

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE



Tuesday 28 February 2023

**10.00 am Luttrell Room - County Hall,
Taunton**

To: The members of the Scrutiny for Policies, Environment Committee

Cllr S Ashton, Cllr A Boyden (Vice-Chair), Cllr A Bradford, Cllr B Clarke, Cllr M Dimery (Chair), Cllr H Hobhouse, Cllr M Kravis, Cllr M Martin, Cllr H Munt, Cllr K Pearce, Cllr T Power, Cllr J Roundell Greene and Cllr A Wiltshire

All Somerset County Council Members are invited to attend.

Issued By Scott Wooldridge, Strategic Manager - Governance and Democratic Services - 22 February 2023

For further information about the meeting, please contact Jamie Jackson
JAJackson@somerset.gov.uk or Democratic Services on
democraticservicesteam@somerset.gov.uk

Guidance about procedures at the meeting follows the printed agenda and is available at
(LINK)

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Are you considering how your conversation today and the actions you propose to take contribute towards making Somerset Carbon Neutral by 2030?



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AGENDA

Item Scrutiny for Policies, Environment Committee - 10.00 am Tuesday 28 February 2023

****Public Guidance notes contained within agenda annexe****

1 **Apologies for absence**

To receive members' apologies

2 **Declarations of Interest**

Details of all Members' interests in District, Town and Parish Councils can be viewed on the Council Website at

[County Councillors membership of Town, City, Parish or District Councils](#) and this will be displayed in the meeting room (Where relevant).

The Statutory Register of Member's Interests can be inspected via request to the Democratic Service Team.

3 **Minutes of the previous meetings** (Pages 9 - 30)

To approve the minutes of the previous meetings held on

- 26th October 2022
- 30th November 2022
- 14th December 2022

4 **Public Question Time**

The Chair will allow members of the public to ask a question or make a statement about any matter on the agenda for this meeting. These questions may be taken during the meeting, when the relevant agenda item is considered, at the Chair's discretion.

5 **Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee work programme** (Pages 31 - 34)

To receive any updates from the Service Manager, Scrutiny and discuss any items for the work programme.

To assist the discussion, members are asked to review the:

- The Committee's Forward Work Programme (attached)

- Item Scrutiny for Policies, Environment Committee - 10.00 am Tuesday 28 February 2023
- The Scrutiny for Policies and Place committee's Forward Work Programme (attached)
 - The Executive committee's Forward Plan of key decisions can be viewed [here](#)
- 6 **Flexible Plastics Pilot Update** (Pages 35 - 40)
- To consider and note the update.
- 7 **Somerset Energy Plan** (Pages 41 - 44)
- To consider the report.
- 8 **Somerset Rivers Authority Key Decision regarding SRA Funding and SCC Hosting role update** (Pages 45 - 58)
- To consider the report.
- 9 **Climate Emergency Governance for Somerset Council** (Pages 59 - 66)
- To consider the report.
- 10 **Any other business**
- The Chair to raise any other urgent items of business

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Guidance notes for the meeting

1. **Council Public Meetings**

The former regulations that enabled virtual committee meetings ended on 7 May 2021. Since then, all committee meetings need to return to face-to-face meetings. The requirement is for members of the committee and key supporting officers to attend in person, along with some provision for any public speakers. Provision will be made wherever possible for those who do not need to attend in person including the public and press who wish to view the meeting to be able to do so virtually.

2. **Inspection of Papers**

Any person wishing to inspect minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Democratic Services at democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk or telephone 01823 357628.

They can also be accessed via the council's website on www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers.

Printed agendas can also be viewed in reception at the Council offices at County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY.

3. **Members' Code of Conduct requirements**

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership. The Code of Conduct can be viewed at: [Code of Conduct](#)

4. **Minutes of the Meeting**

Details of the issues discussed, and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting.

5. **Public Question Time**

If you wish to speak, please contact Democratic Services by 5pm 3 clear working days before the meeting. Email democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk or telephone 01823 357628.

Members of public wishing to speak or ask a question will need to attend in person or if unable can submit their question or statement in writing for an officer to read out.

After entering the Council building you may be taken to a waiting room before being taken to the meeting for the relevant agenda item to ask your question. After the agenda item has finished you will be asked to leave the meeting for other members of the public to attend to speak on other items.

A slot for Public Question Time is set aside near the beginning of the meeting, after the minutes of the previous meeting have been agreed. However, questions or statements about any matter on the agenda for this meeting may be taken at the time when each matter is considered.

At the Chair's invitation you may ask questions and/or make statements or comments about any matter on the Committee's agenda – providing you have given the required notice. You may also present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit. The length of public question time will be no more than 30 minutes in total (20 minutes for meetings other than County Council meetings).

You must direct your questions and comments through the Chair. You may not take a direct part in the debate. The Chair will decide when public participation is to finish.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with many people wishing to attend the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

An issue will not be deferred just because you cannot be present for the meeting. Remember that the amount of time you speak will be restricted, to three minutes only.

In line with the council's procedural rules, if any member of the public interrupts a meeting the Chair will warn them accordingly.

If that person continues to interrupt or disrupt proceedings the Chair can ask the Democratic Services Officer to remove them as a participant from the meeting.

Provision will be made for anybody who wishes to listen in on the meeting only to follow the meeting online.

6. **Meeting Etiquette for participants**

- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- Switch off video if you are not speaking.
- Speak clearly (if you are not using video then please state your name)

- If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.
- Switch off your video and microphone after you have spoken.
- There is a facility in Microsoft Teams under the ellipsis button called turn on live captions which provides subtitles on the screen.

7. **Exclusion of Press & Public**

If when considering an item on the agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act.

If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Democratic Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, ask Participants to leave the meeting when any exempt or confidential information is about to be discussed.

8. **Recording of meetings**

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Please contact the Committee Administrator or Democratic Services on 01823 357628 or email democraticservicesteam@somerset.gov.uk if you have any questions or concerns.

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Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny, Policies Environment committee held on 26th October 2022 at 10am, in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY

Committee members present: Cllr Martin Dimery (Chair) Cllr Jo Roundell Greene, Cllr Henry Hobhouse, Cllr Tom Power, Cllr Harry Munt, Cllr Marcus Kravis, Cllr Barry Clarke, Cllr Steve Ashton.

Officers present: Laura Jensen Economic Development Officer, Mickey Green Managing Director Somerset Waste Partnership, Jamie Jackson Governance Manager Scrutiny, Paul Hickson Service Manager Economic Development, Stephanie Gold Senior Democratic Services Officer, Lee Willment Democratic Services Officer.

Agenda item 1: Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kathy Pearce, Cllr Adam Boyden, Cllr Alex Wiltshire, Cllr Matthew Martin and Cllr Alan Bradford.

Agenda item 2: Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by any member of the committee.

Agenda Item 3: Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28th September 2022 were approved as a correct record.

Agenda item 4: Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present.

Agenda item 5: Scrutiny, Environment committee work programme:

Jamie Jackson, Governance Manager, Scrutiny asked members to consider and comment on the Scrutiny, Environment work programme as published. One non-committee member online asked about planning policy, and specifically whether this committee would oversee the planning policy workstreams of Local Government Reorganisation. The Governance Manager, Scrutiny advised that he would take this question and come back with an answer as soon as he was able.

Agenda item 6: Climate Change and the Economy

Laura Jensen, Economic Development officer provided members with a slideshow to illustrate the key points from the report including

- There are strong overlapping themes in energy, transport, and waste
- Industry/commercial sector is responsible for 25% of the overall emissions in Somerset.
- The BISC workstream activities taking place including business engagement and financial support.
- Many SME's lack knowledge and resource to achieve net zero without support. In consultation, 41% business unsure of their role in transition to net zero.
- The team are measuring the impacts of this work by undertaking surveys and research, networking, and evaluation of direct interventions.

As per paragraph 2 - Issues for consideration.

2.1 The Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the work undertaken to date and consider the approach proposed for future activities in delivering the Business workstream with specific reference to:

- The proposed Somerset Green Business Support Programme
- Information that would be useful for Members to support their engagement with SMEs regarding net zero goals.
- Knowledge Transfer Partnership between larger business and SMEs, as part of a wider social value remit, with reference to large council contracts
- Views on measuring the impact of these carbon reduction initiatives and more generally Somerset business journey to net zero.

2.2. That the Scrutiny Committee notes that the Council is undertaking activities relating to the Climate Emergency Strategy: Business, Industry and Supply Chain Workstream and its relevance to future economic policy decision-making.

The following comments and questions were received from members

- One member felt strongly that this report does not contain enough practical examples to help businesses reduce their energy usage. The Economic Development officer agreed that research has shown that businesses do need practical advice on carbon reduction and advised that this would be incorporated into this future green business support work.
- Businesses, particularly SME's that may be struggling in current economic climates require more practical advice. i.e., insulation and energy usage. How do we engage with them? As above, and the officer added that a direct business support advisor would be commissioned to support this.
- Can we have more detail on the effectiveness of the Somerset Growth Accelerator Fund. The Economic Development officer explained that this had been a very popular initiative and advised that whilst projects have been

approved the funding has not yet been secured. She offered to produce a more detailed report and the committee welcomed this.

- Non committee member online: Do we have any Case Studies to promote best practice to businesses?
- Non committee member online: We need to be clear in indicating the pathways to net zero for businesses. He recommended the Science Based Targets Initiative as a useful paper on this. The officer thanked the councillor for the recommendation and reassured all members that whilst the detail may not be contained within this report, the council has been working with businesses on knowledge sharing, i.e the recent Climate Summit held at Queens College, Taunton on 21st September 2022.
- How can we ensure more businesses attend the workshops being held across the county? The Economic Development officer agreed that the team were doing all they could to promote the workshops.
- Non committee member online: Particularly with the move to a unitary authority, how can we use existing networks to improve engagement with businesses across the county? The Officer advised that the team work closely with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce, The Federation of Small Businesses amongst others, but thanked the councillor for her very useful comments and asked if they could discuss other networking ideas outside of the meeting.
- Are we reaching out to micro business, that may be out of reach of the above networks? These types of businesses make up a very integral part of the economy in Somerset.
- Is the work of the district councils being integrated into this piece of work? The Economic Development Service Manager reassured the committee that all five Somerset councils were working collaboratively and aligning their workstreams on this as part of the Local Government Reorganisation programme.
- Non committee member online: What is being done in terms of driving retrofitting schemes on older business premises? Many businesses do not own their own premises, how can we engage with landlords with regards to practical energy efficiency advice? The Economic Development officer pointed members to the SWMAS programme which is facilitating the above support for owners, landlords and leaseholders of older buildings.

