

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN ANSWERS TRACKER 2021/22

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Cttee Request for information	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Response to request for information	Date of response	Scrutiny Officer Comments/Update
07/07/21	Q) <i>Outturn Report - Can the Finance team provide a comparison with this year's outturn and last years on debts written off?</i>	Cllr Ross Henley/Finance			Understood this information can be provided.
07/07/21	Q) <i>Performance Report – Extensions to Planning applications due to phosphates – further detail on how many had had multiple extensions?</i>	Cllr Mike Rigby / Planning	We don't hold that information and I am not clear of the relevance of whether they have had multiple extensions. The more pertinent information is the number of applications which are currently held in abeyance due to the need to provide measures to mitigate the impact of development on the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site. As Rebecca reported to Planning Committee we currently have approximately 100 applications equating to approximately 2,300 dwellings and 13 sites awaiting the discharge of conditions equating to approximately 450 dwellings.	01/09/21	A verbal update was given to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee by Alison Blom-Cooper during the committee meeting on 3/11/21.
01/09/21	<i>2021/22 General Fund Financial Monitoring as at Qtr1</i>	Cllr R Henley & Cllr M Rigby /	Awaiting response. <i>(Check details of Qtr2 monitoring)</i>	10/11/21	Finance Business Partner currently checking with Stuart Noyce (may be a

	Q) Collation of parking income was requested along with the projected shortfall with comparison to pre pandemic levels.	Finance/ Parking			delay due to leave commitments)
01/09/21	<i>2021/22 General Fund Financial Monitoring as at Qtr1 –</i> Q) Appendix A compared to the budget agreed in February was considered, with a requested for further information in comparison to the detail of the variances.	Cllr R Henley / Finance	Paul Maclean has asked Cllr Buller to contact him direct so that he can fully understand the query and provide a satisfactory response. - First email was 07/09/21 - To be followed up.		Paul Maclean – can provide a detailed written response. Email fwd on. Emily Collacott and Paul Maclean.
01/09/21	<i>2021/22 – HRA Financial Monitoring as at Q1 -</i> There had been a revenue forecast overspend of £610k, with the recommendation setting out £869k, information relating to the variance in the figures was requested.	Cllr F Smith / Housing	The amount of £869k has been moved from HRA earmarked reserves to the HRA general reserves therefore increases the level of general reserves – this figure is not included in the Q1 year-end forecast	10/11/21	Information provided by Emily Collacott and confirmed by Kerry Prisco. Email dated 10/11/21
3/11/21	<i>Innovation District Update –</i> A request was made for the full report from the EIBC study. During the meeting Chris Hall agreed to supply a	Cllr M Kravis/ Development & Place	Chris Hall will redact the report and then make it available to members.	8/11/21	The redacted version of the report was published as part of the Executive Committee report for the Executive

	redacted version due to commercial sensitivity.				meeting held on 17 th November.
01/12/21	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report Q2 –</i></p> <p>QA) It was questioned whether an ecologist had been appointed to work on phosphates.</p> <p>QB) It was questioned how soon it is possible for an incoming call to be answered whether the wait time for calls to be answered included the automatic messaging at the start of the call.</p>	Cllr R Henley / Various Officers	<p>We advertised and failed to fill the agreed post of Nutrient Neutrality Officer and so we have a secondee from Arup on a part-time basis on a years contract to support the phosphates project. She is an ecologist.</p> <p>We do not currently include the time taken to listen to the messages and options at the beginning of the call.</p> <p>The benchmarking undertaken when the team was created found that most other organisations measure answering times from the same point (as all have statements about calls being recorded, GDPR etc). For SWT, the average time spent in the call routing process is around 80 seconds but this depends on the customer's choices on each call.</p> <p><i>Awaiting updated response from Lisa Tuck</i></p> <p>The target of 44 days was set in December 2020 for the current financial year and was based on Quarter</p>	10/12/21	Questions sourced as part of the Qtr 2 performance report by Malcolm Riches

