

SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 31 August 2022

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Simon Coles, Tom Deakin, Roger Habgood, Ed Firmin, Steve Griffiths, Richard Lees, Janet Lloyd, Andy Pritchard, Ray Tully and Vivienne Stock-Williams

Officers: Sam Murrell, Marcus Prouse (Clerks), Paul Fitzgerald, Kerry Prisco, Simon Lewis, Chris Hall, Jonathan Stevens, Scott Weetch, Sally Parry, Richard Brown, Stuart Noyce and Vicky Lowman.

Also Present: Councillors Federica Smith Roberts, Hugh Davies and Loretta Whetlor, John Hassall and Brenda Weston (Via Zoom)

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

31. **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Cllr Dawn Johnson (subs by Cllr Ed Firmin), Cllr Mark Lithgow, Cllr Andy Milne and Cllr Martin Peters.

Apologies were also received from Executive PFH for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation – Cllr Mike Rigby who was subs by Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts.

32. **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee**

The Minutes were approved as a true record subject to the following requests:-

Everyone Active

1) For statistics in appendices, it was requested that 6-monthly or annual figures be provided in future reports, as these may be more useful in showing trends over time.

2) The Energy Plan and work on a Net Zero strategy were welcomed. It was suggested there could be a business case for more solar panels at the centres with involvement of both Everyone Active and SWT. Officers agreed to look into this. – It was requested that this is added to the Written Answer Tracker

3) It was recorded that a request had been made for Everyone Active to maintain the environs and neighbouring areas of their leisure facilities, most especially the hedges and fenced areas around the Golf Course.

Prop: Cllr Coles / Sec: Cllr Deakin Approved.

33. **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 S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr Steve Griffiths also declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 10 as a volunteer on the West Somerset Railway.

34. **Public Participation**

There were no statements or public questions brought before the Committee.

35. **Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

The additional item from Cllr Mansell to be added to the Written Answer Tracker as follows:-

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 on the Written Answer Tracker.

The Committee noted and approved the tracker. *(Unanimous)*

36. **Community Scrutiny Forward Plan**

Disappointment was expressed by Cllr Lisgo and Cllr Habgood about the lack of attendance from Cllr Rigby, especially as there were three items on the agenda which fell under his portfolio. The point was made that it was difficult to ask questions of a substitute who may not have awareness of the topic being

discussed. It also put pressure on future agendas and forward planning, if an alternative date was needed.

Due to annual leave commitments: Chris Brown the report author for the HRA Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Action Plan has requested that this item is deferred to the 26 October 2022, Community Scrutiny Meeting. The delay would not interrupt the democratic pathway as it is due to be taken to the 16 November Executive Meeting, and then onto Full Council on the 6 December.

The Chair put forward the recommendation that the Community Governance Review Report was brought to Scrutiny on the 28 September to debate the issue before the Special Full Council on 29 September. Whilst members of the committee were supportive there was concern about the lack of sufficient time to prepare an adequate response to the report in 24 hours. It was agreed unanimously to follow up this request.

Prop: Deakin / Sec: Coles. Unanimous.

37. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plans**

The Committee noted both of the Forward Plans.

38. **CCTV Review and Upgrade**

Executive Cllr Chris Booth introduced the item as Portfolio Holder for Community.

This is an information report to update on capital investment to replace 11 CCTV cameras in the 'spine' of Taunton's CCTV network from junction of Staplegrove Road with North Street, through Bridge Street, Fore Street and East Street. There is an earmarked reserve of £60K set aside for work on the CCTV project, which would involve an upgrade from analogue to digital cameras, and improve the data produced.

Scott Weetch presented the report to the Committee which outlined four possible options for the future of CCTV in the Taunton Town Centre, including a "do nothing" approach. There were a variety of delivery mechanisms for CCTV across the district, which made it difficult to adopt a one size fits all assessment. Partners included Sedgemoor District Council who had a service level agreement with the former TDBC, and Avon and Somerset Police. In Minehead and Watchet, the CCTV was monitored solely by volunteers and the numbers have been depleted due to Covid and other factors. This has reduced resilience in the systems.

Comments from the Committee included: -

- Dismay and frustration at the length of time the strategy has taken to be delivered. It was apparent that the service level agreements with partners such as Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) had not been upheld and this was detrimental to the life and resources of the existing CCTV systems in

Taunton. Residents and the night-time economy had been let-down by the failures in the system, and some such as the street pastors did not feel safe going about their duties knowing the cameras may not be working.