The Chair thanked all members and officers for the interesting points raised and praised the way the Scrutiny Environment committee is supporting this Councils climate change work so constructively.

Agenda item 7: EV strategy and roll-out impacts and implications.

Mickey Green, Managing Director at Somerset Waste Partnership provided members with a slideshow to highlight key points from the update report including:

- The context of the climate emergency
- The national picture of EV infrastructure
- This work is part of the Council's wider Local Transport Plan
- Research has shown that 'Capacity to charge' has replaced 'range anxiety' as the biggest barrier for EV users.
- In benchmarking exercises Somerset is slightly behind compared to other counties in terms of EV infrastructure, this is likely due to Somerset being a rural area.
- There is a need to continue to work with private sector to identify market failings and fill in gaps in EV infrastructure, to reach all areas of the county including its most isolated rural communities.
- There are many complexities around EV infrastructure including use of cabling and gullies, streetlighting, parking.
- Big challenges for the future include Planning policy, The MTFP budget gap, impacts of LGR, rapidly evolving technology, governance, and the need to provide solutions at a more localised level.

As per paragraph 2 Issues for Consideration/Recommendations.

2.1 The report is for information only following recommendations are to note only. Scrutiny comments are welcomed on the direction of travel, and further updates are intended to be brought to scrutiny at key milestones.

The following comments and questions were received from members:

- Battery technology is evolving rapidly, how can we ensure we keep up with the rate of change here? The Managing Director SWP agreed that battery technology is indeed changing quickly and that some aspects of this work will need evolve with it, where this aligns with the needs identified in this Councils' EV programme.
- The importance of working with private sector electricity providers on this.
- There will need to be different solutions for different types of EV user.
- What impact is the current energy crisis having on this strategy. i.e., huge increases in electricity costs?
- Why are cable protectors an issue for EV infrastructure? The Managing Director SWP advised that current Government guidance makes it very clear that cable protectors are not an acceptable on-street solution. Gullies are a preferred method of installing on-street EV infrastructure.
- How are the district councils' EV infrastructure projects being incorporated into this strategy? The committee were advised that whilst this report looks at County Council fleet only at this stage, it would be aligned with all five councils' activities as LGR takes effect.

- What are we doing about the increased fire risk of electric vehicles? The Managing Director SWP agreed that this was an emerging issue and advised that this was being taken in consideration as part of this work.
- What is the plan for disposal of used batteries? As above, this would be taken in consideration as the programme evolves.
- How can we lobby government regarding financial support for councils and greater legislative powers regarding EV infrastructure in place planning? The Managing Director pointed members to the action plan within the report which talks about lobbying and conversations with DNO's (Distribution Network Operators)
- How can we manage demand on EV chargers at tourism hot spots across the county.
- Members discussed accessibility to the right charging solution for different levels of EV user, the compatibility of EV charging networks and how this impacts the roll out of the programme going forward.
- Rapid chargers will be needed for the biggest road users i.e. taxis.
- How does this work fit in with parking strategy in Somerset? The Managing Director advised that the Councils Parking Strategy was somewhat out of date and due to be reviewed, and that EV infrastructure would be addressed as part of this and the wider Transport Plan for Somerset.
- Will Somerset County Council be offering its employees a salary sacrifice scheme or similar, to purchase EV vehicles? The Managing Director SWP advised that a salary sacrifice scheme was being worked up within HR and that details would follow in the next report.

The Chair thanked all for their comments, questions, and positive discussion on the update report.

Agenda item 8: Approach to Fleet decarbonisation

Mickey Green, Managing Director at Somerset Waste Partnership presented members with a brief set of slides to highlight the key points from the report.

These key points included:

- This work is focused on SCC fleet only, of which there are currently 243 vehicles.
- Somerset Council fleet will be more than 700 vehicles.
- This work will lead to a full fleet replacement timetable.
- Carbon footprint of SCC fleet is coming down from previous years.
- Potential to reduce fleet size by making other arrangements for low-mileage users. i.e., pool cars

As per paragraph 2 - Issues for Consideration/Recommendations

2.1. To note:

- Progress to date, including the phased approach being taken to decarbonise the Council's fleet whilst acknowledging the financial and other resource constraints.
- The intention to make recommendations to the Council during 2022/23 on the approach to future vehicle replacement programmes, in particular how we can minimise/prevent any further internal combustion engine vehicles under 3.5 tonnes being bought. This work has identified that some vehicles are not being as fully utilised as we would expect, and there will be both environmental and financial benefits from tackling that.
- Further work is planned in the future, in particular around hire/pool car, grey fleet, and larger/specialist vehicles.

The following comments and questions were received from members.

- Have we looked at carbon footprint of taxis used for school contracts?
- Concerns that the pace of SCC fleet decarbonisation is being driven by financial pressures, and not environmental.
- What research has been done into use of HVO's? (Biofuel vehicles)

Agenda item 9: Scrutiny at Somerset Council

Jamie Jackson, Service Manager for Governance, Scrutiny introduced the report which was essentially a request for three members of the Scrutiny, Policies Environment committee to volunteer to sit on a task and finish group looking at how the Scrutiny Function will operate in the new Somerset Council. He advised that the group would be required to meet once or twice before making recommendations to the Constitution and Governance committee at the end of January '23.

Three committee members expressed an interest in assisting with this work, and the Service Manager Scrutiny and Governance thanked those members and informed them that he would contact them again outside of the meeting.

Agenda item 10: Any other business

There were no other items of business raised by the Chair.

Minutes of a meeting of Scrutiny, Environment meeting held on 30th November 2022 at 10am in the Luttrell Room, County Hall. Taunton TA1 4DY.

Committee members present: Cllr Martin Dimery (Chair) Cllr Adam Boyden (vice-chair) Cllr Jo Roundell-Greene, Cllr Steve Ashton, Cllr Tom Power, Cllr Marcus Kravis, Cllr Alan Bradford, Cllr Henry Hobhouse, Cllr Harry Munt, Cllr Leigh Redman (as sub)

Non-committee members present: Cllr Rosemary Woods, Cllr Ros Wyke (virtual), Cllr Sue Osborne, Cllr Sarah Dyke (virtual) Cllr Tessa Munt (virtual) Cllr Ros Henley (virtual) Cllr Andy Dingwall (virtual) Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey (virtual), Cllr Helen Kay (virtual) Cllr Richard Wilkins

Agenda item 1: Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kathy Pearce (substituted by Cllr Leigh Redman) and Cllr Barry Clarke (virtual attendee)

Agenda item 2: Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were received from members

Agenda item 3: Minutes from the previous meeting

The approval of the minutes of 24th October 2022 were deferred to the next meeting.

Agenda item 4: Public Question Time

There were no public questions received.

Agenda item 5: Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee work programme.

The Governance Manager, Scrutiny advised members of the committee that the 22/23 Month 6 Budget Monitoring report has been brought to this committee as a one-off (usually taken to Scrutiny for Policies, Place committee only) at the request of the Executive.

The Governance Manager, Scrutiny also advised that at 12.30pm on the date of the next meeting on the 14th December, there would be a tour of B Block to showcase the decarbonisation of SCC estate for members of the Scrutiny, Environment committee. An email and appointment confirming this would follow after this meeting.

The following comments and questions were received from members of the committee-

- Considering this council's declaration of a climate emergency, this committee should be looking to acknowledge the gains that this Council is making by way of a tracker of similar, allowing opportunity for challenge along the way. The Director for Economic and Community Infrastructure (and Senior leadership lead officer for this committee) advised that officers are currently building a climate emergency tracker and that a report on this would be added to the January agenda.
- One member advised that the meeting of the 14th of December 2022 would clash with a Sedgemoor District Council meeting, and therefore he would be unable to attend.
- There is a need to look at streetlighting and the use of LED's as standard in Somerset. The Director ECI advised that the ECI operations team are looking at streetlighting currently, including issues regarding the vulnerable (i.e. those in rural areas who may be at risk of crime due to lack of streetlighting) and that a report would be brought to members as soon as possible,

Agenda item 6: 2022/23 Budget Monitoring Report – Month 6

Cllr Liz Leyshon, Lead Member for Finance advised that she had asked for this budget update to come to this committee to help members understand the unprecedented financial pressures the council is facing, that have never been seen before.

The Lead Accountant then walked members through the figures as shown in the published report and the following comments and questions were received:

- Will this affect the likelihood of being able to follow through with environmental policies? Cllr Liz Leyshon, Lead member Finance advised that there are many projects being carried out across the council and that the environmental thread must be considered on each of those. This committee has the responsibility to continue to pressurise the executive to continue to consider all environmental aspects of every project that the council undertakes.
- The 40% increase of costs in farming is quite shocking.
- Cllr Liz Leyshon, Lead member Finance suggested that members look at the external auditor's audit findings report for 21/22, which provides more detail on environmental impacts of the budget gap.
- Regarding the opening of Comeytrow School as this Council's first PassivHaus designed school, is this Council going to be doing more of this in the future? Cllr Tessa Munt advised that the council will be building schools that are equivalent to PassivHaus standards in the future.

Members noted the recommendations as set out in the report.

2. Recommendations

- a) Note the forecast overspend of £21.2m (section 12) and the key risks, future issues and opportunities detailed in the report which will be closely monitored and updated throughout the year.

- b) Note the forecast position of the capital programme and potential underspend at the end of the current programme.
- c) Approve the removal of £1.1m of borrowing approval from the capital programme for Adult Social Care, noting this funding is now surplus to requirements.
- d) Note the additional external funding that has been added to the capital programme in this quarter.

Agenda item 7: Phosphates issues: Overview and actions agreed from the phosphates summit

The Service Manager for Development and Planning provided members with a presentation to accompany the written report as published, regarding the Phosphates Summit held on the 1st November 2022.

- There are currently 18,000 residential units on hold due to phosphates issue. Nationally this figure is around 100,000 residential units. It is important that County and District councils work together to tackle this.
- Members to approve the establishment of an officer/member working group to address these issues going forward.
- The key messages from the report are-
 - "From December 2022 will approach landowners in a targeted way to invite them to offer their land as potential sites for nutrient mitigation."
 - "We will formally launch the scheme by inviting applications for credits from developers before the end of March 2023."
 - DLUHC will update the Planning Practice Guidance on the application of the Habitats Regulation Assessment in this regard and consider additional revisions as necessary
 - Natural England will launch the scheme by inviting applications from developers for mitigation certificates or credits from March 2023.
 - Developers will submit the certificate to LPAs as part of the planning process providing assurance to LPAs that they can satisfy nutrient neutrality planning conditions.
 - Credits are to be distributed, and the scheme will not allow banking of credits by developers

The following comments and questions were received from members-

- This report does not mention lowering phosphates at Ramsar sites. Following does not fix the problem. We need to install waterways around Ramsar sights to solve the problems. Hysteresis (mud at the bottom of rivers that is full of phosphates) isn't going to go away with the measures outlined in this report.
- Wessex water (sewage works and processing plants) add phosphates to water systems. This is not mentioned in this report.

