safe, legal and functioning on Day1 of the new Authority.

The Community Governance update covered the fact that the new Taunton Parish Clerk was now in post. She would be working from an office in Deane House for the time being.

92. Corporate Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers

There were no comments on the Recommendation Tracker.

It was requested that an answer to the outstanding item on the Written Answer Tracker from 7/12/22 was submitted within 5 working days of the meeting.

07/12/2022	Cllr Lisgo – What is the call abandonment rate for customer services? How longdo callers wait before they ring off? Are these callers followed up?	Allen / Internal Resources	Richard Sealey and Malcolm Riches are looking at the statistics. A full written response will be provided in January, when the outcome is known. Still awaiting a response.		Alison North / Malcolm Riches
------------	--	-------------------------------	--	--	----------------------------------

Officers agreed to follow this up, and circulate the answer to the committee.

93. Corporate Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

No comments were made. The Committee noted the Forward Plan.

94. Executive and Full Council Forward Plan

The Committee noted the Forward Plans. There were no comments or questions arising.

95. Public Transport Task and Finish Report

Cllr Loretta Whetlor thanked the members of the Task and Finish Group for their input, and Marcus Prouse for providing administrative support. The work of the group had been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such there had not been sufficient time and resource to provide a written report to the Committee.

Marcus Prouse showed a series of slides which provided an overview on the work undertaken by the Public Transport Task and Finish Group. These had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting, together with a series of conclusions.

Members of the Committee made the following comments:-

- Was the work on the work-place parking levy followed up and what was the outcome? This had been researched but not implemented. This was mainly due to the impact COVID-19 had on commuting. It was generally accepted that less people were travelling into the offices to work.
- The introduction of £1/£2 subsidised bus fares across the county was welcomed and had increased use of the bus service. The Committee was also pleased with the re-implementation of the late bus service on certain routes. This allowed workers to use the service and assisted the parking situation at Musgrove Park Hospital.
- It was raised that students were not eligible to claim the subsidised bus fare and were tied into the school transport agreement.
- Although the increased public transport between West Somerset and Taunton was welcomed, there was still a very limited service from Minehead to Bridgwater. There was currently only 1 daily bus each way that served Bridgwater/Taunton College and operated in term time. This was not sufficient because there were as many work opportunities in Bridgwater as Taunton. The free Hinkley Bus alleviated this problem somewhat, but due to the erosion of the coast road at Cleeve Hill, Watchet this now did not travel to the pickup point at Blue Anchor.
- It was asked whether Butlins could be encouraged to provide transport for their guests on change-over days, especially from the Taunton train station. Very often these buses were over-filled by people travelling to

- Minehead with their luggage and families. This placed a lot of pressure on the regular service and commuters at peak times.
- There need to be more input at the development stage of new housing estates, to ensure that bus routes and public transport options were built into the early plans and could be provided as part of S106 and Community Infrastructure Levies.
- It was suggested that during peak times a quicker direct service bus could be provided for those commuters who wanted to travel straight to work, rather than take the longer journey through the villages. There was a mismatch at present, because some buses were over full at peak times, whilst others were practically empty.
- Those Councillors who are now part of the unitary council, were asked to support the recommendations and do their best to see they were implemented.
- Concern was expressed about what happens to the subsidised fares after the 31 March. Would the trial be extended?

Cllr Lisgo proposed that the report was passed to the Executive before Somerset West and Taunton Council ceased to exist, so that the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation – Cllr Mike Rigby could take it forward to the new Somerset Council for their appropriate consideration. This recommendation was seconded by Cllr Janet Lloyd, and unanimously supported by the Committee.

Cllr Whetlor agreed to add a recommendation to the report, in respect of an improved service between Minehead/West Somerset and Bridgwater, in recognition of the significant number of educational and employment opportunities that are there.

96. Local Labour Agreement Policy

The report was introduced by Lisa Tuck, Service Manager for Economic Development, supported by Hattie Winter and Colleen Blake.

Corporate Scrutiny Committee was asked to note the formal adoption of the SWT Local Labour Agreement Policy into the Council's Policy Framework.

Currently only Sedgemoor District Council has such as agreement in place as part of their Local Plan, and this will be picked up and adopted by the new Somerset Council. SWT wants to implement this agreement as a material planning consideration going forward, so that it too can become part of the former Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council Local Plans. When these become the new unitary local plans, this planning policy will transfer as part of the process. It is also hoped that this will provide a model for other councils to emulate.

