

## SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL

### CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN ANSWERS TRACKER 2021/22 - UPDATED

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Cttee Request for information	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Response to request for information	Date of response	Scrutiny Officer Comments/ Update
1 Dec 21	QC) It was questioned how many quality employment opportunities the Council had attracted in the last few years, in terms of productivity what was the percentage increase and in which sector?	Former PFH Cllr Marcus Kravis / Development and Place	<p>Responses provided to members by Malcolm Riches</p> <p>Although the objective for the 'Our Environment and Economy' priority does include reference to attracting high quality jobs, there is <u>not</u> a specific commitment to deliver a particular quantity of such jobs. The actions over the 4 years of the strategy are in many cases enabling actions, such as creating a business plan for Wellington Station, the delivery of the Digital Innovation Centre at Firepool and securing funding for the development of Tone Dale Mill.</p> <p>Creation of jobs is captured as a net figure in the Council's annual Authority Monitoring Report. The practical difficulty is that with a net figure, jobs will be created and lost, in many cases for reasons outside of SWT's direct control. The 2020/21 report is available on the SWT website shortly.</p> <p><a href="https://somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/authority-monitoring-report">Authority monitoring report (AMR) (somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)</a></p> <p>The Development and Place Directorate however does measure square footage of employment land directly created by the Council (such as the square footage created via the Coal Orchard and Minehead employment site including the new Snazaroo building) on a quarterly basis as an indicator of increasing the potential for the creation of high-quality jobs.</p>	13/07/22	Lisa Tuck

26/01/22	<p><i>Draft General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23</i></p> <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>	Former PFH Cllr Marcus Kravis / Development and Place	<p>The Capital Budget 2022/2023 presented to Scrutiny proposed a Capital budget of £100k for Employment site enabling and Innovation to promote Growth (budgeted on a Capital cost centre shown as funded from borrowing).</p> <p>The Council agreed to a specific budget in 2022/23 to support Innovation (i.e. £50k to support the Innovation Conference).</p> <p>The Development and Place Finance Business Partner agreed to return the £100k Capital budget (awaiting confirmation from Paul McClean).</p>	13/07/22	Lisa Tuck
26/01/22	<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>	Cllr Mike Rigby/ Development & Place	<p>The main building and car parking area at the old bus station is now being used by the NHS as a Vaccination Centre and is open to the public. Their license runs for 6 months until end of September 2022.</p> <p>To get the building ready for use, the NHS have refurbished much of the main building to a high standard. This has involved knocking down partition walls, resolving drainage issues, decorating, painting railings and windows, cutting back overgrown foliage, and making general adaptations so that nursing teams can operate safely and securely. The top floor is being used for office space and a staff area with kitchen, whilst downstairs there is the vaccination centre, storage areas and 1-2-1 consultancy rooms. The NHS are keen to extend the license once it expires.</p> <p>Following a joint application to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, SWT and Minehead Town Council were awarded £96,360 to support the installation of two Changing Places facilities – one in the office building at the Old Bus Station in Tower Street, and one</p>	25/05/22	Response provided by Robert Downes