- Cllr Ros Wyke advised that this is a wide spectrum issue, which is why this member/officer working group will be so important. The government has announced some measures, but there is a need for more localised solutions that work as 'one voice' in Somerset to tackle the issue.
- There is a conflict between financial and environmental pressures here, and this needs to be considered very quickly, adding that this is a very serious situation for Somerset. The Director ECI advised that the working group would include officers from both Economic and Environmental service areas.
- SAGIS is not an eco-system, it's an ICT system. There is a paper that reports that 90% of phosphates is from human sources, farming and agriculture is only 10%.
- Regarding holding Wessex Water to account, Cllr Tessa Munt advised that the working group would be taking this forward with Wessex Water as 'one voice' for Somerset.
- We are stuck between a rock and hard place and it's a very difficult subject. This has slowed down housing and this is causing major social issues such as homelessness and overpopulation of less affected areas like Frome. Cllr Ros Wyke agreed that this is such a complex issue and agreed with the Director ECI regarding the timing of communications between the member/office working group, Wessex water, and this Scrutiny committee. She would be happy to come back and update this committee when the timing is right.
- There is a House of Commons sub-committee questioning water companies to understand how much sewage is coming out of septic plants. The councillor questioned the validity of the responses from Wessex Water to the House of Commons on this.
- Membership of the working group – how will this work? The Director ECI is working on a list of members and officers with suitable knowledge and experience to progress this work.

Members noted the recommendations/considerations as published in the report

2 Considerations/recommendations

- 2.1** On 1 November 2022 Members and Officer undertook a phosphate workshop on the issue. The purpose of the workshop was to develop a shared understanding of the problem, review progress to date and then to consider next steps and priorities.
- 2.2** It was agreed to set up a Member/Officer working group involving members and officers – and this is the recommendation of this paper.

Agenda item 8: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Quantock Hills

Iain Porter, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Manager Quantock Hills gave members a overview of the published report with a series of slides.

There are 46 AONB's in the UK and all are very different.

Quantock Hills AONB key points-

- Heathlands area is the largest in the Southwest region.
- Woodlands make up 29% of the total AONB
- Farmlands make up just over 50% of the AONB
- There is a small part of the Jurassic coastline within the AONB which is rich in fossils

AONB Partnership key points -

- Designated in 1956
- Has a committee of 18 members
- Currently going through governance review regarding impacts of LGR

AONB Service team key points -

- Experts funded from DEFRA
- Projects and programmes teams
- Huge wealth of volunteers with a contribution of over 3500 hours of time.

AONB Priorities key points-

- Nature recovery – LIS, GQLDF and Levels up
- Climate change – tree planting, tree health, agricultural resilience, natural flood management
- Agricultural transition plan - Input management, technology innovation, log grazing, farming engagement programmes, farming grants, countryside stewardship.
- Using the natural environment to boost health and wellbeing

AONB People key points -

- Training and funding for young people and long term unemployed
- Land management kills scheme funded by Quantock Hills AONB.
- Volunteers

AONBS The future - Government Landscapes review 2019.

- Revised purposes and duties (under levelling up bill)
- Revised governance
- Change of name to National Landscapes.

The following Comments and questions were received from members -

- The apprenticeship scheme is very impressive.

- Cllr Dixie Darch, Associate Lead Member for Environment commented that this is a great example of an integrated approach between the environment, skills and training, arts and culture, leisure and tourism etc...
- There are unseen benefits in that landscapes are protected from unwanted development. What are the prospects of getting this AONB expanded? The AONB Manager advised that these boundary reviews take 20 years to do historically, but there is a hope that this will be progressed more quickly as part of the Government Landscapes Review 2019.
- How can landscape management contribute to lowering carbon emissions in this county? What is the best land management approach for this area?
- One member paid tribute to Cllr Anthony Trollope who knew every inch of the Quantock Hills and felt that these areas are so important and must be protected.
- Cllr Sarah Dyke, Executive Leader member commended the presentation and added that she is very excited about the work that is going on at The Quantock Hills and all AONB's in Somerset.
- Does this council fund the AONB's? The AONB Manager confirmed that for the Quantocks the Council contribution is £44k per annum, adding that a large chunk of funding comes from DEFRA.
- Is there a push for any boundary changes on the Quantocks? The AONB advised that consideration is given to neighbouring communities looking to be included in an AONB boundary.

Members agreed to the recommendations as at paragraph 2 of the report -

2.1 Members are asked to consider and note the update.

[BREAK 12 - 12.10]

Agenda item 9: Local Nature Recovery Strategy update

Introduction and presentation from Jon Doyle Strategic Manager Community Infrastructure, Climate and Flood Management gave a presentation on the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Key points from this presentation included -

- The LNRS is a Statutory requirement of the Environment Act 2021.
- The LNRS Establishes priorities for specific actions for nature recovery.
- DEFRA will assign a responsible authority and Somerset County Council have been asked to be the responsible authority to develop this strategy in Somerset.
- The LNRS is a powerful tool to help public and private sectors to work collaboratively together to drive nature recovery.
- We are still awaiting guidance from DEFRA and Natural England to progress the strategy further.
- Outline approach and progress to date (copy text from slide)

- Clarity needs to be sought on primacy and timings of planning legislation and we await guidance on this.

The following comments and questions were received from members -

- Regarding planning policy, does the LRNS have any legal weight in this currently? The Strategic Manager Community Infrastructure, Climate and Flood Management advised that the Council is awaiting further planning policy guidance, but that currently the guidance states that developers should 'give regard' to LNRS's.
- Is this short list of priority projects dependant on funding, or just the guidance? Can some projects get started without the guidance, or is it all on hold pending the guidance? The Strategic Manager Community Infrastructure Climate and Flood Mgmt. advised that this is very much a wait and see at this time.
- The Director for Economic, Communities and Infrastructure advised that a lot of this work is about knitting together many of the existing networks to make the best nature recovery strategy for somerset. SEED funding is very limited though, so we need to be realistic about what we can do.
- Regarding a suggestion for a member Task and Finish project on this, The Director ECI felt that there is a need to establish the parameters of what the council's role will be in this piece of work before it can be opened up in a member task and finish setting.

Members agreed to the recommendations as at paragraph 2 of the report

2.1 Members are asked to consider and note the update.

Agenda item 10: Draft S19 investigation reports for Chard and Ilminster

Jon Doyle, Strategic Manager Community Infrastructure, Climate and Flood Manager began by explaining that a former Service Manager in Flood Management presented the initial findings on these investigations to Scrutiny for Policies, Place committee last year. He advised that these reports are concerning two extreme weather events, 29th June 2021 Chard and 20th October Ilminster. There was a second incident in Chard, and this will come to the committee in due course.

Headlines for 28th June 2021 Chard incident report -

- Exceptional rainfall (1 in 300-year event) and massive overland flows from the fields
- Local drainage systems overwhelmed.
- Substantial debris due to damaged roads and powerful flows
- Downstream properties and business were flooded resulting in major disruption
- Main cause was exceptional amount of rain and overland flows from the fields
- Local topography of road layouts including steep roads on the north and west of the town

- The committee were shown maps and photographs of the worst affected areas.
- Not just Chard itself, many surrounding areas affected: Combe St Nicholas, Nimmer and Wadford, Forton, Tatworth, Wambrook, Lower Coombes, Chaffcombe, Scrapton Lane, Whitesaunton.
- A number of consultations and site visits to gain intelligence and evidence to inform the investigation. Including Multi-agency emergency meetings, site visits, public meetings to gain further intelligence.
- Iterations of the Draft report have undertaken reviews coordinated by the Chard Area Resilience Group, the South Somerset Area West Committee, Wessex Water and The Environment Agency

The following comments and questions were received from members –

- North Petherton had the same problem. When that amount of rain comes down there is very little we can do about it.
- West Camel and Queen Camel had the same and they have installed mitigation measures i.e., anti-flood devices for each house.
- We must accept that nature is stronger than anything we can do to mitigate it. Flood water will find a way and with climate change this is going to become more common.
- Communications with communities needs to be better and although we can't stop the flooding, we can make sure communities are better prepared.
- Wincanton also experiencing flooding. Highways have investigated and clarified that it's because drains can't cope with the rainfall. As councillors can we do something about this?

Headlines for 20th Ilminster 2021 incident report -

- Severe flooding took place in Ilminster and Sea on the 20th of October 2021. High rainfall on the back of previous wet weather created high river flows and overland surface water flows in the area
- The overarching problem was a combination of the very high rainfall and the already wet ground conditions following recent rain in the preceding period, making October a very wet month overall.
- This is combined with a relatively impermeable underlying geology and soils, which would have had very little moisture deficit to absorb more rain. Hence the Isle experienced its highest water level in 30 years gauge history. The resultant flooding was well beyond what any residents of the area had seen in their lifetimes and flows on the river Isle were the highest recorded.
- This created two issues – the Isle coming out of its bank and flooding areas to the west of town, and rainwater accumulating in North Street, Ditton Street and Shudrick Lane.
- Consultations on iterations of this draft report have taken place with Chard Area Resilience Group, South Somerset Area West committee, Wessex Water and The Environment Agency. Public meetings/drop-in sessions to gain knowledge and intelligence on those effected have been held.

- Integrated Catchment Study completed, multi-agency meeting held, Community drop-in event, multi-agency debrief event, Working Group weekly meetings led by EA with LLFA attendance.
- Continuing to work with EA to develop catchment (fluvial and surface water) view.

The following comments and questions were received by members –

- Cllr Sue Osborne, county councillor for the Ilminster division thanked the officers of this council for all of the work they are doing on this, and also thanked Ilminster Town Council for all of the work that they are doing on finding mitigating solutions for the residents of Ilminster and surrounding areas who feel at risk of future flooding.
- Regarding agriculture and the use of direct drilling as opposed to traditional ploughing to aerate the land and allow it to drain effectively. Is this having an impact on run off from farmland?
- Regarding run off from built environment, should we be putting more pressure on developers to manage SUDS.
- We need to focus on installing appropriate drainage solutions to manage during periods of heavy rain. i.e., Hong Kong have drainage designed for tropical rainstorms.
- Under a government funded scheme, homeowners in West Camel are putting their own barriers in place to protect their properties. Can this funding be used in the areas identified in these reports?
- There's always an engineering solution to these things, but the problem is cost.
- This creates serious problems for people looking to buy homes in these areas. Mortgage applications may be declined as a result of the difficulty in finding insurance for these high-risk properties.