Comments from the Committee included: -

- Members were supportive of the aspirations outlined in the report and agreed that contributing to the local economy via up-skilling and employment were improving opportunities for inward investment.
- The aim of the policy to try and ensure that at least 25% of the workforce is employed locally. This would be promoted via the Department of Work Pensions (DWP), Employment Hubs, Skill Up, Somerset Skills and Learning and via roadshows.
- Current gaps in the labour market are a legacy of COVID-19 which has
 adversely affected the tourism and hospitality sector. The Economic
 Development team recognise this and are doing what they can to ensure
 that new recruits to those industries are employed from the local
 workforce. They are aiming for 25% local uptake. The team will be working
 with developers as part of the planning process in the very early stages.
 Therefore, it needs to be factored in as a material planning consideration.
- It will only apply to large scale development, which is currently classified as 50+ dwellings.
- Concern was expressed about the policy affecting the viability of sites coming forward and might deter developers from building. Alison Blom Cooper stated that as with all planning policies, there would be various concerns about viability, but these would be addressed and assessed as sites came forward, and would be considered alongside other issues such as transport links, health and education policies.
- It was queried whether there were currently enough planning staff to implement the policy once it was adopted? SWT currently had a full complement of planning officers, but it was a volatile employment market and was under considerable pressure from the private sector. It was an ever-changing picture. The implementation of the Local Labour Agreement would be monitored and facilitated by the Economic Development team, and there was more capacity to cover this type of work. Currently in Sedgemoor District Council, there is a full-time labour and skills employee who builds up a skills plan with employers to identify labour gaps and how these can be filled. It's a model that can be transferred to other councils.
- It was queried whether SWT had worked with the construction industry and the supply chain whilst drawing up the policy. The team had taken advice from the CITB (Construction Industry Training Board), DWP and other district councils such as Sedgemoor, who already had the policy in place. It was an ongoing process and would be monitored and developed as the scheme became embedded in the planning policy.
- It was asked how the policy would be affected by the current phosphate situation. At the present time it is mainly the smaller sites which are being held (which amounts to approximately 3000 properties). As this policy relates to larger future sites, which will build in phosphate mitigation as part of the planning process, it is not envisioned that this will be a problem.
- It was asked how Councillors will be made aware of the policy if it is not going to Full Council for consideration. The policy will be signed off as an Executive Decision, and then the Economic Development team will ensure that it is actively promoted to ensure members are aware of the policy. This can be achieved via Member Briefings, the website and newsletters. It is also important that the future Somerset Council, abides by the terms of the policy especially regarding any new council housing development.

- The Committee was informed that even though the Local Labour Agreement was only now being adopted, previous developments at Seaward Way and North Taunton tried to recruit locally. They had this built into the work contracts to try and encourage the sub-contractors to employ apprentices and use local supply chains. This Local Labour Agreement policy would be formalising the process.
- Officers were congratulated for their hard work in finally bringing the Local Labour Agreement through the democratic process. It was an important piece of work which would leave a legacy for SWT.
- The definition of local for the purposes of the Agreement would conform to the boundaries of the relevant Local Planning Agreement. (So currently split between West Somerset and Taunton Deane).
- Cllr Buller concluded by saying that most of the report was aspirational and she was not sure whether it was achievable. She asked if successful examples could be provided by other councils who already had a process in place. (It was agreed by Hattie Winter to come back with a written answer). Please see Tracker.

The Councils Corporate Scrutiny Committee did not make a specific recommendation in relation to this report. The comments made were noted by the project team. The comments will be considered during the implementation of the policy to ensure the objectives of the policy and aspirations of the Council are realised.

(The Meeting ended at 8.07 pm)

Somerset West and Taunton

Public Transport Task and Finish Group – Final Report

15th February 2023 – Executive

Chair – Cllr Loretta Whetlor Scrutiny Officer Support – M Prouse

Thank you

A big thank you to all officers and representatives who engaged with the work of the review.

- SCC/SWT Officers
- Buses of Somerset/First Bus SW
- Richard Huish College/ Bridgwater and Taunton College
- Travel Watch SouthWest



Membership

Councillors John Hassall, David Mansell, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Derek Perry, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley and Loretta Whetlor - **Members of the Review into Public Transport Task and Finish Group**

Dates of meetings (Notes of all attached to the Agenda):

- •1st Meeting 19th August 2020
- •2nd Meeting 1st October 2020
- •3rd Meeting 5th January 2021
- •4th Meeting 8th February 2021
- •5th Meeting 26th April 2021
- •6th Meeting 11th August 2021
- •There were also sub-group meetings with College reps in February and March 2021.