			<p>in the Coop Car Park in Minehead. To take this project forward, work is required to remove asbestos from the office buildings and realign drainage and utility services. Once done part of the office building can be converted. The intention is to start developing the Changing Places facility in 2022/23.</p> <p>Work is also continuing to define the longer-term use of the site. The focus of which has been on the inclusion of the old bus station site in proposals put forward by Somerset County Council to the Department for Transport for funding under the Bus Service Improvement Plan process. It was recently announced that Somerset has been awarded indicative funding of £11.9m. Although more work is required to refine proposals, they did include an allocation of funds for a Taunton Mobility Hub utilising the old Bus Station site. The project team is currently waiting to hear whether this specific proposal will progress further.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Finally, it is worth noting that Natalie Kirbyshire, the Project Manager working on the plans for the Tower Street site, has now left SWT. A new project manager has been recruited and will start in July. In the meantime, if you have any queries, please contact Joe Wharton or Robert Downes (<a href="mailto:r.downes@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk">r.downes@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk</a>) in the Major and Special Projects Team.</p>		
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03/2/22	<p>Community Engagement Hubs</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>	Former PFH Cllr Marcus Kravis / Development and Place	<p>The Community Employment Hubs are fully funded via grants obtained by the Economic Development Team from the following organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Department for Work and Pension</li><li>• Somerset County Council Business Rate Retention Fund</li><li>• HPC s106 Funds ringfenced for Skill and Training. V</li></ul> <p>The funding covers reopening and set up costs, running costs, 2 part-time Employment Hub Coordinators, management costs and volunteer expenses. The funding covered the period of 1 September 2020 to 31 May 2022.</p> <p>Value for money is assessed by the grant bodies as part of the funding process.</p> <p>The funding organisations set targets for the period as follows: To open 5 new hubs across the district by 17 April 2022. To engage with 300 individuals through direct contact and events arranged through the work of the hubs (e.g., careers fairs, meet the employer events).</p> <table><tr><th>Location</th><th>Delivery model</th><th>Planned opening date</th><th>Opening times/dates</th></tr><tr><td>Priorswood Community Centre</td><td>Face to face/virtual</td><td>29 March</td><td>4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday in the month 10-12</td></tr><tr><td>Halcon Link Centre</td><td>Face to face/virtual</td><td>31 March</td><td>4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in the month 12.30-2.30</td></tr></table>	Location	Delivery model	Planned opening date	Opening times/dates	Priorswood Community Centre	Face to face/virtual	29 March	4 <sup>th</sup> Tuesday in the month 10-12	Halcon Link Centre	Face to face/virtual	31 March	4 <sup>th</sup> Thursday in the month 12.30-2.30	13/07/22	Lisa Tuck
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			<p><b>Challenges to delivery:</b></p> <p>The pandemic and restriction to contact has resulted in additional challenges for the project as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ability to open hubs in the community for face-to-face support.</li><li>• Ability to recruit and train volunteers to support the hubs.</li><li>• Limited capacity to provide virtual support to clients.</li></ul> <p>An additional challenge to the project was the initial absence of SWT Volunteer Recruitment and Management policies and processes.</p>														

03/2/22	<i>Innovation Centre / Team</i>  Q) Who is on the Innovation Team?  Who is the SWT Officer Lead?	Former PFH Cllr Marcus Kravis / Development and Place	A summary of the members of the Innovation Leadership Group was made available to members on mod.gov provided by Mark Wathen shortly after the Scrutiny meeting.  <a href="#">Innovation District Members Info.pdf</a>  Mark Wathen	13/07/22	Lisa Tuck
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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 received in grants from the government over the past two years.</p>	Finance / Internal Operations	<table><tr><th>COVID GRANTS TO SUPPORT SWT</th><th>2020/21 £'000</th><th>2021/22 £'000</th></tr><tr><td>New Burdens</td><td>-306</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Surge Enforcement Funding</td><td>-74</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Community Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)</td><td>-</td><td>-210</td></tr><tr><td>Outbreak Management Fund</td><td>-47</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Coronavirus Response Fund - Rough Sleepers</td><td>-102</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Protect &amp; Vaccinate</td><td>-</td><td>-116</td></tr><tr><td>Vulnerable Renters</td><td>-</td><td>-93</td></tr><tr><td>Test and Trace New Burdens Admin</td><td>-58</td><td>-96</td></tr><tr><td>Covid 19 Grant</td><td>-</td><td>-813</td></tr><tr><td>Covid-19 LA Support Grant</td><td>-2,386</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Sales, Fees and Charges</td><td>-3,135</td><td>-415</td></tr><tr><td>New Burdens</td><td>-196</td><td>-190</td></tr><tr><td><b>Sub Total</b></td><td><b>-6,304</b></td><td><b>-1,933</b></td></tr></table>	COVID GRANTS TO SUPPORT SWT	2020/21 £'000	2021/22 £'000	New Burdens	-306	-	Surge Enforcement Funding	-74	-	Community Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)	-	-210	Outbreak Management Fund	-47	-	Coronavirus Response Fund - Rough Sleepers	-102	-	Protect & Vaccinate	-	-116	Vulnerable Renters	-	-93	Test and Trace New Burdens Admin	-58	-96	Covid 19 Grant	-	-813	Covid-19 LA Support Grant	-2,386	-	Sales, Fees and Charges	-3,135	-415	New Burdens	-196	-190	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-6,304</b>	<b>-1,933</b>	01/06/22	John Dyson, Corporate Finance Manager.
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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	Unfortunately, this isn't currently possible. Our phone system doesn't log calls against a customer record so repeat contact isn't identifiable. This will be raised as part of the Unitary work with the Telephony workstream, as a requirement for any Customer Relationship Management software we use in the future. It may be possible to analyse Firmstep to identify repeat requests for the same address and the Business Intelligence team are looking into the feasibility of this.	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches																																										