Members noted the recommendation as set out in the report at paragraph 2

2.1 Members are asked to consider and note the contents of the draft reports and provide feedback on any factual inaccuracies and upon any of the recommendations contained therein prior to their finalisation and publication, as required by the Flood and Water Management Act (2010).

Agenda item 11: Any other items of business

There were no other items of business raised by the Chair.

[MEETING CLOSED 1.51pm]

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Minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee held on 14th December 2022 at 2pm in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY.

Committee members present: Cllr Martin Dimery (Chair) Cllr Adam Boyden (vice-chair) Cllr Jo Roundell-Greene, Cllr Steve Ashton, Cllr Tom Power, Cllr Marcus Kravis, Cllr Henry Hobhouse, Cllr Martin Lovell (as sub), Cllr Barry Clarke, Cllr Alex Wiltshire, Cllr Kathy Pearce, Cllr Matt Martin.

Agenda item 1: Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Harry Munt (Cllr Martin Lovell as sub) and Cllr Alan Bradford.

Agenda item 2: Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest received from members.

Agenda item 3: Minutes from the previous meeting

Members were advised that due to staff sickness the approval of the minutes of 24th October 2022 and 30th November 2022 will be deferred to the next meeting.

Agenda item 4: Public Question Time

There were no public questions received.

Agenda item 5: Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee work programme.

The Governance Manager, Scrutiny asked members to consider the Scrutiny Environment work programme as published, along with the Executive forward plan of decisions, and invited comments and questions from all present.

There were no further questions or comments from members.

Agenda item 6: Interreg 2 Seas- End of Project Progress Report

Cllr Sarah Dyke Lead Member Environment introduced Steve Dury, Senior Commissioning Officer in Environmental Services and added that this work is a real 'good news story' for Somerset.

Steve Dury gave members a presentation entitled Interreg 2 seas: Climate Change Adaptation in Somerset which highlighted the following key issues -

- Changing weather patterns - more extreme weather and high-risk flooding
- Nature Based Solutions use natural methods to mitigate flooding, as opposed to more man-made methods i.e., concrete.
- Nature based solutions can be applied to many different aspects of flood water management i.e. soil and land management, leaky dams, river restoration.
- Headlines, key findings and achievements of the Interreg 2 Seas Triple C project.
- Headlines, key findings and achievements of the Interreg 2 Seas Co-Adapt project.

The following comments and question were received from members-

- Members commended the very impressive work being undertaken.
- How can we be assured that there will be sufficient funding opportunities available to enable this work to continue. The Officer assured the committee that all funding avenues would be explored.
- Regarding lack of participation from landowners – is this going to continue to improve if the funding is no longer available? The Officer advised that organisations like FWAG Southwest are doing great work, and this will lay the foundations for much better relationships with Landowners in the future. They have a good track record of bidding and being awarded funding to date.
- Regarding phosphates – To what extent do Wessex Water provide funding for projects like this? He was advised that Wessex Water do contribute in a number of ways including schemes like Phosphate credits.
- Regarding the most recent summer droughts – do this work mitigate this at all. The Officer advised that some measures can be taken which manage excess water in winter and release it during periods of drought.
- The Environment Agency do not appear to feature a lot in this work, why is this? The Officer advised that The Environment Agency had been consulted from the beginning, but only recently have become much more involved with the projects.
- Monitoring and measuring what is resulting from these projects – to what extent can nature-based solutions completely resolve the problems identified within this report. The officer advised that there needs to be a balance of nature-based solutions as well as hard engineering to achieve the desired outcomes.

The Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee members noted the progress report.

Agenda item 7: Peat- Update on work with DEFRA on the future of Peat Workings

Cllr Sarah Dyke, Lead member for Environment introduced Colin Arnold, the Principal Planning Officer and advised that as Somerset is one of the biggest peat producers in the country this work was a key manifesto pledge and a significant part of the ecological emergency declaration in Somerset.

The Principal Planner gave members a presentation to accompany the report and asked members to consider some of the key points from the report including -

- The benefits of peatlands
- Review of permitted peat extraction in Somerset

The following comments and questions were received from members-

- The Chair felt that this subject was in some ways quite controversial. The Director ECI advised that 'wrap around' business support for peat producers is a key part of this work, including helping them with diversification into other markets.
- How does a peat bog absorb carbon? The officer explained how carbon absorption of peat bogs works in basic terms and advised that a video would be shared with the committee which explained this in more scientific detail.
- Cllr Dixie Darch, Associate Lead member Environment advised that carbon absorption of peat is a growing science and that there are many things going on around managing water levels and reducing carbon emissions as a result of disturbed peat.
- What is the value to the local economy in terms of peat production? The Principal Planner advised that there are about 90 workers on peat sites in Somerset, as an example of employment benefits of the industry in Somerset.
- What are the timescales for the peat extraction review and what if, following consultation there is a negative response from Peat producers on this? The Director ECI assured members that this work was being moved forward very quickly. A ban on domestic peat is imminent and the ban on commercial peat is expected later, so it is crucial that peat producers are supported through this period of significant change for the industry.
- We must remember that peat is used in domestic and commercial soil production and that there will always be a need for. What peat alternatives are we aware of? The Lead Member Environment took this question away for further consideration by the team.

The Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee noted the recommendations at paragraph 2.1 of the report:

2.1. An Officers Non-Key decision has been undertaken where the Director of ECI Commissioning has approved authorised officers to engage with owners/operators of peat extraction sites in Somerset and explore the possibilities of them voluntarily ending peat extraction on their sites in exchange for financial compensation from the Council.

2.2. Therefore, the main key issue relating to this report is calling for Members support in reducing the extent of extraction of peat on the Somerset Levels and Moors.

Agenda item 8: Estates decarbonisation - our programme and progress

Cllr Sarah Dyke, Lead Member for Environment introduced the item on Estates Decarbonisation as a key objective of the climate emergency strategy and felt that this work was a crucial part of leading by example on carbon reduction in Somerset.

Oliver Woodhams, Estates Manager began by introducing some of the key officers from the Corporate Property Team who had been leading on the decarbonisation work.

Abigail Lambert, Energy Manager, Dave Dangerfield Service Manager Building Services, and the Estates Manager talked members through a series of slides highlighting key findings, objectives, measures and monitoring around energy consumption and carbon reduction measures across the councils' own estate. The officers provided members with an overview of key achievements and the councils current position in terms of the achieving net zero and some explanation of some of the key approaches being taken, giving site specific details (both current and future planned projects) including the status of any funding opportunities being or due to be received as part of the ongoing or future planned works.

In conclusion the Estates Manager explained that there is a key link between property rationalisation and decarbonisation as we move into the unitary authority from March '23.

The following comments and questions were received from members -

- The Chair thanked the officer for the work being done in Frome, particularly Frome College and asked for some further detail on this. The Service Manager Building Services advised that boiler management was a key part of the work being undertaken at Frome College.
- There are some easy solutions such as solar panelling of roofs across the county, as well as huge projects such as the recent decarbonisation of B Block in its entirety. How are we prioritising which solutions needs to be funded first? The Officer informed the committee that in terms of prioritising, it is usually those buildings with the biggest need that are done as a priority. Age also plays a part in prioritisation, with end-of-life heating systems being addressed as a priority too.
- Are officers able to provide a financial column in this report which shows the financial savings achieved as a result of the decarbonisation of the estate, as a comparison against the overall costs and the payback. The officer gave Yeovil Library as an example of a 67% financial saving that had been achieved through overhaul of an aged heating system and advised that more of this sort of data will be coming through very soon,
- How far ahead do local authorities look ahead in terms of financial paybacks?
- Regarding the potential use of wind power, have we looked at the technology available to support this? The Estates Manager offered to take this question away for further consideration.
- The vice-chair asked for more detail of local projects and the Estates Manager assured members that more detail can be provided on request.
- What will happen to the various contracts held by District Councils and their stakeholders concerning Estates decarbonisation projects. The Estates Manager assured members that much of this data was being reviewed as part of the property rationalisation workstream of the local government reorganisation programme.
- Page 51 Can we have some more detail regarding energy demand reduction.
- As a recommendation, there is an organisation called LETTI who have written guidance that could be very useful and informative here.

- Regarding costs associated with retrofitting, to what extent are these costs usually incurred under maintenance contracts anyway?

The Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee noted the presentation.

Agenda item 9: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty overview

Cllr Sarah Dyke, Lead Member Environment introduced Jim Hardcastle, AONB Manager of the Mendip Hills who gave members a presentation of headline information on the Mendip Hills AONB including -

- The strategy and delivery work of the AONB in the Mendip Hills
- Findings from the Annual Forum held on 26th November 2022.
- Framing all the work under 4 key priorities, and used by DEFRA
 - Nature
 - Climate
 - Place
 - People
- The Farming in protected landscapes programme and associated funding
- An overview of the activities of the Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan, which will work alongside the Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy when it is adopted, including the recruitment of the first Nature Recovery Ranger, species management, nature task volunteers, tree planting, grassland restoration.
- Working alongside development management/planning consultees and lobbying for AONB's to be a statutory consultee.
- Measurement of light pollution and working with the largest consumers to reduce this locally.

The following comments and questions were received from members -

- Are there any thoughts about extending the AONB eastwards? The Officer advised that this would be considered as part of the National Landscapes Review, but that a specific Mendip Hills extension was not being considered at this time.

Members of the Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee noted the update.

Agenda item 10: Any other items of business

There were no other items of business raised by the Chair.

[MEETING CLOSED 4.36PM]

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Environment Scrutiny Work Programme (Feb - March 2023)

28th February

- Update on Key Decision regarding Somerset Rivers Authority Funding and Somerset County Council hosting role - David Mitchell, Senior Manager, Somerset Rivers Authority.
- Local Area Energy Plan – Jacob Hall, Climate Emergency Service Manager.
- Climate Governance for Somerset Council - Jon Doyle, Strategic Manager ECI Climate and Flooding and Jonathan Stevens, Assistant Director Climate Change and Assets, Somerset West & Taunton District Council.
- Flexible plastics collection trial - Mickey Green, Managing Director, Somerset Waste Partnership.