Background

- In the summer of 2020 the then Managing Director of First Bus South West was invited to appear before the Scrutiny Committee to discuss Bus Provision in the light of the recent closure of Taunton Bus Station.
- In a follow up meeting, both Cllrs Kravis and Rigby as the relevant Portfolio Holder's were invited. A detailed discussion took place which covered both a temporary opening of the recently closed bus station in light of the Covid-19 pandemic to enable greater social distancing when using public transport; in addition to the long term solution of a bus station.
- At the conclusion of the item the Scrutiny Committee resolved to examine the current provision in relation to public transport in the district and what is required to increase provision and improved modal links including consideration of carbon neutrality.



Purpose

'examine the current provision in relation to public transport in the district and what is required to increase provision and improved modal links including consideration of carbon neutrality.'



What we did

The group has considered what action is within SWT's powers to address the reasons for the under-use, and dissatisfaction of bus users with the current service and associated facilities in order to increase public transport use.

- This Task and Finish Group undertook the following;
- •Reviewed the changes that have occurred and continue to evolve in this area.
- •Examined the evidence presented by invited guests (SWT Officers, SCC Officers, academics and external consultants), including the current provision of bus transport.
- Been a critical friend.
- •Reviewed SWT policies and practices.
- Developed a Survey (did not use due to SCC request not to clash with existing)



Implications

Links to Corporate Aims / Priorities

This is in line with the Corporate Strategy of the Council and the Climate Emergency Declaration of the Council.

Finance / Resource Implications

Funding requirements from this Council to ensure the delivery of recommendations requires confirmation.

Climate and Sustainability Implications (if any)

The recommendations contained within this report would benefit the District's aims and aspirations in relation to Character and Sustainability.

As it states in the SWT Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan "As the authority responsible for highways and transport, this Council must rely on Somerset County Council (SCC), to deliver on many of the actions and aspirations relating to transport. This Action Plan has been developed alongside the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy so that it is informed by its emerging strategic direction and actions. SCC have been kept abreast of this Action Plan and its contents, but have not been involved in its detailed development and have not adopted it as their own policy. The Council will work closely with SCC to ensure the transport elements of this Action Plan are delivered".



Process

Process

The task and finish group has produced this report to the Scrutiny Committee to outline details of the review process undertaken, the evidence gathered, conclusions and subsequent recommendations for action. The Scrutiny committee can if so wished refer this report to the Council or Executive and/or the appropriate partner organisation, and ask them to consider the recommendations arising from the review.

The Task and Finish Group has gathered evidence through a variety of ways and referred to the following background documents. The Group held five meetings. Background documents are annexed to this report.



College Transport Case Study

- Led on by Clirs Wheatley and Perry Case Study Proposal
- Who would we speak to?
- Staff at RHC who deal with transport, plus principal on macro issues
- Transport Commissioner at SCC
- ₹ Education officers at SCC (if student transport is part of their remit)
- Bus operators regarding routing matters

∄Desired outcomes?

- Identify various problems at RHC and vicinity caused or exacerbated by the current model of student transport
- Identify possible solutions and improvements to these problems, especially where SWT could help.
- Extract any wider lessons from the case study relevant to urban/rural public transport in the district



Examining Provision – info provided by SCC

- There were at the time of the Group meeting 17 fully or partially subsidised bus routes operating in or through the SWT area and 2 Slinky services operating in the area.
- Patronage figures on the Park and Ride service were provided.
- Rural Mobility Fund
- Community Transport



Picture since meetings

Due to officer capacity and changes in the Governance Team a final report as is customary was not able to be prepared at the conclusion of the Group's Work.

There have been a number of events that have taken place since the Group last met in August 2021 which have superseded events, e.g. BSIP funding J25 Pedestrian/cycle improvements.

