

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Wednesday, 17 January 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Martin Dimery (Chair)

Cllr Steve Ashton

Cllr Bente Height

Cllr Henry Hobhouse

Cllr Harry Munt

Cllr Rosemary Woods (as sub)

Cllr Alan Bradford

Cllr Edric Hobbs

Cllr Dave Mansell

Cllr Mike Stanton (as sub)

In attendance:

Cllr Dixie Darch

Cllr Richard Wilkins

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Oliver Patrick, Cllr Dawn Johnson, Cllr Peter Clayton, Cllr Ros Wyke, Cllr Sarah Wakefield, Cllr Norman Cavill.

41 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Tom Power (Cllr Woods as sub), Cllr Marcus Kravis (Cllr Stanton as sub) and Cllr Adam Boyden.

42 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

Cllr Stanton declared an interest in item 7 due to his position as Chair of the Somerset Rivers Authority Board.

Cllr Harry Munt also declared an interest in item

7, due to his role as a member of the Somerset Rivers Authority Board.

43 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd November 2023 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments;

- The committee had previously voted for an additional scrutiny meeting to consider Water Quality in Somerset, but this has not yet happened. Cllr Hobhouse proposed a revote to progress this as an urgent matter, seconded by Cllr Ashton, and the committee voted unanimously in favour to progress this as soon as possible.
- Regarding item 39 the Action Tracker – Proposed revision to wording regarding the outcomes of Scrutiny recommendations.
- Regarding item 40 the Committee Forward plan – Revision to wording to reflect that the committee did not note a forward plan, but that they noted an update report on the approach to the development of the forward plan.

44 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

The Chair welcomed Nick Hall to the Scrutiny Committee Climate and Place who introduced himself and thanked members and officers for the written responses to his questions that had been submitted and published in advance of the meeting. He asked members to consider the following as follow-up to the questions and responses obtained prior to the meeting: -

- You have confirmed that Glastonbury festival traffic management does fall within the remit of this committee, does this mean that there will now be coordination with the Scrutiny Committee - Communities who's remit is the licensing and planning aspects of the event?
- You have stated that there is no publicly available debrief report for Glastonbury festival traffic management, is there an intention to create such a report?
- Members of the local community are reassured that they can now contact the council directly with any issues relating Glastonbury Festival.
- Thank you for the update on the Strategic Traffic Management Plan which is a condition of the recent planning approval. Given that the applicant has not yet submitted this plan, does this mean that the festival should continue to operate under the conditions of the previous planning approval?
- I look forward to more responses on the specific issues raised as part of my PQT submission, as advised in the written response from Somerset

Council.

- There needs to be further distinction between Somerset Council's role and regulator and service provider at Glastonbury Festival.

The Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport thanked Mr Hall for his questions and advised that the team are always happy to have conversations about issues such as these. He also advised that, in terms of the question around planning conditions and the Traffic Management Plan, he would seek advice and come back to the member of the public directly.

45 Scrutiny Climate and Place Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

Due to a publishing error, the link to the supplementary agenda item 'Scrutiny Committee Climate and Place Forward Plan Report 2024' was unavailable. Democratic Services advised that the report would be available for consideration and comment at the next meeting.

The committee reviewed the

Action Tracker and there was a brief discussion about the importance of outcomes (i.e a report to the Executive) being reported back to the committee for completeness. A member asked when the overdue S19 reports for 2020-2022 would be coming to this committee, and the Service Director for Economy, Employment and Planning advised that officers would seek advice and an update would be provided as soon as possible.

Jamie Jackson, the Governance Manager, Scrutiny referred to the meeting of 19th July 2023 during which a request was made for a Task and Finish group to influence Somerset Council's strategic approach to climate change. He advised that the policy development on the new strategy/vision is underway, and that an email would be sent to members seeking volunteers for the Task and Finish group after the meeting.

46 Economy, Employment and Planning: Level 2 Devolution Deal Position Statement - Agenda Item 6

The Chair invited Paul Hickson, Service Director for Economy, Employment and Planning to present the position statement following the 2023 Autumn Statement Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announcement on a change in the pace of devolution to accelerate to a level 2 deal, which presents an opportunity for Somerset to start a progressive national devolution journey. The Service Director highlighted that this report does not refer to the recent asset and service devolution conversations with parish and town councils which are ongoing.