29th March

- An introduction to the work of Scientific Services - Darren Clark Service Manager Scientific Services.
- Severn Tidal Commission - Paul Hickson, Strategic Manager Economy and Planning.
- Climate Emergency Tracker – Mark Fortune, ECI Service Manager Climate Emergency.
- Somerset Tree Strategy – Jacob Hall, Climate Emergency Service Manager and Jez Ralph, Director, Evolving Forests.
- Nutrients Management Task and Finish group for Somerset – Introduction and early findings – Colin Arnold, Service Manager Development and Planning

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Scrutiny for Policies & Place Committee Work Programme 2022-2023

Overarching themes	Committee meeting dates / proposed agenda items	Lead Officer/Item Lead
1 February 2023 @ 1pm EXTRAORDINARY MEETING		
Commissioning	Somerset Council Plan	Strategic Manager - Commissioning Development, Sunita Mills Strategic Manager – Performance Planning & Business Intelligence, Tony Johnson
Finance	Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 (Reserve) – Jason Vaughan	Director - Finance and Governance, Jason Vaughan
7 February 2023 @ 10am		
Revenues & Benefits	Income & Arrears Management Policy	Assistant Director – Customer, Somerset West and Taunton Council, Richard Sealy
Highways	Award of Professional Services Contract for Place Services (Core highways, transport and wider place services)	Strategic Commissioning Manager - Highways and Transport, Mike O’Dowd-Jones
Finance	Budget Monitoring Report – Month 9 (December)	Strategic Manager - Finance Business Partnering, Christian Evans
7 March 2023 @ 10am		
Finance	Budget Monitoring Report – Month 10 (January)	Strategic Manager - Finance Business Partnering, Christian Evans
SSE/Property	Dillington House- update on closure and exit	Head of Support Services to Education, Ian Rowswell

Note: Members of the Scrutiny Committee and all other Members of Somerset County Council are invited to contribute items for inclusion in the work programme. Please contact Sarah Wright, Democratic Services (01823) 357628 sarah.wright@somerset.gov.uk who will assist you in submitting your item.

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Somerset County Council
Scrutiny Committee
– 28 February 2023

Flex Collect – Soft plastics collection pilot

Lead Officer: Mickey Green

Author: Mickey Green

Contact Details: mickey.green@somersetwaste.gov.uk

Executive Member: Cllr Sarah Dyke

Division and Local Member: n/a

1. Summary

- 1.1.** This report summarises SWP’s role in a funded national pilot testing the collection of flexible plastics from the kerbside, informing how we might seek to roll this out around the whole County in due course. Flexible plastics are a particularly difficult material to recycle, being low quality and made of many different plastic types. The national FlexCollect plastic recycling pilots is a great opportunity to take part in, learn from and help us achieve our aim of adding these materials to the kerbside collections in the future.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee endorses the proposed approach to the flexible plastics collection pilot.

3. Background

- 3.1.** Between October 2020 and July 2022, SWP introduced the Recycle More collections to more than 260,000 households, adding new materials to weekly collections:
- Plastic pots, tubs and trays.
 - Food and beverage cartons (e.g. Tetra Paks).
 - Small household electricals (e.g. a kettle or toaster).
 - Household batteries.

This was the biggest changes to recycling in the county for more than a decade and the successful roll-out was achieved despite the challenges of Covid.

It has had a fundamental impact on domestic waste collections in the county, though it should be noted that Isolating the impact of the new service on waste tonnages has been greatly complicated by the pandemic and associated lockdown restrictions. The phased nature of the roll-out adds another layer of complexity. However, the indications are that Recycle More has reduced refuse/rubbish by around 20%.

The picture for recycling is more complicated. The increases in plastic and other materials are to some extent offset by reductions in paper and textiles. However,

the net result is a notable increase in recycling at the same time as the reduction in refuse/residual waste. The arrival of Recycle More correlates with increases in the weights of many recycled materials – our current recycling rate is around 57%, much higher than it has ever been.

Most importantly, average total arisings have fallen by around 500 tonnes per week - around 15% - as the decrease in refuse outstrips the increase in total recycling. This reduction in overall waste is a win-win: less waste is being generated and a greater proportion of what is generated is going to recycling.

After the roll out of Recycle More, one of the key materials left in the residual waste is flexible plastics. This comprises roughly 8% by weight of residual waste (SWP composition analysis, 2018), but it is a lightweight material that takes up a lot of volume in the bin. A further composition and participation analysis will be undertaken in Spring 2023 which will give us up to date data on what is left in our rubbish bins. Residents are very keen to be able to recycle this material. Nationally, flexible plastic packaging represents nearly a quarter of all UK consumer plastic packaging but only 6% is currently recycled

- 3.2.** Flexible plastics are a challenging material to collect and recycle. They are comprised of many different types of plastic and in many cases multi-layered materials (e.g., food pouches made up of laminated layers of metal and plastic). Altogether, flexible plastics are lightweight, high volume, low value, difficult to sort and recycle. There are few reprocessors who accept them, and it is difficult to recycle them into closed-loop applications (i.e., into the same material again). Poor quality unsorted plastic films have been found dumped overseas. For these reasons, SWP has not wanted to collect plastic films until such time as we could be sure that the whole system changes to create viable markets for them and they would actually be recycled.

SWP with WRAP conducted a small trial of collecting flexible plastics in 2015, covering 1400 households. The trial itself was successful, though participation levels were low. The quality of material collected met the specification of the reprocessing plant, but there was some contamination of non-target material, and the reprocessing plant went into administration shortly after the trial ended. We can see that the design of the new pilots reflects learning from these and other campaigns, with a much more detailed communications plan, and clear guidance for households on what is and isn't collected. The FlexCollect pilots will also be accepting a wider range of materials than the original trial.

- 3.3.** Government, through the collection and packaging reforms (Consistency in collections and Extended Producer Responsibility) has indicated that households and businesses will be able to recycle flexible plastics by March 2027. As a result of this guidance, WRAP (the Waste and Resources Action Programme) has been working with manufacturers, reprocessors, supermarkets and other parties, to stimulate demand for the material, and encourage investment in reprocessing facilities. The supermarket flexible plastic collection points that have recently started being introduced are the first phase of this work.

- 3.4.** The Flex Collect project builds on previous work done by the Flexible Plastic Fund. Funded by DEFRA, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the FPF, the trial will be project managed by SUEZ and run for three years, starting in April 2022. The first phase of the project was the 'Pioneer' phase, with Cheltenham Borough Council, South Gloucester Council and Maldon District Council taking part in this phase. SWP are in the 'industrialisation' phase, and joining the pilot from April 2023, for 2 years. Five other local authorities are expected to join in this phase.

4. Approach to the pilot

- 4.1.** The project will trial the collection of flexible plastic packaging and will seek to understand:
- The likely and actual volumes of flexible packaging arising from households, the impact of collecting these items on current waste and recycling streams, and the impact on the entire value chain
 - The cost, operational efficiencies and challenges associated with different types of collection methodologies, sorting processes, logistics, and reprocessing of flexible plastics
 - The success of varied communications approaches with regards to participation rates, compliance, and contamination

The process, challenges, and cost of reprocessing the materials once sorted, and the current and future end markets and infrastructure available and required

- 4.2.** Somerset has been chosen to represent a rural area with some levels of deprivation. The pilot area to be chosen needs to take this into account. Due to space constraints and capacity issues at the depots the pilot will need to be run from Evercreech Depot. For these reasons, initial thoughts are that the stage 1 pilot will take place in the Mendip area. Stage 2 areas will be determined at a later point (and is not contingent on the stage 1 area chosen).

The pilot will run in two parts:

- Stage 1: Small pilot of c.3,500 properties to run for 1 year. This will allow us to trial the collection system and learn lessons.
- Stage 2: The pilot will be extended to around 15-20,000 households – enough to take it to a wider range of properties and learn from that.

- 4.3.** The pilot is still in the design stage but key principles are:

- Flexible plastics that will be accepted are plastic bags and wrappers – e.g. bread bags, frozen food bags, salad bags, cheese wrappers and similar (e.g. cling film). It is expected that crisp packets and sweet wrappers will also be included.
- Pouches, sachets and packets, such as pet food pouches and baby food pouches, are not included as there is currently no viable outlet for these

materials with a thicker metal layer.

- Residents will receive clear guidance developed by WRAP on what can and can't be accepted. Households involved in the pilot will receive a teaser leaflet 4 weeks ahead of the start, a reminder leaflet 2 weeks ahead of the start and a 'nudge' leaflet around 6 weeks post-start date. We will seek to also host local drop-in sessions to respond to questions and demonstrate good practice.
- Households will be provided with a pack of blue translucent bags to collect their flexible plastics in. The bag should be tied and placed out for collection in either the green or black recycling container in which there is space.
- Flexible plastics must not be placed loose within the bright blue bag for cans and plastic bottles and pots, tubs and trays, as they need to be recycled separately.

4.4. End destinations of materials.

Whilst SWP requires that materials collected for recycling must be recycled within the UK as a preference, for these national trials, arrangements are being made with a number of reprocessors to take the material and report back.

The primary treatment solution will be recycling, where options include both mechanical and chemical recycling and seeking to avoid down-cycling (e.g. using the material to make benches). Secondary options would send materials to be used as Solid Recovered Fuel (SRF), which would be used only as a last resort. Reprocessing within the UK will be prioritised; however, it may be necessary to process some material in EU facilities, particularly where technology is not yet commercially available in the UK. Materials arising from the trials will not be sent outside the UK or EU for sorting/reprocessing.

5. Consultations undertaken

- 5.1.** The ambition to accept flexible plastics at the kerbside has been part of SWP's Business Plan for a number of years (and as such has been consulted on with all partners – District Council and County Council). The approach to the pilot has been reviewed by the Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel and by the Somerset Waste Board, and it is being brought to this scrutiny committee given the timing of LGR.

6. Implications

- 6.1. Financial:** The trial will be financed as an open book contract. It will be fully funded by the FPF, apart from SWP/Somerset Council staff time. Financing covers the fixed asset costs (bins, bags, boxes, weighing systems, cages, compactors and modifications to facilities), and costs associated with storage, logistics, treatment, testing, communications, and training. These costs will be discussed before the trial commences and expected costs will be approved in principle between the local authority, SUEZ, and the project steering committee. Additional costs which

arise after the trial has commenced will also need to be approved. Costs will be managed directly with Future Recycling Limited (FRL) on behalf of the Flexible Plastic Fund. The pilot will end in 2025, but at this stage, it is expected that EPR funding will be in place, which will enable those taking part to continue with the collections and to extend it across the whole County.

Legal: A project agreement will be signed between the local authority, the FPF, Suez, WRAP before commencement.

HR: There are no HR implications – it will be delivered by existing SWP/Somerset Council staff and this is reflected in our Business Plan (and hence allocating officer time).

