

## SWT Scrutiny Committee - 1 July 2020

Present: Councillor Gwil Wren (Chair)

Councillors Libby Lisgo (Vice-Chair), Sue Buller, Dixie Darch, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Janet Lloyd, Mark Lithgow, Derek Perry, Phil Stone, Nick Thwaites, Danny Wedderkopp, Keith Wheatley and Loretta Whetlor.

Officers: James Barrah, Paul Harding, Alison North, James Hassett, Mark Leeman, Marcus Prouse, Andrew Randell, Andy Spragg, John Hanes, Malcolm Riches and Robert Downes.

Also Present: Councillors Chris Booth, Brenda Weston, Francesca Smith, Ray Tully and Alan Wedderkopp

(The meeting commenced at 6:15)

### 15. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Cavill, Hunt, Mansell and D Wedderkopp,

Councillor Lloyd attended as a substitute on behalf of Councillor Mansell  
Councillor Whetlor attended as a substitute on behalf of Councillor Hunt  
Councillor Lithgow attended as a substitute on behalf of Councillor D Wedderkopp

### 16. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 3 June 2020.

(Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> June circulated with the agenda)

**Resolved** that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> June be confirmed as a correct record following minor amendments.

### 17. 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 L Lisgo   | All Items  | Taunton Charter Trustee | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr M Lithgow | All Items  | Wellington              | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr J Lloyd   | All Items  | Wellington &            | Personal | Spoke and Voted |

|                |           |                       |          |                 |
|----------------|-----------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------|
|                |           | Sampford Arundel      |          |                 |
| Cllr L Whetlor | All Items | Watchet               | Personal | Spoke and Voted |
| Cllr G Wren    | All Items | Clerk to Milverton PC | Personal | Spoke and Voted |

## 18. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

## 19. **Signing of Charter for Compassion**

Councillor Booth introduced the item and welcomed John Haines and Andy Spragg to present the Charter of Compassion.

The Charter for Compassion is a document, linked to a world-wide movement, through which community groups, public bodies, faith organisations and individuals can commit to work together to find solutions to local issues, doing so in a way that is underpinned by values of compassion, fairness and respect, in order to alleviate suffering.

The Council was approached to sign the 'Charter for Compassion', which was due to take place at the Feelgood Festival, at Woodlands Castle, Taunton on 10th May 2020. Due to restrictions on public gatherings this event was postponed and no new date had been confirmed.

The Charter was compatible with, and supports our corporate priority objective to 'Develop and deliver effective communications, consultation and engagement which listens to and engages with our residents and stakeholders and is central to the delivery of our services, strategies and plans'.

During the discussion of the item the following comments and questions were made

- The signing for the Charter of Compassion had been written by Karen Armstrong.
- The vision set out for charter to be signed by towns and organisations.
- Members of the committee largely welcomed the charter although expressed concerns over unpopular decisions and fairness around this and how the concept of compassion fits certain areas of decision making.
- Working together and empathy in the organisation would fit what public sector organisations were trying to achieve within the existing constraints.
- The Charter provided the framework of values to have conversations around the process.
- Further views were expressed by the committee that acting in the best interests of the residents was not always the most popular decision.
- Conforming to the code of conduct as part of everyday life was already a requirement of elected members. Applying this to Interactions with other organisations already happened as part of the role.
- The benefits in signing the charter were questioned, further concerns were expressed that a similar charter may be required to be signed on another topic such as climate change further down the line.
- Further consideration was given to which religions and industries were represented as part of the charter.

- The committee further considered if a big organisation was required to sign the charter for credibility, concerns were expressed over the religious background of author.
- The ambitions were to be visible with the charter, which would not directed against individuals or religions, the charter aimed to follow common themes of all religions
- Individuals from all religions across the world would have signed the charter, which was inclusive of religions. It had no affiliations with particular scientific organisations.

**Resolved:-** The Scrutiny Committee recommend that the Council does not sign the Charter of compassion at Full Council.

## 20. **Hinkley Point C Housing Fund Strategy (Phase 3)**

Councillor Fran Smith introduced the report which was presented by Mark Leeman

The construction of the Hinkley Point C nuclear reactor is one of the largest construction projects in Europe, employing (at peak – anticipated during Spring / Summer 2021) 5,600 workers on site. A significant proportion of the workers are not Somerset residents (currently 57%), and so there is an impact on the local housing market as workers seek accommodation, particularly in the private rented sector. These pressures have predicted effects such as limiting availability of accommodation for locals, exacerbating rentals, and in some instances, the displacement of current tenants.

Through Section 106 planning agreements, EDF have made available funding contributions to mitigate the impact of the HPC project. Funding was first released in 2012 and other monies have been made available since. Previously, West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council agreed funding strategies (Phases 1 and 2), using EDF money to mitigate the impact of the HPC construction on the local housing market. This mitigation took the form of creating new bed spaces and providing services for those who were struggling and needed advice and support.

