

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

30/11/2022	<p>Housing Update – Does the Council recycle the waste collected on the Estate Skip Days?</p> <p>Requested by Cllr Dave Mansell</p>	Cllr Fran Smith / Housing Directorate James Barrah	<p>SWT has tried to place skips for different types of waste to encourage recycling but in practice our tenants are not very diligent and at the end of the day each skip was contaminated with mixed waste and therefore this did not work.</p> <p>Our Estates Officer calls several skip providers to seek the best price for the large skips we need. She has committed to check the next time we do this to ask what their recycling policies are and to seek one that can endeavour to recycle most of the content.</p>	22/12/22	Simon Lewis
30/11/2022	<p>Housing Update – What is the “Winter Plan” as referenced in Christian Trevelyan’s SIP report</p>	Cllr Chris Booth / Communities. Housing Directorate James Barrah	<p>The Winter Plan is driven by Somerset County Council through Public Health – it is a partnership approach to help people struggling with heating over the Winter. Partners include SCC, GPs, NHS, Centre for Sustainable Energy and others. It includes advice on heating and insulation as well as signposting financial support. Getting ready for winter (somerset.gov.uk)</p>	22/12/22	Simon Lewis
25/01/2023	<p>Confidential Item – Cllr Mansell asked if the notes from the previous meeting could be circulated to the committee</p>	Cllr Caroline Ellis / Portfolio Holder for Culture	<p>The confidential notes have been uploaded to the Mod.Gov web library, and Cllrs have been notified via email.</p>	07/02/22	Sam Murrell / Governance