7. Background papers

7.1. n/a

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author

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Somerset County Council
Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee
– 28th February 2023

Somerset Wide Energy Plan

Lead Officer: Jacob Hall

Author: Jacob Hall

Contact Details: Jacob.hall@mendip.gov.uk

Cabinet Member: Sarah Dyke

Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1.** This report is to update the Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee on the progress of a Somerset Energy Plan. This was a key deliverable from the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy, however the focus of this initial phase of work is mapping the development of renewable energy technologies in Somerset.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** Members are asked to note the contents of this report and the progress made so far in the development of the Somerset Energy Plan

3. Background

- 3.1.** A Local Area Energy Plan was identified as one of the key deliverables in the Energy section in the joint Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy, specifically to “develop and deliver an Energy Plan for Somerset - Roadmap to decarbonising the energy system in Somerset. whole systems approach (buildings, heat, transport and power generation).”

A Local Area Energy Plan is an evidence-based approach that sets out the most effective route for the local area to reach both its local and national net zero target. The Plan considers the complex interactions of power, gas, heat and transport and the different ways our energy might be supplied, managed and consumed in the future.

This action was investigated in 2020 with a project initiation document written and soft market testing undertaken. Quotes at the time came back with estimates for £500,000 plus to complete the full plan. The project was therefore put on hold due to the high costs involved and the lack of funding.

In early 2022 a working group of officers from the five councils came together following some initially scoping work by Mendip District Council to discuss how the project could be moved forward.

The group recommended that a rescoped (and hence affordable) plan would incorporate. The rescoping was based around analysis of existing energy

plans specifically focusing on the Dorset example developed by their Local Enterprise Partnership with Regen. We held discussions with them to understand how they had approached the work and determined we would be looking for a similar piece of work which was more affordable than previous quotes.

The Somerset Wide Energy Plan differs from the more traditional Local Area Energy Plan by mapping at a higher level and specifically focusing on renewable technologies. We are also using this work to scope potential on our own assets as well as how we influence the Somerset Local Plan.

Funding for this piece of work was committed by members of the Climate Strategic Management Group (SMG) in 2021. However, this funding was not enough to progress the project based on the initial soft market testing conducted. Additional funding has been provided by three of the four planning authorities planning policy teams based on the project beginning to inform the development of the new Somerset Local Plan.

Our plan specification is as follows as determined by representatives from across the five authorities from the climate and planning policy teams.

- Develop a high-level assessment of renewable opportunities to support the development of the new Somerset wide Local Plan to identify areas suitable for renewable energy
- Understand the opportunities for renewables on council owned assets both free standing and council buildings
- A report detailing the current state of renewable energy generation and an unconstrained area-wide map of renewable energy opportunities irrelevant of land ownership.
- A GIS map showcasing a high-level assessment of unavoidable constraints and reasonably high level (e.g LCA, access to the grid), subjective constraints to help understand the potential likelihood of reaching the objectives outlined in the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy.
- Identify investment projects and opportunities ensuring evidence is in place to allow the new Somerset Council to take these forward directly or in partnership and have the evidence available bid for potential future funding
- A roadmap towards the objectives outlined in the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy including a target of net zero by 2030 and how to work alongside community energy organisations, the private sector and various other stakeholders on to invest and grow renewable energy generation in Somerset.

3.2. Based on the project initiation document and working group discussions a

tender was issued by Mendip District Council on behalf of the five Councils in November 2022. The project plan is split into three work packages.

- 1) Work package 1: Baseline existing local renewable resources focused on understanding the pipeline and demand for renewables in Somerset. Develop a high-level overview of unavoidable and subjective constraints for renewable installations and an assessment of energy infrastructure and council assets for the development of renewable technologies.
- 2) Work package 2: Scenarios and Roadmap. Develop a road map of net zero scenarios for 2030,2040 and 2050 and how this aligns to national and local scenarios and policies. Analysis of potential generating capacity and yield for technologies across locations.
- 3) Work package 3: Investment Plan Development. Produce an economic benefit assessment of how to deliver the road map along with recommendations on policy routes and viable projects in Somerset. Critically ensure that stakeholder engagement takes place at all stages of the plan's development

4. Consultations undertaken

4.1. The project has developed in partnership between the five Somerset Councils that are coming together to form Somerset Council. Primarily representatives from the climate teams and planning have worked together to develop the project and will sit as part of the core steering group as the project develops. A wider stakeholder engagement plan will be created as a critical part of the project explained in more detailed below.

4.2. Stakeholder engagement and evaluation will be key for the development of the Energy Plan and will take place throughout the project. This will be done through a core steering group, advisory group and then a wider engagement exercise with other key stakeholders. The creation of a stakeholder engagement plan one of the first actions for the project

Stakeholders will include but are not limited to the below

Stakeholder	Reason for inclusion
Core steering group consisting of Climate and Planning Officers	Core project team ultimately responsible for the delivery of the Energy Plan
Council officers including Planning Policy, Economic Development and Asset Management	Evaluate and provide specific knowledge around key areas of the Energy Plan's development.
Council Members	To scrutinise and support to the

	development of the plan throughout it's development
District Network Operators (National Grid & Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks)	Provide detail of the current grid capacity and future energy scenarios. Ensures buy in for the development of renewable technologies across Somerset
South West Net Zero Hub	To bring local knowledge and renewable energy expertise.
Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership	Part of continued partnership with the district councils existing Local Plans and named as a key partner with delivery of clean energy projects in Somerset's Climate Emergency Strategy
Wildlife and environmental NGOs such as the AONBs & Local Nature Partnership	To advise on impact, constraints and potential solutions on Somerset's natural environment and potential nature 'hotspots' to be avoided
Agricultural organisations such as FWAG SW and NFU	To advise on impact, constraints and potential solutions on agricultural land and farming community
Local community energy organisations	To bring local knowledge and experience of renewable installation projects. Ensure collaboration for potential future project de
Renewable energy developers including current operators such as EDF	To understand relevant impacts of the Hinkley Point development and grid connection and to share plans and invite support

5. Background papers

5.1. No background papers

Somerset County Council
Scrutiny Committee
– 28 February 2023

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) 2023-24 Enhanced Programme of Flood Risk Management Works and signing the SRA Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution

Lead Officer: Michele Cusack, Director Economic and Community Infrastructure Commissioning

Author: David Mitchell

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Cabinet Member: Sarah Dyke, Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1.** Since it was launched in January 2015, Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) has given Somerset greater flood protection and resilience. The Board of the SRA has approved funding for approximately 240 projects, with 70 running at present. The SRA is a partnership between different Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs), in which partners are bound together through an annually renewed Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution. The SRA is able to fund extra flood protection and resilience work across Somerset because every year money is raised especially for the sole use of the SRA. In total, since 2015, Somerset has had an additional £22.8 million. As the SRA is technically what is known as an unincorporated association, since 2015 Somerset County Council has been the host authority and Accountable Body for the SRA. At its meeting on 15 March Somerset County Council Executive is expected to take a decision on whether, after 1 April 2023, Somerset Council should become the host authority and Accountable Body for the SRA, to enable its good work to continue. Somerset Council representatives to the SRA Board are expected to be nominated at 1 March Somerset County Council meeting.
- 1.2.** The enhanced work undertaken by the SRA adds to Somerset County Council's wider priorities (economic, nature, phosphates) and is part of ensuring that the council has strategic alignment across everything it does (be it the county business plan, DRAFT Somerset Council Plan, district council local plans, local nature recovery strategy, climate emergency strategy, the local transport plan etc). More information about how SRA actions support these plans is provided in section 3.17 to 3.21.
- 1.3.** The purpose of this report is to enable the Scrutiny Committee to understand the implications for the new Somerset Council of taking on the role of host authority and Accountable Body for the SRA. In particular, this report will focus on **Financial, Legal, Human Resources, and Reputational** implications.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** As stated above, the Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the implications of Somerset Council becoming the host authority and Accountable Body for the SRA. Key issues for consideration are:
- Financial
 - Legal
 - Human Resources
 - Reputational

3. Background

- 3.1.** The winter of 2013-14 was the wettest in Somerset for 250 years. Around 150km² of land was submerged for weeks, 165 homes flooded, 7,000 businesses affected, and 81 roads closed. An Economic Impact Study¹ estimated the cost to Somerset as being up to £147.5m. In response to this flooding, Somerset councils and key stakeholders produced the 20 Year Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan (FAP). One of the main objectives of this FAP was to create a partnership body that would give Somerset greater flood protection and resilience and oversee the FAP. The SRA was duly launched in January 2015. With the launch of the SRA the objectives of the FAP became county wide objectives. The SRA funds activity across the whole county.
- 3.2.** The FAP was produced - at the Government's behest - during the devastating floods of 2013-14. Somerset County Council was involved in the preparation of the FAP; it led the FAP Leaders Implementation Group; it was instrumental in expanding the FAP to cover the whole of Somerset; it became the host authority and Accountable Body for the SRA in January 2015. In short, the council has long nurtured and supported the SRA for the good of the people of Somerset.
- 3.3.** The SRA was set up as a partnership between different Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs), because different parts of Somerset have different flooding problems. Organisations are limited in what they can do individually, but working together as SRA partners they have achieved a great deal more than would otherwise have been possible. Current partners in the SRA are Somerset County Council, the four district councils (Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, South Somerset), the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, and the Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards. Following vesting day, all local authority members will come from the new Somerset Council.
- 3.4.** The SRA does not take away any of its partners' existing responsibilities or

¹ Somerset Economic Impact Assessment of the winter 2013/14 Flooding, Parsons Brinckerhoff (2015)

accountabilities (nor any of Somerset landowners' existing responsibilities or accountabilities). They all continue. The purpose of the SRA is to give Somerset a higher level of flood protection and resilience, above and beyond the usual activities of the Flood Risk Management Authorities (FRMAs) listed as partners above. The SRA is able to fund extra work because every year money is raised especially for it.