	<p>QC) It was questioned how many quality employment opportunities had the Council attracted in the last few years, in terms of productivity what was the percentage increase and in which sectors.</p> <p>QD) It was questioned whether the average relet time of 44 days under homes and communities was normal.</p>		<p>2 Housemark metrics that showed a median performance of 44.5 days for District Councils that held housing stock at that time. In practice, meeting this target has been an enormous challenge both for us and across the Housing sector and we are currently falling short, as are most other Housing Providers. To illustrate this, Housemark data showed that the District Council average void turnaround time had increased to 49.8 days by Quarter 4 of 2020/21 (and no doubt has continued to further increase this year). Key factors that have affected turnaround time in this financial year have been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of trades-staff due to Covid • Trades staff being re-prioritised onto repairs work to clear the backlog built up during Covid lockdown (when we only undertook emergency repairs to minimise the risk of transmission and in line with government guidance). • Inability to recruit skilled trades staff, due to a very competitive market, including the impact of the Hinkley project attracting workers to EDF. • Delays in receiving a range of materials to complete Voids works, due to Covid, Brexit and other external factors. <p>This issue is not unique to SWT Council and is being experienced right across the Housing Sector. The Housing Directorate has an established plan to improve our Voids turnaround times that focuses on a number of areas of potential improvement and we are meeting regularly to ensure that progress is made on bringing average times down.</p>	04/01/2021	Simon Lewis
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			<p>As a Housing Management team, we also review our performance indicators as part of a wider suite to give us a rounded view of performance with respect to letting of properties. The Pulse statistical data for September 2021 does show us in the top quartile for the indicators “Proportion of dwellings vacant, but available to let”, and only marginally outside of top quartile performance for ‘Proportion of social homes let”, so our performance overall does give us some confidence that although improvement is required, we are not significantly out of step with other Housing Providers.</p> <p>This relates to the General Fund monitoring report, Table 3 on p52. It is an improved position on asset management income compared to last year by c£150k. This is due to leases completing earlier than expected for units at Seaward Way and Lisieux Way.</p> <p>At the end of September, performance for the year-to-date is 81% which is exceeding the target of 80%. Fly-tipping is dealt with by an external contactor and performance has improved during the year. Following a drop in performance in the first few months of this year, partly driven by a rise in the amount of fly-tipping, we continue to work closely with the contractor to closely monitor performance and drive improvement. It is important to note that the target</p>		
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			<p>relates to the speed of response rather than a failure to respond.</p> <p>The national performance indicator which looks at the Council's performance in determining planning applications (major, minor and other) looks at the speed with which applications are dealt with within the statutory time period or an agreed extended period. Those applications which are held in abeyance as a result of the need to provide mitigation to ensure nutrient neutrality and ensure there is no impact on the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site have not yet been determined and so would not be included in these figures. Most of these applications have an agreed extension of time so if they are determined in line with this agreement they will meet the targets.</p> <p><i>Answer listed under Recommendation Tracker as taken to Executive on 15 December 2021</i></p>	<p>04/01/2021</p> <p>04/01/2021</p>	<p>Malcolm Riches</p> <p>Malcolm Riches</p>
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	<p>QE) It was asked whether the asset management and completion of leases earlier than expected could be elaborated upon and clarification given.</p> <p>QF) Fly tipping was raised as being a big issue and it was questioned what was being done to address this.</p>	<p>Cllr Mike Rigby</p>		<p>04/01/2021</p>	<p>Malcolm Riches</p>
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QG) Planning applications had been delayed due to phosphates, there were over 120 applications waiting to be decided so why does the report claim a high level of success. It was asked if officers could give a date for when these applications would be coming forward and say how many of the applications waiting were likely to go forward.