Conclusions have been identified which would need to be investigated further by the appropriate Council teams/PFH/ Place Scrutiny of the new Somerset Council



Picture since meetings

BSIP funding has also been allocated to deliver:

- Bus priority measures (bus lanes and bus priority signals at junctions) in Taunton and Bridgwater
- The £1 single fare within the Taunton Town Zone (commenced 5th December 2022)
- The trial of evening services into Taunton with last buses being between 10 and 11pm these are due to commence 30th January 2023 and include:
- Service 28 Minehead to Taunton
- Service 22 Wellington to Taunton
- Service 30 Chard/Ilminster to Taunton serving Gateway P&R site
- Service 1 Priorswood town service serving Silk Mills P&R site
- A mobility hub in Somerton acting as a rural test bed and providing a bus interchange facility for services from Somerton/Yeovil to Taunton
- Development of the Think Travel journey planning site to incorporate ticketing options
- Marketing of the BSIP specific schemes
 Somerset West

and Taunton

Bus Service Improvement Plan Picture

To confirm the BSIP related activity:

- SCC in consultation with key stakeholders developed the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)
- SCC established a Bus Advisory Board
- SCC has entered into an Enhanced Partnership with all local bus operators in Somerset
- The DfT awarded BSIP funding to Somerset for various schemes





- SWT Council to write a letter to Government and specifically the Department of Transport asking them to trial future transport/bus schemes in Somerset.
- That the Council seeks endorsement from the County Council and the Districts and MP's for the letter's contents.



Conclusion 1 – further comments

BSIP funding has been awarded to Somerset to trial a number of schemes. The funded schemes have been selected to demonstrate how effectively the funding can be used to deliver the results the DfT are wishing to see and hopefully prove the case for more funding to deliver similar schemes in other areas of the County.



Conclusion 1 – further comments

- The letter needs to include references to:
- LTA resource
- Refer to Enhanced Partnerships and opportunities these create (SCC has entered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and SCC has entered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and SCC has entered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and SCC has entered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and opportunities these creates are considered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and opportunities these creates are considered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and opportunities these creates are considered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and opportunities these creates are considered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and opportunities these creates are considered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and opportunities these creates are considered into an Enhanced Dartnerships and opportunities the considered into an Enhanced Dartnerships are considered into an Enhanced Dartnerships ar (SCC has entered into an Enhanced Partnership with all local bus operators in Somerset)
- Specifically mention unique rurality of Somerset and DRT as a solution supported
- Build on Community Transport e.g. Watchet and Wivey Link



- We heard from Officers at South Somerset District who were exploring the potential to trial a Digital Demand Responsive Transport scheme working with SCC.
 The Group encouraged officers at SWT to investigate/
- The Group encouraged officers at SWT to investigate/ opt-in to this scheme and it was pleasing to see in the Somerset Recovery and Growth Plan include a pledge to deliver a digital Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) solution for the residents of Somerset.



Conclusion 2 – further comments

Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Govt funding will be used to trial a Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) service in the Somerton area, feeding into the proposed rural mobility hub, also funded by BSIP. This will help to facilitate access to and onward travel via the public bus network and help to increase patronage to support the public bus services. This initiative is already in the pipeline.



Conclusion 2 – further comments

- Direct Response Travel (DRT) is a practice carried out by at least three local authorities Milton Keynes, West Midlands and N.E Lincolnshire. The first two are mostly conurbations and the third being largely rural. Ours is a mixture of urban and rural and the rural areas suffer most from a lack of bus services. DRT involves bus and coach companies working together to provide a service on demand.
- It was understood that Somerset has the 4th lowest area of the UK with each resident using the bus 10 times each year on average.



- The Group considered that the closure of the Bus Station in Taunton had created an issue and the lack of a proper bus interchange needed to be addressed.
- The Group looked to Gloucester and Swindon as an example of recent exemplar developments in this regard and hoped that this could be looked at as a priority project for any successor Council.



Conclusion 3 - comments

BSIP funding has been awarded to develop a mobility hub in Taunton, on the former bus station site. This will provide an interchange facility, not just for buses for other modes of travel as well. Stage 1 of the easibility study is complete and this will shortly move to stage 2 which involved more detailed design and shortlisting the components to be delivered through the hub.



- The Group discussed SWT facilitating and potentially trialling electric community car club schemes. The Group was aware there are examples of this in Watchet and elsewhere.
- The Group hoped the Council could promote ride sharing wherever possible, especially perhaps benefitting Students driving in from neighbouring authorities such as North Devon to get to College.
 - The Group discussed ensuring existing schemes were expanded to try and get a complete coverage.
- The Group was pleased to hear that SWT is in the process of developing a Car Club pilot which aims to deliver eco-friendly shared transport in the heart of Taunton. Its project partner, Co Cars, was at the Coal Orchard event to showcase the electric cars that will be available to hire via the scheme which is expected to go live by the end of 2022.