- 3.5.** The SRA is not a Risk Management Authority (RMA) as defined in the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010. Somerset County Council (which is the Lead Local Flood Authority), the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards, district councils and Wessex Water are designated as RMAs. RMAs have statutory functions, duties and powers set out in the FWMA that enable them to fulfil their various functions. The SRA is an unincorporated association whose membership includes the RMAs listed above (except Wessex Water). These RMAs are the 'SRA Partners': the SRA Partners propose and are able to undertake projects, using SRA funding, on behalf of the SRA because they hold the expertise and the necessary statutory powers.
- 3.6.** For its first full year of work in 2015-16, the SRA had £2.7million of what was called Interim Funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Somerset's local authorities and the Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards. For 2016-17, and every year since, Somerset's local authorities have been allowed by the Government to raise money purely for the SRA through what is technically known as an Alternative Notional Amount (ANA) of 1.25% of 2016-17 council tax. Because the SRA has had this unique extra funding stream, for its mission of doing extra flood protection and resilience work, councils have not had to divert funding from any other services for the SRA. The level of the charge made for the SRA has not increased since 2016-17. The total amount raised for the SRA has increased from £2.7million in 2016-17 to an anticipated £3.01million for 2023-24, but that is only because the number of households in Somerset has increased.
- 3.7.** Through local taxation the SRA funds a unique depth and breadth of actions. These are grouped into five workstreams, that reflect the local priorities of the Flood Action Plan and of Somerset people, and the need to approach different challenges across Somerset in different ways.
- 3.8.** Through the SRA, an additional £22.8m has been raised since 2015: an average of £2.9million annually. Since 2015 the SRA Board has approved funding for approximately 240 projects, with 70 running at present. The SRA funds activities across the whole of Somerset. A map showing the locations of SRA funded activities since 2016 is provided at the end of this paper.
- 3.9.** The SRA does not have its own operations team undertaking works and projects. Instead, the SRA provides grant funding to its partner organisations and others to deliver projects that support the objectives of Somerset's 20 Year

Flood Action Plan and accord with locally agreed priorities. The SRA Board each year approves a series of projects which are collectively referred to as the 'Enhanced Programme'. The Enhanced Programme is the collective name given to works wholly or part funded by the SRA. These works are designed 1) to be *above and beyond* the usual activities of Flood Risk Management Authorities, and 2) to further the objectives of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan, which is overseen by the SRA. Many SRA actions and initiatives are completed within one financial year, but some require longer-term research, design, planning and implementation, so take longer. The Enhanced Programme therefore currently includes works originating and progressing over several years.

3.10. SRA Governance

The SRA is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding and by a constitution that all partners are committed to. The MoU is refreshed and signed by the SRA partners annually. The constitution clearly sets out the purpose of the SRA and the role of the SRA Board.

The SRA Board has the authority to:

- Agree the SRA annual Enhanced Programme and authorise Somerset County Council to release SRA funding for the delivery of its current year's activities
- Endorse programmes that reduce both the risk and impact of flooding and other activities supporting the delivery of the Vision for the Somerset Levels and Moors in 2030 and the Flood Action Plan to be carried out by the Parties
- Determine the scope of services provided by SCC as Host Authority

The SRA Board currently consists of representatives from the following organisations – the 'SRA Partners'.

One representative each from:

- Environment Agency
- Mendip District Council
- Natural England
- Sedgemoor District Council
- South Somerset District Council
- Somerset County Council
- Somerset West and Taunton Council
- Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

Two representatives each from:

- Parrett Internal Drainage Board
- Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board

It is the SRA partners that make up the SRA who deliver projects on behalf of the SRA.

3.11. The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel meets twice a year and consists of 2 representatives from each of the county and district councils and one representative from each of the Axe Brue and Parrett Internal Drainage Boards.

3.12. SRA Achievements

Works funded by the SRA since 2015 have directly or indirectly benefitted everybody living or working in Somerset. SRA activities have included:

- extra maintenance, repairs and improvements
- innovations
- collaborations
- contributions enabling major projects to go ahead
- studies, reviews, and investigations
- long-term initiatives
- moves that respond to Somerset's special characteristics
- and mixtures of the above

In practice – to give just a few examples, workstream by workstream – this has meant:

SRA Workstream 1 – Dredging and River Management

- annual dredging of the River Parrett and the combined development of water injection dredging and silt monitoring techniques to get quicker, cheaper and less disruptive results;
- enhancing the River Sowey (Parrett Flood Relief Channel) and King's Sedgemoor Drain system;
- supporting big initiatives such as the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier, Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme, Dunball Sluice refurbishment, Cannington Flood Alleviation Scheme, a new Highbridge pumping station and pioneering and nationally important experiments with 'Stage 0' river restoration techniques on the National Trust's Holnicote estate in West Somerset;
- repairs to river banks in Frome town centre and to the River Avill Flood Relief Channel near Dunster.

SRA Workstream 2 – Land Management including Natural Flood Management

- hundreds of schemes to slow the flow of water down through upper and mid catchments, including better soil management, storage ponds, scrapes and bunds, leaky woody dams, tree and hedge planting, and joint efforts with Highways to address the root causes of flooding problems on roads.

SRA Workstream 3 – Urban Water Management

- a major and unique review of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) at new developments across Somerset, dozens of inspections of SuDS as they are being built, and the production of Somerset-specific SuDS guidance for developers, to make places better and safer to live;
- studies of urban water management in places such as Minehead, Yeovil, Shepton Mallet and Croscombe, and Wells.

SRA Workstream 4 – Resilient Infrastructure

- tens of thousands of extra highway maintenance activities, including gully emptying, drain jetting, silt trap emptying, trash screen clearing and inspecting, clearing and repairing or replacing culverts;
- upgrades to old and inadequate drainage systems in the A38 between Wellington and Taunton and the A39 and B3191 at Carhampton;
- road raising at Shurton and Burton near Hinkley Point.

SRA Workstream 5 – Building Local Resilience

- helping people affected by flooding on the Somerset Levels and Moors to devise community flood plans;
- helping to stage annual Somerset Community Resilience events; giving communities grants for flood resilience equipment;
- helping people to set up very localised early flood warning systems;
- producing the film Down by the River and contributing to the Somerset Trails app;
- supporting the creation of moor associations on the Somerset Levels and Moors; and working with partners on a scheme jointly funded with the EU to encourage adaptation to the water-related impacts (flooding and drought) of climate change.

All these SRA activities – and dozens more like them – have given Somerset greater flood protection and resilience.

Details on projects funded by the SRA can be found on the Somerset Rivers

Authority website www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk

3.13. SRA Funding

Somerset County Council has been the Accountable Body for Somerset Rivers Authority since its inception. The SRA is funded through council tax and annual contributions of £10,000 each from the Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards. In the 2016-17 financial year a small additional charge (1.25%) was added to council tax bills as an 'alternative notional amount²' (ANA) solely for the purpose of funding the activities of the Somerset Rivers Authority. The ANA is a Parliamentary procedure enacted by, what was then, the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government. The use of an ANA ensured that funding the SRA did not reduce funds available for other council services. This ANA is rolled forward each year to fund the SRA. The amount charged is fixed at 1.25% of the 2016-17 council tax charge. For 2023-24 the charge per band D property will be £14.65, resulting in approximately £3.01m being raised for the SRA.

3.14. Funding for the SRA has been approved annually by each of the councils at budget setting meetings. For 2023-24 Somerset County Council will set the budget on behalf of the new Somerset Council on 22 February. Somerset County Council meeting Item 5 Paper A - 'Budget, Medium Term Financial Plan and Council Tax Setting' sets out that approximately £3.01 m will be raised through council tax for the SRA in the 2023-24 financial year.

3.15. The SRA and other strategies and plans:

SRA schemes and projects add to the wider priorities of Somerset's local authorities and the forthcoming Somerset Council and supplement the new council's strategies and objectives. The SRA is also reviewing Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan, with the aim of delivering a wide range of benefits.

For example, SRA activities directly contribute towards meeting priorities of the current County Business Plan.

County Business Plan Outcome 2: Safe, vibrant and well-balanced communities able to enjoy and benefit from the natural environment whilst addressing climate change.

Key priorities supported:

- A Somerset which is prepared for, and resilient to the impacts of Climate Change

² The alternative notional amount (ANA) is the formal name for the process used by central government to add funds to the Council Tax base.

- Ensure flood prevention remains a focus for the protection of communities in Somerset.

3.16. The work of the SRA addresses a number of the priorities proposed in the **draft Somerset Council Plan** and the “Vision” for Somerset Council:

The draft vision states:

“The new Somerset Council will build a fairer, greener, more flourishing, Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you.”

SRA activity delivers the priorities of:

- A Greener, more sustainable Somerset
- An environmentally sustainable and more resilient Somerset

Climate change is increasing the likelihood and impact of flooding. The work of the SRA helps Somerset prepare for, mitigate the impacts, become more resilient to and ultimately adapt to the impacts of climate change

3.17. Climate Emergency Strategy

The work of the SRA directly supports achieving Goal 3 of the Climate Strategy – ‘To have a Somerset which is prepared for, and resilient to, the impacts of Climate Change’. Through delivering the Somerset 20 Year Flood Action Plan, the SRA partners undertake projects and activities that contribute towards tackling many of the climate change related risks identified in the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy.

Sector	Climate Risks				
Transport Networks	Disruption to transport networks from extreme weather events, (flood and heat)	Flood risk to transport infrastructure			
The built Environment	Damage to buildings and infrastructure from extreme weather events	Increased flood risk	Increased water stress	Disruption to power and communication networks	
Business and Industry	Disruption to transport, energy and communications				
Natural	Risk to	Impacts on	Impacts	Damage to	Damage

Environment & Agriculture	vulnerable species and habitats	'eco-system services' enjoyed by people	of increased drought	natural habitats from water stress	to crops & landscapes from flooding
Water (Flood Risk & Drought)	Increase risk of coastal, pluvial and fluvial flooding	Increased flash flood risk from extreme weather events	Further stress on water resources	Increased competition for water	Drought impacts on water quality and supply
Health & Wellbeing	Disrupted access to services and facilities from extreme weather events	Flooding impacts on health, wellbeing and livelihoods			

3.18. Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Somerset Local Nature Partnership (LNP) is well established and is already leading on the Natural Environment and Farming and Food sectors of the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy. The LNP has been identified as the natural partner to work with Somerset County Council / Somerset Council in the development of the statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The Government's ambition is that each LNRS will be a powerful new tool that will help the public, private and voluntary sectors work more effectively together for nature's recovery.

- 3.19.** Many Somerset Rivers Authority projects are designed to deliver environmental enhancements as well as flood and water management benefits. The SRA encourages and enables projects that tackle flooding from a range of angles. The SRA seeks multiple benefits where possible when providing funding e.g., tree planting slows the flow of water into rivers but also contributes to carbon capture; and, encouraging land management practices that reduce excess water run-off can also improve water quality.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** The SRA Board considered the future hosting of the SRA and make-up of the SRA Board following vesting day at its meeting on 20 January 2023. The SRA Board recommended that after vesting day the SRA should maintain the geographic representation that is currently provided via district councils by mirroring this within Somerset Council. It has been recommended that the SRA Board replaces current county and district councillors with six Somerset Council councillors in total, one from each of the four district council areas plus one representing what used to be the West Somerset Council area. In addition, the Board recommended that the Somerset Council Lead Executive Member with responsibility for the SRA should sit on the Board. SRA Board

members also recommended that a representative from Wessex Water be invited to join the Board as it is the only Risk Management Authority not part of the SRA.