- Fear of crime is rising not reducing, and lack of CCTV and safeguarding reinforces those fears.
- There have been failings in the systems in Taunton, but due to changes in the administrations between Sedgemoor DC and SWT, these have been challenging to unpick. The previous management regime at Sedgemoor agreed to maintain and upgrade the CCTV as needed, via a Service Level Agreement, but this was not upheld. Unfortunately, this was not made apparent until just before Covid, so was difficult to challenge. Therefore, SWT had to re-assess the entire CCTV network, which meant going back to basics and checking all hardware, software, and data. It was very quickly realised that the Taunton cameras had not been maintained to a suitable standard. Unfortunately, due to the challenges presented by Covid, there had been insufficient monitoring to note this problem earlier.
- Avon and Somerset Police used to run a volunteer scheme out of the Minehead Police Station which monitored the CCTV coverage on a rota basis throughout West Somerset (Minehead and Watchet). Due to Covid and other factors, there is now only 1 volunteer left working with the system.
- It was asked if anyone had contacted the Avon and Somerset Police Crime Commissioner, regarding attracting some extra funding to support these initiatives.
- Cllr Lloyd asked if Wellington Town Council still contributed to the maintenance of the CCTV equipment. If this has stopped, when did this happen? Referred to the [Written Answer Tracker](#) for a response.
- Cllr Pritchard asked how many successful prosecutions have resulted from the use of CCTV cameras? This information will need to be obtained from Sedgemoor District Council. Referred to the [Written Answer Tracker](#) for a response. *The point was also raised that at present SWT feels that the level of reporting is not sufficient to provide a response, but it is hoped this can be improved and made publicly available on the council's website.*
- The Committee was reminded that the use of CCTV was not just to reduce crime, but also to look for missing persons and safeguard the vulnerable.
- Welfare and Suicide prevention – some cameras were focussed in areas to alert the emergency services of potential suicide risks. One such, was the multi-storey car park. Another location was the O-Bridge viaduct but unfortunately there was a lack of street furniture and electrical supply to facilitate the siting of a camera. These risks are regularly assessed and monitored. *SWT is currently still waiting on Sedgemoor to provide information on moveable/portable cameras to see if this would be a feasible option for areas such as the O Bridge.*
- Privacy Impact Assessments – This checks how often the cameras are used and monitored and what they are looking at. Legally, the cameras are only focussed on public realm/spaces and there are strict laws on privacy and usage. (Can't look into windows or homes). The data is held

securely and must be relevant. The system is not yet capable of artificial imaging or facial recognition software. The camera imaging is basic analogue only.

- It was asked what systems of CCTV are currently used in the other Somerset districts: *South Somerset's system is managed by Sedgemoor District Council, whilst Mendip operates an independent stand-alone system.*
- Why only £60K allocated? *The budget of £60k has been earmarked from the current reserve and there is no further identified funding.*
- Some of the money will be used to improve compliance of the CCTV system in Taunton. Amongst other things this will upgrade the existing signage which will be out of date very soon, and continuous reviews are needed to ensure SWT satisfies the Information Commissioner requirements at regular intervals. (Data protection). Compliance relates to the need for a camera to be sited where it is, as well as ongoing monitoring to ensure that the information captured is relevant and stored appropriately.
- The current cameras have a shelf life of 5-6 years and were installed nearly 20 years ago. They are long past their user dates. As Sedgemoor have now upgraded to digital receivers, and the SWT cameras are operating on analogue, there is a disconnect between transferring the images/ the systems communicating with each other.
- Cllr Whetlor expressed disappointment in the level of CCTV service in Watchet. Agreed to have an off-line conversation with officers outside the meeting.

Final Points

The Chair recognised that there had been considerable frustration and challenge around the delay in bringing the report forward to Committee. From the comments made the Committee appeared supportive of the report and the work being undertaken. The current report only dealt with the Taunton Town Centre however, and this was an item that would need to be progressed through the new unitary council in the future and rolled out to all our communities.

The Committee unanimously voted to approve the report.

7.10pm Scott Weetch and Sally Parry left the meeting.

39. Parking Strategy Actions Review

In the absence of Executive Councillor Mike Rigby, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning & Transportation, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts introduced the report via zoom. The report highlighted the work that has been done to amalgamate the two districts of Taunton Deane and West Somerset and would be ongoing as it progressed into the new unitary and the wider Somerset area became part of the strategy.

Stuart Noyce and Richard Brown presented the report to the Committee.