2/3/22	<i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i>  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.	Customer Services / Internal Operations	<table><tr><th>Directorate</th><th>Number of complaints up to end of Dec 2021</th><th>Answered within 10 working days</th><th>%</th></tr><tr><td>Internal Ops</td><td>218</td><td>160</td><td>76%</td></tr><tr><td>External Ops</td><td>318</td><td>285</td><td>90%</td></tr><tr><td>Housing</td><td>305</td><td>208</td><td>68%</td></tr><tr><td>Dev and Place</td><td>38</td><td>29</td><td>73%</td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>879</td><td>682</td><td>78%</td></tr></table> The number of complaints received continue to be significantly higher than in the previous financial year.	Directorate	Number of complaints up to end of Dec 2021	Answered within 10 working days	%	Internal Ops	218	160	76%	External Ops	318	285	90%	Housing	305	208	68%	Dev and Place	38	29	73%	Total	879	682	78%	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches
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2/3/22	<i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i>  Q) It was asked whether, excluding the increase in housing complaints, the number of complaints had increased.	Customer Services / Internal Operations	A breakdown of complaints is shown above	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches																								
2/3/22	<i>Corporate Performance Report as at Quarter 3 2021/22</i>  Q) It was asked how many planning enforcement orders were currently out and active versus had been closed.	Internal Operations	In total in 2021 we had 310 Enforcement Cases across SWT.  So far in 2022 we have had 87, which if this rate continues would be an increase for the year as whole.  For open cases still open on the system the numbers are as follows  2020 = 25 2021 = 178 2022 = 77 Total – 280	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches																								



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	<p>We have compared service standards between the other councils as part of our work to prepare for the new Somerset Council. Regarding call waiting times, SWTs performance is currently equal to or in many cases better than those of our peers.</p>	01/06/22	Malcolm Riches
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 Covid had had a big impact on staff sickness.</p>	Human Resources / Internal Operations	<p>The sickness data does not currently categorise sickness into long-term or short-term sickness, but this is being developed.</p> <p>The overall turnover data includes permanent and fixed term staff but not temporary or agency.</p> <p>A report is being prepared for SMT which will be available in mid-April and will be shared with Members.</p>	05/03/22	Malcolm Riches
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	<p>There is currently a national issue around recruitment and retention for qualified planning staff.</p> <p>Within the planning service in SWT there are professional planning staff covering the following posts: 17 DM Planning posts; 9 planning policy and implementation posts, a Phosphates Planner post (covered by way of a secondment) and an Assistant Director. Note – not all of the posts are full time. In addition, the service has business support officers and enforcement officers.</p> <p>During 2021/22 there were new starters covering the following posts: Garden Town Implementation Manager (post transferred from the Major Projects team and funded by Homes England) Assistant Director,</p>	25/07/22	Alison Blom Cooper

			<p>Planning Officer trainee, Senior Planning Officer DM, Principal Planning Officer DM, Principal Planning Policy Officer, Infrastructure Planning Officer and Planning Policy Officer. Leavers were a Team Leader, 2 Development Management Officers and 1 Assistant Director. We have in place at the current time agency cover for the Team leader and 2 Development Management Officer posts.</p> <p>This followed a national recruitment exercise for the Team Leader and Development Management Officer posts in March/April 2022 which resulted in no applicants and as a result we have had to use agency cover. We have a 0.6 post vacant whilst the postholder is seconded to a temporary NSIP role. In addition, the Service Manager has now resigned, and her last day of service is 5 August 2022 – similarly we have been out to external recruitment for this post and sought to recruit via recruitment agencies but have received no applications. This reflects the national shortage of planners and the difficulties in recruiting to all posts requiring RTPI membership and experience</p>		
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