This report presents the latest HPC housing funding strategy (Phase 3), using the current evidence to identify projects to mitigate impacts on the housing market. This will include taking forward activities that have worked well and adding in new ones to meet new emerging trends. We have in excess of £1.4M to invest that includes unspent funds from the previous strategy.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Taking into account the Equalities statement, the report indicated there would be negative impacts to a range of groups, a full assessment has been provided taking into account all those impacted.
- The Council had received funding for two officer posts. Utilising these posts for both previous areas of West Somerset and Taunton Deane was intended.

- Funding streams set out in the report allocated £470k for 50 affordable homes to rent owned by the Council, further details were requested around the allocated funding.
- EDF were supportive of the proposals set out in the report.
- Infrastructure pressures due to the number of additional employees working in the area were considered.
- The increased demand as a result of Hinkley activity was mainly around 1 and 2 bedroom properties.
- Funding had been received to tackle mitigation as part of the development consent order which set out that where there had been significant changes further funding was required.
- Further information was requested relating to social value gains to the voluntary and community sector. Commitment was given to provide this following the meeting.
- The peak point of employment at Hinkley Point was estimated to be 2021.
- The economic issues and housing need was considered across the district.
- Members encouraged further work on joint projects with EDF to engage in more initiatives. Sedgemoor had received investment for roads, housing and accommodation however Somerset West and Taunton had received less investment. Benefit from infrastructure was still received as a result of developments in Sedgemoor.
- A Covid-19 economic recovery plan was still in development in conjunction with all 5 Councils.
- The committee welcomed the recent opening of the accommodation located at the Canonsgrove facility and considered if there was still funding to continue this.
- Impact of increase of the increase in employees through the Hinkley development on local hospitals was discussed.
- The Scrutiny Committee encouraged continued dialogue with EDF on more joint ventures in relation to housing, alongside economic developments of Taunton as part of the recovery briefing from CEO.

**Resolved** that:- the Scrutiny Committee considered the proposed Hinkley Point C Housing Fund Strategy and supporting project activity, and noted the report.

## 21. **SWT Corporate Performance Report 2019/2020**

The Performance Report was introduced by Malcolm Riches.

As part of the Councils commitment to transparency and accountability this report provides end-of-year performance information for a number of indicators across a range of council services. The format of this report will be developed further from the start of the 2020/21 financial year in order to monitor progress of the Councils Corporate Strategy.

The table in Appendix 1 includes the councils Key Performance Indicators and shows how the council has performed for 2019/20 financial year.

The majority of indicators have are either met or exceeded the target. For the 2 indicators where performance is significantly below target, and the indicator is rated "Red", commentary is provided below:

Number of complaints responded to in 10 working days.

This has been an area of focus since last summer and has led to a restructure of the management of complaints. Jess McVie was recruited to manage the process (and

support Cllrs with their cases) which has led to significant improvements. However, some areas of the organisation have struggled to respond to complaints as quickly as needed.

Every complaint is assessed and any that are not actually complaints, such as requests for service and appeals against decisions, are reassigned to the specific process. The council does not want to discourage complaints as they are a valuable source of critical feedback, however, while the organisation has traditionally been effective at correcting mistakes (although sometimes not within the timeframes we would like) we have been less effective at implementing effective preventive action and learning from our mistakes to prevent repeat complaints. This is an area of development that has been receiving additional priority.

Prior to the Coronavirus outbreak we had been preparing a series of development workshops to coach teams in how to deal with complaints with a particular emphasis on effective responses and preventative action. This has been temporarily put on hold but will restart as soon as possible.

FOI requests responded to in 20 working days.

To help improve performance a dedicated case manager was recruited last autumn to manage the FOI process, and a new process for submitting FOI requests has been implemented. This had led to significant improvements in performance and for January, 81% of FOIs were responded to on time.

During the discussion of the item the following comments and questions were made:-

- Complaints were set out across the Council, these were broken down across the Council so particular attention could be made with training and staff awareness in the next steps in examining staff complaints.
- Complaints and freedom of information were the top two indicators.
- Recognised there was an issue around localities complaints.
- Clarity for Councillors and staff who are processing complaints.
- Monitoring figures as part of the financial outturn report was an ongoing piece of work to be brought to Councillors in the coming months.
- Members of the Committee welcomed a clearer picture of the ongoing figures.
- Report to reflect how staff have adapted and continued services provision as a result of the impact of Covid-19.
- A report to Councillors as part of the all Councillor briefing had been received. Keeping improving and results from each directorate to work with Councillors was an ongoing piece of work.
- Measure different factors that are important in the current trends and operation was an important direction to go in alongside more dynamic reporting.
- The Committee thanked officers for the report.

**Resolved** that:- The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

## 22. Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

(Copy of the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan, circulated with the agenda).

Councillors were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance Team.

An item of a DLO update was requested to be added to a future date on the forward plan.

**Resolved** that the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan be noted.

23. **Full Council Forward Plan**

**Resolved** that the Full Council Forward Plan be noted.

24. **Executive Forward Plan**

**Resolved** that the Executive Forward Plan be noted.

(The Meeting ended at 8:24pm)