

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council - 19 February 2020

Budget Amendments - Energy and Climate Protection Projects

**Proposed by Councillor Dave Mansell
Seconded by Councillor Gwil Wren**

Supported by Councillors Ian Aldridge, Mark Blaker, Sue Buller, Dixie Darch, Caroline Ellis, John Hunt, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Andy Pritchard, Nick Thwaites, Brenda Weston and Loretta Whetlor

BACKGROUND

Somerset West and Taunton Shadow Council unanimously resolved to declare a climate emergency on 21 February 2019. Good progress has been made in developing new policies, projects and strategies, including in the Corporate Plan and Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document. Work is also progressing on a Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience Plan for Somerset West and Taunton and jointly on a Somerset Climate Emergency Framework.

However, more capacity is required to deliver climate protection projects that involve and engage with the community and to identify and prepare energy projects within the council's estate, as well as by working with the community and private sectors.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE PROTECTION PROJECTS

This budget amendment will allow the appointment of a new specialist officer for community climate protection projects. It will also allow studies to be commissioned to assess and plan energy projects, including for renewable energy, battery storage and the retrofit of home insulation and low-carbon heating systems.

Initially, the new officer appointment would be on 2-year contract (starting part-way through 2020/21 – preferably by early summer), with an option to make the post permanent subject to future funding, including from savings achieved.

Grant funding would be sought to support, enhance and extend this work. Funding sources for climate protection initiatives are increasing and applications would benefit from the support of a specialist officer, so helping to attract more external funding to Somerset West and Taunton.

The post-holder will need to be able to work on their own initiative, to provide direction and assistance for some projects to be delivered by others, and to work positively with others as a team. They will need relevant experience and proven abilities relevant to the post.

Potential project areas are listed below. It may not be possible for projects in all these areas to be launched in two years, so assessing the best options and preparing realistic work programmes will be important early tasks. Some flexibility should be retained to respond to funding and other opportunities. Early projects should include pilots for the installation of effective home insulation and low carbon heating systems, with a view to their further development and implementation. The aim should be to develop pilots into larger programmes that are rolled out throughout the district, possibly in phases.

The post would be supported by a budget to cover communications, research and administration support, as needed.

Community Engagement Projects

A new specialist officer would be a catalyst and promoter of community projects related to climate change. In some cases, these projects will be time-limited or need minimal on-going support. In other cases, the specialist would help to initiate and establish projects but not provide on-going management, so ensuring these projects can be transferred to community organisations (new or existing), service providers or volunteers. This approach has been successfully demonstrated by the Resilience Manager employed by [Frome Town Council](#).

Potential community projects throughout the district include:

- Home energy and insulation projects, as outlined below.
- E-Car Clubs for shared use (and maybe shared e-bikes too).
- Share Shops (as established in [Frome](#)).
- Repair Cafes (several established already in SWT which may benefit from networking).
- Food reuse, especially from retail outlets, and Community Fridges.
- School and work-place active travel promotion.
- Low-carbon diets.
- Tree and wild flower planting and re-wilding projects.
- E-newsletter (with communications team).
- Guides and directories to low and zero carbon living.
- Many more possibilities

These projects would also involve: SWT Locality Engagement Leads and Champions

Home Energy and Insulation Projects

To contribute to effective reduction in carbon emissions, it will be important to promote home energy and insulation projects, with early pilots launched. These could include:

- a) Home solar PV panels and battery storage installation.
- b) Home insulation and low carbon heating, such as heat pumps and heat networks.

Features of these energy projects should include:

- Aiming to encourage installations that achieve or move towards zero carbon homes.
- Where possible, offering discounted bulk buy promotions* (with quality suppliers selected through procurement processes).

Projects should focus on the following to achieve maximum benefits and impact, especially initially:

- Cover most housing types in small areas (groups of streets, villages, small neighbourhoods, etc).
- Target house movers (via new council tax registrations or estate agents etc) and those replacing boilers, who are more likely to consider retrofitting energy efficiency measures and renewable energy installations.
- Target those with higher value homes, who are more likely to both have high energy use and be able to afford retrofit works.

Studies for Council Energy Projects

Potential projects for assessment and planning include:

- Solar PV panels (roof and ground) and batteries on council properties, especially where realisable savings or paying users for power.
- Utility scale battery storage (investment opportunity).
- Small/medium wind turbines on council estate in acceptable locations (possibly large on right sites).
- Energy saving measures (including smart controls and possibly demand management) and insulation retrofit in council buildings.
- The development of advice on domestic private sector insulation retrofit and heating systems (for owner occupiers and private renters and landlords).
- Joint working with the community energy sector, including the Centre for Sustainable Energy, as well as, where appropriate, with private sector companies.

Some of these projects would also involve: SWT Asset Management

* Successfully demonstrated by [Wivey Solar Club](#) in 2014 and Frome [Solar Streets](#) in 2019. Also, on a less local level, by [Solar Together](#), who have worked with over [20 local authorities](#).

New energy projects on council properties have potential to make savings and generate income for the council.

BUDGET COSTS AND FUNDING

Costs for the proposals in this report together with budget amendments to provide the funding are shown in the following table.

TABLE 1 - Budget Amendments

COSTS	2020/21 £	2021/22 £	2022/23 £
Energy Projects Study	10,000	30,000	15,000
Community Engagement Specialist (2-year post)	30,000	40,000	15,000
Communications and support costs	20,000	20,000	10,000
TOTAL COSTS	60,000	90,000	40,000
FUNDING			
Use part of Environment Strategy £75k proposed budget	-	30,000	-
Business Rates Funding / Reserve	60,000	60,000	40,000
TOTAL FUNDING	60,000	90,000	40,000

RECOMMENDATION FOR BUDGET AMENDMENTS

Full Council resolves to make the budget amendments shown in Table 1 for implementation of climate protection and energy projects as outlined in this report.

S151 Officer Comment – Robustness of the Budget and Adequacy of Reserves

Having reviewed the proposed amendment, if supported, my opinion is the additional costs and funding option will not fundamentally change my conclusions with regard to the robustness of the budget estimates or adequacy of reserves, as set out in sections 22 to 24 in the main General Fund Budget report (Item 10). If costs are initially established as fixed term as proposed this will align with the principle of using one-off business rates funding without creating an ongoing strain on resources or increase to the projected medium term budget gap.

Adjustments to Item 10 Main Budget Report

Table 6: Total Spending on Services in 2020/21 increased by £60,000 to £17,289,828; Transfer to Earmarked Reserves reduced by £60,000 to £3,534,525

Table 7: Energy and Climate Protection Projects £60k added; Transfer to Business Rates Smoothing Reserve reduced by £60k to £1,974k

Table 8: Extract highlighting amended figures:

	2019/20 £	2020/21 £	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
Services Costs	14,752,279	17,289,828	15,476,966	14,991,256	15,521,686	16,218,479
Earmarked Reserves-Other	2,834,631	621,236	-1,060,000	-40,000	0	0

Table 11: Net Contribution to Business Rates Smoothing Reserve reduced by £60k to £1,974k and Total reduced by £60k to £3,474k.