Cllr Marcus Kravis

Chris Hall issued response in consultation with the PFH – Marcus Kravis

	<p>QH) It was raised that a feasibility study for Employment Land in West Somerset was mentioned in the report, and it was asked why a feasibility for the whole of the district was not being undertaken. It was asked where the budget for this study was coming from and whether it was revenue or capital funds.</p>																									
01/12/21	<p><i>2021-22 General Fund Financial Monitoring as at Q2 -</i> Q) An update was requested on how well asset management under External Operations and Climate Change was performing compared to previous years.</p>	Cllr R Henley / External Operations	<p style="text-align: center;">Asset Management Rental Income</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="909 837 1675 1297"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="909 837 1120 930">2020/21 Budget</th> <th data-bbox="1120 837 1469 930">2020/21 Outturn</th> <th data-bbox="1469 837 1675 930">Budget Variance</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="909 930 1120 975" style="text-align: right;">-£436,920.00</td> <td data-bbox="1120 930 1469 975" style="text-align: right;">-£519,066.41</td> <td data-bbox="1469 930 1675 975" style="text-align: right;">-£82,146.41</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" data-bbox="909 975 1675 1019"> </td> </tr> <tr> <th data-bbox="909 1019 1120 1153">2021/22 Budget</th> <th data-bbox="1120 1019 1469 1153">2021/22 Forecast Outturn as reported in Period 7</th> <th data-bbox="1469 1019 1675 1153">Budget Variance</th> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="909 1153 1120 1198" style="text-align: right;">-£765,130.00</td> <td data-bbox="1120 1153 1469 1198" style="text-align: right;">-£1,002,840.62</td> <td data-bbox="1469 1153 1675 1198" style="text-align: right;">-£237,710.62</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" data-bbox="909 1198 1675 1243"> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="909 1243 1120 1297" style="text-align: right;">-£328,210.00</td> <td data-bbox="1120 1243 1469 1297" style="text-align: right;">-£483,774.21</td> <td data-bbox="1469 1243 1675 1297" style="text-align: right;">-£155,564.21</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	2020/21 Budget	2020/21 Outturn	Budget Variance	-£436,920.00	-£519,066.41	-£82,146.41				2021/22 Budget	2021/22 Forecast Outturn as reported in Period 7	Budget Variance	-£765,130.00	-£1,002,840.62	-£237,710.62				-£328,210.00	-£483,774.21	-£155,564.21		
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05/1/22	<p><i>Infrastructure Funding Statement</i></p> <p>Q) Officers agreed to update members after the meeting regarding what would happen to CIL funds if parish councils were taken over or split as part of a new town or parish council was formed and whether the CIL funds could be ringfenced to be spent on certain projects.</p> <p>More detailed information within the IFS on the locations of the projects where S106 have been spent.</p> <p>Guidance for Councillors on CIL and S106 so they can see the differences between the different funding types</p>	Cllr M Rigby / Development and Place	<p><i>This issue is still being investigated with Shape Legal. As soon as an answer is received the Committee will be updated.</i></p> <p>The planning obligations team will enter the parish name at the front of the project descriptions going forward.</p> <p>Information sheets on CIL and S106 have been created and will be distributed to members.</p>	<p>21/02/2022</p> <p>21/02/2022</p> <p>21/02/2022</p>	<p>Rebecca Staddon, CILCommunity Engagement Officer</p> <p>Rebecca Staddon, CILCommunity Engagement Officer</p> <p>Rebecca Staddon, CILCommunity Engagement Officer</p>
26/01/22	<p><i>Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23</i></p>	Cllr Ross Henley/ Internal Operations	An email was set to all councillors with a detailed response to this question on Wednesday 23/2/22 in advance of the Full Council Budget Setting meeting.	23/02/2022	

	<p><i>Community Governance Review and Funding for a town council for Taunton</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked about the need for a settlement if a new town council was set up in Taunton and concerns were raised that this did not appear to have been planned for in the budget. Any new town council would need a budget to be able to provide services such as public toilets. Officers agreed to provide a full answer to the committee after the meeting and before the Full Council budget setting meeting.</p>				
26/01/22	<i>Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23</i>	Cllr Marcus Kravis/ Development & Place			

	<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>				
26/01/22	<p><i>Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23</i></p> <p><i>Gypsy Site</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked what was being done to help provide gypsy sites and if a site had been found. Officers responded that a response would be given after the meeting.</p>	Cllr Fran Smith/ Housing & Communities	A capital sum was allocated to Taunton Deane Borough Council to identify and then procure a suitable and sustainable gypsy and traveller site. Work took place to identify a suitable site however this proved difficult and none was agreed. This challenge has since been picked up by a County wide group that considers all public sector owned land in Somerset to find suitable sites to meet the needs of the travelling community across the county. The group has not yet concluded and presented its findings. The capital has been ringfenced for this purpose and will roll forward to contribute towards required funding, once this is resolved.	31/01/2022	Simon Lewis, Assistant Director of Housing and Communities.