He invited comments and questions from members and the following were received and discussed: -

- One member felt positive and supportive of the report and in particular bus franchising in Somerset which could allow more local authority control and competition in this area.
- With reference to climate change and adults' skills markets, retrofitting is a huge opportunity that this devolution deal may create that aligns with this council's climate objectives.
- There was a question on whether Somerset should or could apply with neighbouring authorities, and the Service Director advised that in the specific short term, no, but will certainly be considered as the journey continues into the longer term.

The Chair thanked the officer and members for their comments and questions and concluded that the Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place considered and noted the Position Statement report.

47 Somerset Rivers Authority: Draft Strategy and Flood Action Plan 2024-2034 - Agenda Item 7

The Chair welcomed David Mitchell, Senior Manager, Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) to the meeting. The Senior Manager, SRA explained that the purpose of bringing the item to members of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place is twofold:

1. to review and comment on the early draft of Executive Decision SRA funding decision report that will be considered on 6 March.
2. to consider the draft SRA Strategy and provide feedback on its content.

He then took members through a presentation which explained what the Somerset Rivers Authority is and how it came into being. The slides took members through a summary of the SRA's governance, workstreams (and achievements so far), budgets and the headlines of the new Strategy and Flood Action Plan 2024-2034.

He invited comments and questions from members and the following were received and discussed:

- There was concern about the impacts of new development/building on the flooding of roads in Somerset and the need for a strategy to help communities that are being affected. The Senior Manager

advised that the SRA is involved, with its partners, in monitoring and investigations, and can assist in terms of support with grant funding to help deliver solutions for all of these sorts of issues.

- There were many comments made around the devastating impact of flash flooding, and some members expressed concerns that these events are becoming more regular, and in some areas not improving despite flood prevention and mitigation activities.
- One member expressed his support and gratitude for the very good work of the Somerset Rivers Authority.
- Members felt that drain and gully clearing is an important aspect of flood prevention that continues to be an issue all over the county.
- Regarding council tax increases, one member felt that taxpayers do not want to pay more of their council tax to the SRA. The Senior Manager reassured the committee that there was no proposal to increase the 1.25% precept.
- Regarding the many projects that are shown on the map, would they be considered successful? Would these projects have been done without the support of the SRA, and finally if Somerset Council did not continue to fund the SRA, would all of this work have to stop? In his response the Senior Manager gave the view that the projects have been highly successful, and advised that without a significant amount of its funding coming from Somerset Council the SRA would certainly have to certainly have to adapt and change the way in which it operates.
- One members asked if, when SRA officer go out to divisions, they make contact with division members to allow members to understand what is happening. The Service Manager agreed with this request, understanding the reasoning behind it.
- Regarding the flash flooding in West & Queen Camel which occurs annually despite flood defences, can the SRA support communities like this and share learning from this with other communities across Somerset facing the same issues? The Service Manager assured the councillor that SRA Community Engagement officers undertake activities such as these in their daily role.
- One member felt that more information was needed around the baselining, modelling, justification and quantifiable benefits of the Council spending this money. The Senior Manager acknowledged the point, assuring members that throughout the process, grant proposals are appropriately assessed for their benefits and impacts. He agreed that the SRA could improve its communications around this.

The Senior Manager concluded that from the discussions at the meeting it has become clear that there is a need for more information on how the SRA is funded.

He advised that he would provide a briefing note after the meeting, thanking the committee for the discussion, questions and valuable feedback.

The Chair thanked the Senior Manager for the reports and concluded that the Scrutiny Committee – Climate and Place had considered and noted: -

- 1) The draft of Executive Decision SRA funding decision.
- 2) The SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan 2024-2034.

48 Waste Services: Flex Collect Update - Agenda Item 8

The Chair welcomed Mike Cowdell, Head of Waste, to the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place to present an update report on the flexible plastics trial, Flex Collect, that was delivered to 3600 properties around Frome during May 2023.

The trial included communications, engagement with residents and provided participants with a blue, transparent bags to present flexible plastics alongside the existing recycling service.

The trial yielded impressive results and The Council has in-principal agreement to extend the trial to 20,000 properties in the East of the County from spring/summer 2024.

Members sought clarity on the types of materials included in the trial, and there was a request for further information regarding the ways in which those materials are processed and repurposed by the end user. The Head of Waste advised that he would obtain the requested information and bring it back to the committee at their next meeting.

The Scrutiny committee – Climate and Place considered and noted the Flex Collect Update.

(The meeting ended at 12.35 pm)

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CHAIR