During the debate the following points were made: -

- Cllr Mansell noted that the former West Somerset DC had carried out a stock condition survey of their car parks. Is this happening in the Taunton Deane area? Can this be shared with Members once finalised? *As part of the unitary transfer of assets, all car parks are being surveyed (including the Multi-Storey) and will form part of a portfolio of costings for the next 25yrs. It also takes into account the anticipated costs to maintain in the future, from the complex infrastructure of the multi-storey to the simple car park white lining maintenance programme. Some of the assets had been improved over the last few years by introducing EV charging points and the upgrading of car parking machinery. This new information will need to be captured. An assessment is also being undertaken to examine the income generated by each car park and balance that with the maintenance programme. Once the assessment is completed it may be possible to bring that back to Committee and share with members.*
- LGR Process - When are the fees and charges likely to be reviewed, as there isn't consistency across the district? *The current fees and charges for the SWT district were set for this year by Full Council. All fees, charges and licences are being reviewed across the whole county in line with unitary processes. It is likely to form part of the budget process for the new council. This work is being undertaken now to ensure alignment once the new Council is operational.*
- Cllr Habgood expressed anger that there did not appear to be a comprehensive strategy for the management of car parks or car parking income, and there was a lack of transparency. He saw this as a failure in the administration. The Leader responded by highlighting the challenges of bringing the two councils together: combatting COVID-19 and the changing behaviour of users of the car parks. There were also other areas of the PFH report going to Full Council on 6 September that clearly highlighted the level of progress that was being made to the car parks and the maintenance programme district wide.
- Cllr Lisgo recognised that merging the two councils into SWT had caused difficulties, but asked what learning had been achieved through this process which could make the passage smoother as we move towards the unitary council? *It will be a good opportunity to look at car parking in its entirety across the councils including on-street car parking and park and ride. Most of the transfer of systems had been harmonious as there was a move towards regularisation of data and inspections. Learning included ensuring that there was one system of management across the whole district and rulings were applied in a consistent manner. The staff that had transferred into the service had good knowledge and skills and eased the process into one way of working.*
- *The main problem areas were centred around the fees and charges and decision/policy making covering the whole district. It was difficult to find an approach that was equitable for all at the same time. There had also been issues with the adoption of electronic permits, as some users did not have*

the wi-fi coverage to enable them to use it. Main area of learning was to consult with users and listen to feedback.

- *There is already a good relationship and a lot of partnership working taking place between all the Council's in Somerset. It is envisioned that this will be strengthened and progressed as the work is aligned into the new council workstreams.*
- There has been a change in user behaviour of the car parks, partly due to the pandemic, but also as people try to reduce their carbon footprint and rely less on cars. SWT is way ahead of other authorities in implementing EV charging points in their car parks.
- Income has not yet returned to the pre-pandemic levels, as reflected in the change of user behaviour, but it has recovered substantially in the last 12 months. The town centres are busier but there is still a reluctance for people to return.
- Cllr Whetlor praised the staff for their hard work especially in relation to Watchet. She stated that the PFH should consult with ward members about local issues so that this knowledge can be shared. One such example is that disabled parking bays in the Watchet car parks are empty due to being chargeable, so disabled badge holders park on street and display their badge to avoid paying. This means the bays are empty and can't be used, and there is a shortage of general need car parking.
- Cllr Lisgo summed up by saying that there were lots of frustrations around the car parking reports and she could not see it getting better anytime soon due to the amount of work involved. Merging this into one strategy for the whole of Somerset was going to present a huge challenge right across the county, which is not helped by a lack of member involvement, transparency, and dialogue. She expressed the wish that the PFH involves ward members in the discussions and draws upon the experience of Councillors and Officers when addressing these issues to incorporate previous lessons that have been learnt!

The Committee voted to note the report. (8/12 in favour)

Cllr Habgood and Cllr Stock Williams – against

Cllr Lisgo and Cllr Tully abstained.

7.31pm Cllr Booth, Stuart Noyce, Vicky Lowman and Richard Brown left the meeting.

40. **Executive Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning & Transportation - Councillor Mike Rigby**

3.2 of the Scrutiny Terms of Reference state that the Scrutiny Committee may review and scrutinise and ask questions of the Leader, lead Councillors, the Executive in relation to their portfolios. Cllr Rigby had tendered his apologies and in his absence Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts was prepared to substitute for him.

- Cllr Janet Lloyd asked for the outcome of the Stantec report on the health of the town centres, following the expenditure of the Emergency High Street Fund. Cllr Deakin did find a copy of the report online which can be accessed [here](#). Referred to the [Written Answer Tracker](#) for a response.