<p>26/01/22</p>	<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>	<p>Cllr Mike Rigby/ Development & Place</p>			
<p>26/01/22</p>	<p><i>Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23</i></p> <p><i>Broadband</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked what progress had been made on superfast broadband. Officers responded that a response would be given after the meeting.</p>	<p>Cllr Marcus Kravis/ Development & Place</p>			

03/2/22	<p><i>Community Engagement Hubs</i></p> <p>Q) What is the budget for the community engagement Hubs?</p> <p>How does SWT assess value for money?</p> <p>Is 34 live cases good or bad?</p> <p>Was there ever a target set?</p> <p>Are the live cases only linked to the two open sites?</p>	Cllr Marcus Kravis / Economic Development			
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03/2/22	<i>Innovation Centre / Team</i>	Cllr Marcus Kravis / Economic Development			
	Q) Who is on the Innovation Team? Who is the SWT Officer Lead?				
03/2/22	<i>A358 Dualling Scheme</i>	Cllr Mike Rigby / Development and Place	<p>National Highways are responsible for organising the Community Liaison Forum meetings on the A358. These are essentially public consultation events with previous meetings held on 23 June, 7 October 2021 and recently the 15 February 2022.</p> <p>A list of parish councils invited to attend has been provided to members. National Highways will be asked if any presentations made at recent meetings can be uploaded to the SWT website.</p> <p>The lead officer on this at SWT is John Burton.</p>	03/02/22	Alison Blom Cooper, Assistant Director Strategic Place and Planning.
03/2/22	<i>Town Centre Health Checks</i>	Cllr Marcus Kravis / Economic Development		03/02/22	Alison Blom Cooper, Assistant Director Strategic Place and Planning.

	Q) Can SWT ensure that Stantec who are undertaking this work engage with the Chambers of Commerce, ward members and traders as part of the Town Centre Healthchecks?		This has been passed on and these persons/organisations will be included in the list of stakeholders to be involved in the project.		
03/2/22	<p><i>Car Parking / Lighting</i></p> <p>Q) Can SWT improve the pedestrian link/lighting between Cannon St Car Park and Middle Street?</p> <p>Q) Can better lighting be provided at the ticket machines in Cannon St Car Park.</p>	Cllr Mike Rigby / Development and Place	<p>Parking Services have been in contact with the Pay on foot machine supplier in regards to the issue raised below, they have confirmed the lighting levels are currently set to the highest level however we are carrying out investigations into the light level readings. Once this information has been supplied we will look at alternative options If required.</p>	23/5/22	Vicky Lowman, Specialist Parking and Enforcement
2/3/22	<p><i>General Fund Financial Performance Report for Quarter 3 of 2021/22</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked how much the Council had</p>	Finance / Internal Operations			

	received in grants from the government over the past two years.				
2/3/22	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i></p> <p>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.</p>	Customer Services / Internal Operations			
2/3/22	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i></p> <p>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.</p>	Customer Services / Internal Operations			
2/3/22	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked whether, excluding the increase in housing complaints, the</p>	Customer Services / Internal Operations			

	number of complaints had increased.				
2/3/22	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked about the statistics for enforcement in various areas across the Council, such as environmental health.</p>	Internal Operations			
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			
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</p>	Human Resources / Internal Operations			

	Covid had had a big impact on staff sickness.				
2/3/22	<p><i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i></p> <p>Q) It was asked how many planning enforcement orders were currently out and active versus how many had been closed down.</p>	Planning / Development and Place			
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			