- The Group investigated a Workplace Parking Levy, which is in place in Nottingham and being considered in other areas. The levy on employers gives an incentive to walk, cycle and use public transport instead of cars for commuting to work. It also raises funds to improve these alternatives.
- The new Council should set up a feasibility study into it's practical application across the area and its effect on businesses.



- SWT Council to write to Butlins and First Group to request extra 28 services to alleviate pressure on the single bus due to the normal 28 bus being overfull, if able to do so without subsidy.
- Request the relevant PFH to meet with them to discuss feasibility.





Conclusion 7 -comments

- SCC in conjunction with the Somerset Bus Partnership launched the 'Bus It' campaign in August 2022, to encourage travel by public bus. This focussed on the potential cost savings when looking at the cost of fuel and running costs of a car. The campaign also focussed on bus pass holders to encourage this cohort to use their bus passes and travel more.
- We are happy to receive suggestions and work with colleagues to understand any other promotional activities/communication streams that would be beneficial.



- The Group investigated the history of the Student Bus Ticketing Scheme 'County Ticket' and believed there needed to be a greater flexibility in the ticket prices to ensure it is well used in future, if ever brought back into use following its suspension.
- The Group hoped there could be some form of subsidy to the Student County Ticket for one year as a trial to get the county ticket down to sub £500 (It was over £800) and see if this increases usage.



Conclusion 8 - comments

- Development of a young persons ticket was submitted as part of the initial BSIP funding bid but money was not allocated for this scheme. This remains an initiative we will continue to review and re-visit in the future should funding opportunities arise.
- The County Ticket has not been re-introduced, with the various ticket types available direct from operators, it is more cost effective for students to purchase tickets that are suited to their travel requirements, direct from the operator.
- College transport included as part of Bus It £2 Somerset County Wide scheme.



The Group would encourage regular working together with the Council and Local Colleges of encourage their students to opt for public transport following successful meetings with all parties to understand each others issues/priorities.



Conclusion 9 - comments

The operational team meets with the FE Support Group throughout the year – which includes representatives from the main FE Colleges in Somerset and transport eatures on the agenda. We are happy to discuss particular issues/opportunities with individual Colleges



The Group expressed a wish that the Planning department looked at strengthening enforcement of its gavel plan enforcement in future.



Conclusion 10 - comments

- The Local Transport Authority should monitor and improve the outcomes of Travel Plans for new housing developments. Consideration should be given to replacing 'Travel Vouchers' with significant funding for additional bus services or for Park and Ride improvements serving the new housing from their first occupation.
- The Local Transport Authority needs to monitor the implementation of Travel Plans and publish any evidence on the benefits achieved. The task and finish group expects any benefits are currently small and may have arisen without the Travel Plan.



Conclusion 10 - comments

 Provision of information on active travel and public transport to new occupiers is low cost and should be worth continuing. The benefits of green vouchers seem more doubtful.

It could be better to instead invest directly in additional bus service provision for new housing developments, which is available once more than a quarter of the new dwellings are occupied. Where this is impractical, equivalent funding should be provided instead to improve Park and Ride services that could be used by new occupiers. It is important planning policies require new housing to be located where active travel options and public transport can be available to residents.



 The Group discussed the under-utilisation of the Park and Rides in Taunton.

The Group believed they could be better marketed as destinations and the Council look to implement amenities on their site.





Conclusion 11 - comments

- SCC decided in August 2021 to make the Park and Ride free during the construction of road improvements associated with Creech Castle Junction/A358/Toneway. > Patronage rose significantly
- On completion of the works, the free fares came to an end but through BSIP funding SCC have managed to reinstate fares at a lower rate (£1 single, £2 return) and free for bus pass holders after 9.30 am. Patronage numbers have been retained at a good rate and are still much higher than before the free fares were introduced.
- This coincided with the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic and the temporary pedestrianisations of Town Centre.
- Use of enhanced real time Car Parking Information Signs
- Late Night Service introduction on 30/01/2023
- Bus it Campaign £1 fares in Taunton



- The Group identified that the Somerset Climate Strategy says that the Council would work with operators to improve provision.
- The Group supported this ambition.