- Cllr Mansell stated that he would like to see the rural centres such as Bishop Lydeard and Wiveliscombe covered by the Health Check survey too.
- Cllr Mansell welcomed the Active Travel initiatives that were being explored especially the Wellington to Taunton cycle link. He was aware that land availability was likely to be an issue, so this was something for the new council to pursue.
- Cllr Pritchard asked if rising costs and inflation are having an impact on existing workplans and placing projects at risk especially regarding pedestrianisation and more sustainable transport? *There are specific budget allocations set aside for various projects but if SWT decided to deliver on them all, we would be over budget by approximately £1million. More work is being done to establish priorities and need and look at what is affordable and best deliverable but there are very real challenges around rising costs and budget deficits.*
- The Committee was supportive of Active Travel and recognised that more sustainable methods of transport are required, especially in Taunton where 80% of car journeys are under 5 miles. It was also important to work with partners and stakeholders such as the Taunton Area Cycling Campaign (TACC) and maintain good relationships.
- It was recognised that there is a lot to do, and more resource and money is needed.
- Cllr Whetlor asked that the Stantec Town Centre Health Check report was circulated to the relevant parish clerks, and there was better clarity in their reporting methods and emails.

41. **Access to Information - Exclusion of Press and Public**

The committee voted to move into confidential session for part of Item 12 (if necessary) and for the entirety of Item 13.

42. **2022/23 Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 1 (30 June 2022)**

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Fran Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing. In her absence the report was introduced by Cllr Federica Smith Roberts via zoom.

Kerry Prisco as the report author read out a briefing statement on behalf of Cllr Fran Smith as follows: -

“Members will recall that setting a budget for 2022/23 was extremely challenging. The Housing Sector is experiencing the most challenging period in a generation as multiple risks, from both a regulatory and economic perspective, crystallise and competing demands place pressure on the service. However, a balanced budget was presented and approved, albeit with a strategy relying on one-off financial measures.

The projected outturn financial position for the year is an **overspend of £745k** based on estimates made as of 30 June 2022. This is mainly due to a potential pay award pressure exceeding that budgeted, the rising cost to bring void properties back up to a lettable standard due to the condition of properties returned and inflated cost of materials, as well pressures on staffing costs.

There are still further risks and uncertainties well documented within the report, with some that will materialise over the next few months and place further pressure on the reported outturn position e.g., pay award, insurance premiums and depreciation.

Whilst the current level of General Reserves at £3.213m does provide the ability to cover the current predicted overspend, if required, **the projected overspend will reduce to General Reserves £2.468m**, which does not provide sufficient resilience to mitigate the risk of any further significant overspend or additional pressures.

The Housing Management Team will take steps to reduce, and halt spend especially for discretionary activities, to help mitigate the current position, and to try to maintain a more secure reserves position”.

- Cllrs Habgood/Lisgo asked if this was the worst-case scenario and what steps were being taken to protect services going forward? *There are steps being taken to protect core services, whether via cuts, stopping discretionary works or finding alternative methods of delivery. It is likely that central government will implement rent freezes going forward to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis. Work is currently taking place to protect the HRA Business plan but that relates to next year. The report details the current position at the end of Qtr1, and managers are currently looking at their budgets to determine if they have any slack that can be trimmed, or where savings can be identified. Procurement is also being investigated to see if there is better buying power on the supply of materials.*
- The HRA is very much a reflection of the wider world and the current challenges being faced by many residents in the district. Unfortunately, it is going to be a very difficult time for everyone.
- Capital Projects - SWT is currently looking at the projected risks/costs and is working to mitigate against this. Some of the capital projects are protected due to fixed rates combating against inflationary increases, but SWT is working with its contractors to protect our interests.
- The SWT Revenue budget is more volatile and is difficult to mitigate due to inflation, pay increases, rising utility bills and the escalating cost of building materials.
- The housing team currently have extra staff employed, over and above the management structure, but they were put in place during the pandemic to deal with complex casework and are demand led. Current areas of scrutiny to reduce costs are possibly increasing service charges and reducing staff capacity. The housing directorate is mindful however of the

impact this could have on tenants and support services, at a time when all other costs are increasing. It is being carefully monitored.

- It was requested that any potential savings are identified and reported to the Committee for the Qtr2 update at the end of November.

The committee noted the report. (Unanimous)

8.14pm Simon Lewis and Kerry Prisco left the meeting.

43. **Confidential Item - Asset Management Lease**

The Committee moved into confidential session at 8.14pm.

The Committee noted the report at 8:40pm and the meeting was closed.

(The Meeting ended at 8.41 pm)