

# Full Council Meeting 29 March 2022

## Community Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/22

### Foreword

I was surprised and pleased to be appointed to the position of Chair for the Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) Community Scrutiny Committee in its inaugural year. It is unfortunate that with the onset of the Unitary Council, this will become one of the briefest committees in the short history of SWT Council.

Nevertheless, we have managed to get through a sizeable chunk of work, and I am both pleased and gratified with how my colleagues have scrutinised the various reports and items that have come before us in the past twelve months.

2021/22 has been a memorable period, during which Members have worked together to tackle the myriad of conflicting pressures relating to the Coronavirus pandemic that have affected our work and the lives of our constituents in so many ways. We have also had to deal with the changing face of Somerset as we move towards a new Unitary Council, with the resultant anxieties, uncertainties, and concerns from both our own staff, colleagues and local organisations.

Clearly one of the most fundamental components of successful scrutiny lies in partnership working and about acting as much more than just a critical friend or opposition to the Executive. I am therefore grateful to the Leader of the Council for continuing to encourage transparency and involvement of Scrutiny in the decision-making process.

In this, we benefit from the collegiate way of working, which has been ably demonstrated in the various cross-party task and finish groups that have been established in the last year. Of particular mention is the Zero Carbon Retrofit led by our Vice Chair, Cllr David Mansell which came to Community Scrutiny in January 2022.

### 2021/22 Programme

Overall, the last year has been an extremely busy one for the Committee. We have discussed many and varied issues of community interest and concern such as:

- Review of the VCSE Community Grants
- Social Housing Developments in Taunton and Minehead
- The Climate Emergency Strategy and Climate Resilience Plan
- Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Accommodation Plan
- The Future of Flook House
- Council Housing Zero Carbon Retrofit
- North Taunton Woolaway Project
- Litter Strategy and Enforcement
- Electronic Parking Permits – a verbal update

We also received regular reports on the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Performance, which included updates on how the Housing Directorate was coping with the ravages of COVID-19. Despite many challenges the Housing Service continues to support tenants and vulnerable members of the community, and this has been noted on the occasions reports are brought before Scrutiny.

We also continued to include a regular slot to question Executive Councillors. Not only does this offer Committee members a greater opportunity for extended questioning than is possible in normal meetings of the Full Council but it also offers portfolio holders the chance to expand on their roles and responsibilities.

Cllr Derek Perry	Sports, Parks and Leisure
Cllr Fran Smith	Housing
Cllr Chris Booth	Communities
Cllr Dixie Darch	Climate Change

We look forward to a visit from Cllr Andy Sully on the Environment portfolio in the coming months.

## **Updates from Partners / External Organisations**

### **Update on Post Office Provision**

April Meeting - Richard Hall - External Affairs Manager South England and Wales / Jason Collins Network Team)

### **Avon & Somerset Police**

September meeting – Chief Inspector Justin French – Question and Answer session.

### **Onion Collective**

January Meeting – Directors of Onion Collective – Question and Answer session.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, 2021/22 has been an unusual year for many reasons, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Scrutiny Member colleagues for their support, flexibility and commitment over this period. This includes my fellow Corporate Scrutiny Chair, Cllr Gwil Wren and the vice chairs who have fully played their part in making sure that we got on with the business of the Council as the residents of SWT would expect.

Despite only having one year left as a sovereign Council there is still much work to be done. I look forward to working with colleagues on the evolving Unitary Council, and the emergence of a Taunton Town Council, whilst continuing to support our communities in the post pandemic world.

Cllr. Libby Lisgo  
Community Scrutiny Chair