- 4.2.** Councillors have the opportunity to comment on the raising of SRA funds at the budget setting meeting on 22 February. The general public also have the opportunity to raise questions at the budget setting meeting.

5. Implications

5.1. Financial:

As explained above in section 3.12 funding amounting to an estimated £3.01m will be raised for the SRA for 2023-24 from council tax. £20,000 will also be contributed by the Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards.

- 5.2.** Somerset Council, as the Accountable Body, will be responsible for the proper oversight, management and accounting of all funds raised for, and spent by the SRA. All SRA funds will be managed through Somerset Council and overseen by a Somerset Council finance manager. The SRA Board allocates SRA funding as grants. The SRA's constitution defines the Board's purpose and authority of the Board and sets out delegations for financial decisions. All SRA Board decisions must align with Somerset Council Standing Orders and, where necessary, a key or non-key decision will be taken by the relevant council officer or Executive Member to ratify the decision of the SRA Board.

5.3. Financial Risk & Mitigation:

The SRA provides grant funding, paid in arrears, to SRA delivery partners upon evidence of agreed and eligible works being completed to the required standard. Organisations delivering SRA funded projects must first settle any charges and then claim funds back from the SRA by submitting a grant claim form. Claim forms must be signed off by a suitably qualified financial officer from the delivery organisation giving the SRA assurance that any claim is for eligible spend. This process minimises the risk of funds being spent on ineligible activity. The SRA undertakes an audit annually of selected claims to provide an additional level of assurance that SRA funds are being spent for the intended purpose.

5.4. Financial Risk & Mitigation:

Somerset County Council, on behalf of the SRA, has Strategic Grant Agreements (SGA) that it uses with SRA Partners. An SGA sets out the responsibilities of the delivery partner in relation to project delivery and financial procedures, and also sets out a process for resolution of any disputes. These grant agreements will be novated to Somerset Council.

5.5. Financial Risk & Mitigation:

Just as some projects underspend, so some projects occasionally face cost

increases. In such a case, there is a risk that an SRA delivery partner may be unable or unwilling to absorb those costs. In this instance the SRA may be asked to fund the cost increase. When this occurs the delivery partner must seek approval for additional funding from the SRA Board. This approval process allows the SRA Board to consider funding requests in advance of committing to those cost increases and allows the Board to manage its available funds in a prudent manner and to consider any impacts on the overall Enhanced Programme and budget. Where a cost increase occurs that could not be identified in advance, the SRA Board has the option to not fund that cost increase and the delivery partner would be liable for that cost. Any decision will be at the discretion of the SRA Board taking account of the SRA's financial position at the time and considering the implications of such a decision. Financial decisions are taken at SRA Board meetings or through delegated authority by the Chair and Vice Chair. Any decision taken by the SRA Board must also follow council Standing Orders and, where necessary, a key or non-key decision will be taken to ratify the SRA Board decision.

5.6. Due to the measures and procedures set out above, financial risk to Somerset Council as Host Authority and Accountable Body for SRA is deemed to be low. The SRA follows strict processes for the allocation and management of the grant funding that it provides. These processes make it very unlikely that the SRA will exceed its available budget.

5.7. Legal Implications

If Somerset Council is to be the Accountable Body for the SRA, then all decisions will be taken in accordance with Somerset Council's Standing Orders and procedures. This means that SRA Board decisions, where relevant, will be decisions in principle until ratified by the Accountable Body. For example, if the SRA Board takes a significant financial decision, this will be accompanied by a key or non-key decision by the Accountable Body.

5.8. Human Resources Implications

Somerset Council will act on behalf of the SRA Board as Host Authority. Somerset Council will employ the SRA staff (x4 full-time equivalents). As such Somerset Council will be responsible for all human resources related matters for the SRA team.

5.9. Equalities Implications

No 'due regard' issues have been identified linked to Somerset Council being the host authority and Accountable Body. Organisations delivering projects funded by the SRA are expected to assess if an Equalities Impact Assessment is required for their own projects and undertake as necessary.

5.10. Reputation Implications

Somerset Rivers Authority is an unincorporated association entered into

voluntarily by Somerset County Council and the other SRA partners through the annual signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. To be able to fulfil the function that it was set up for the SRA needs Somerset Council to take on the responsibility of being host authority and Accountable Body for the SRA. SRA funding is raised through council tax and as such it is important that there is clear democratic accountability for the raising and spending of this funding. It is proposed that Somerset Council will appoint six councillors from across Somerset to sit on the SRA Board, including the Executive Member with responsibility for the SRA. The council will also provide the legal and financial governance and processes that will allow the SRA to continue to fund additional flood and water management activities across Somerset.

- 5.11.** Should Somerset Council decline to be host authority and Accountable Body it is highly likely that the SRA would have to be wound up, as no other suitable host authority has been identified. Such a move would shutter nine years of major efforts by partners and communities across Somerset, less than halfway through Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan (which was drawn up in 2014 and is overseen by the SRA). It would result in the loss of approximately £3m per year to invest in Somerset for tackling flood risks, increasing resilience to flooding and adapting to climate change. The flooding of January 2023 has reminded local communities that Somerset is still very vulnerable to flooding, despite the significant investments made by the SRA and SRA partners since the devastating floods of 2013-14.

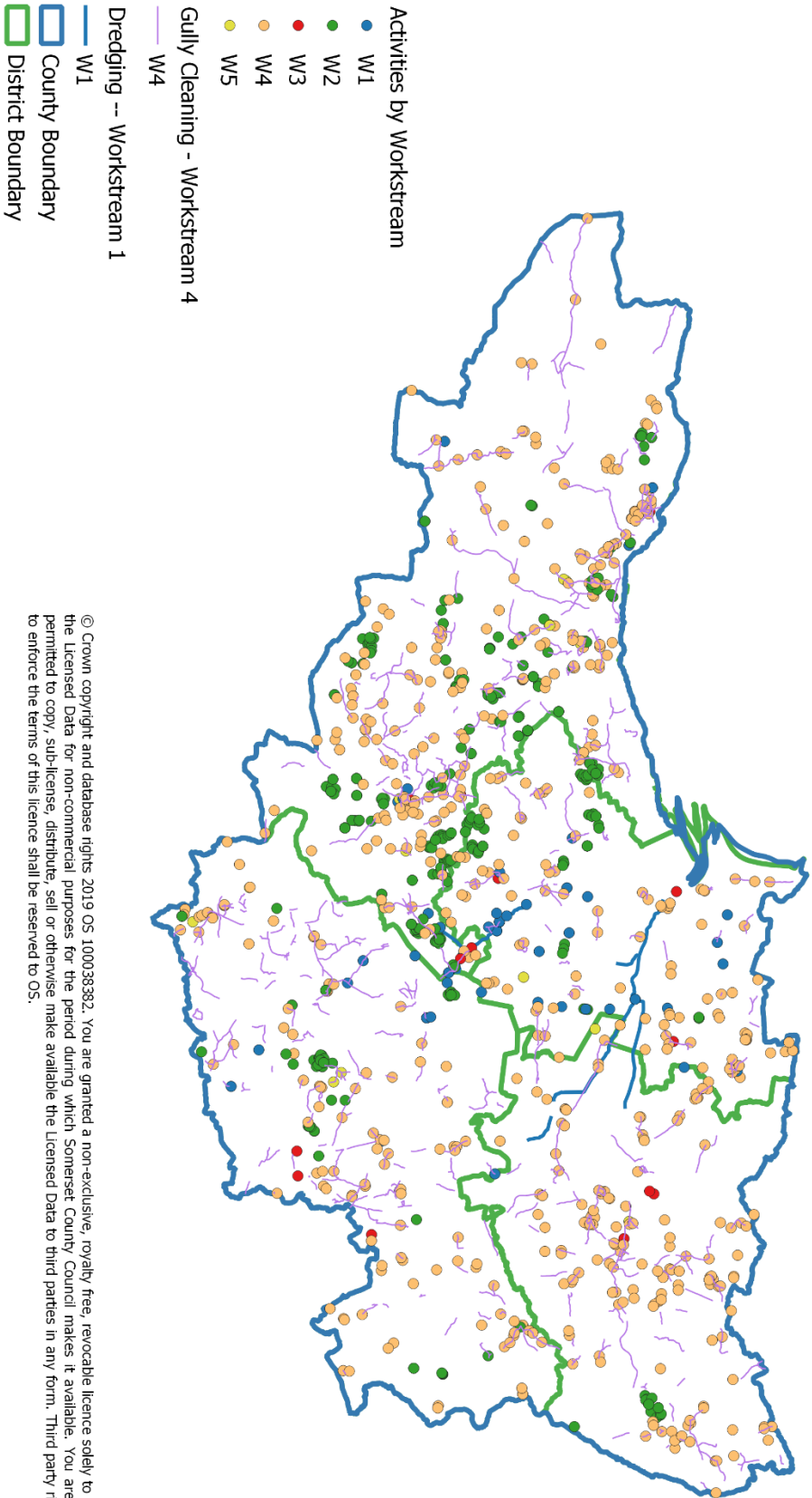
6. Background papers

- 6.1.** January 2023 - SRA Board Paper 2023-24 Enhanced Programme & Budget
[Somerset Rivers Authority Annual Report-2020-21-Summary](#)
SRA website – www.somersetiversauthority.gov.uk
Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author

Map showing location of a selection of SRA funded activities since 2015.

Somerset Rivers Authority - Location of SRA Funded Activities
Activities shown by workstream
Not all activities shown



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Somerset County Council
Environment and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee
– 28 February 2023

Update on Future Governance of the Climate and Ecological Emergency in Somerset Council

Lead Officer: Michele Cusack, Director of Commissioning, Economic and Community Infrastructure

Author: Jon Doyle, Strategic Manager, Economic and Community Infrastructure

Contact Details: jonathan.doyle@somerset.gov.uk

Cabinet Member: Cllr Sarah Dyke

Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1.** As part of the Local Government Reorganisation work, the Climate and Water sub-workstream (Environment sub-workstream 1) were requested to develop a number of options to ensure an appropriate governance overseeing the new Authority's response to the Climate and Ecological emergencies.
- 1.2.** The previous incarnation of the governance arrangements – the cross-authority Climate Implementation Board – will cease to effective upon vesting due to it being comprised of Members with specific responsibility for Climate Change and/or the Environment, alongside one other Member nominated from each of the County and District authorities.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1.** To note the options developed and presented to the Exec/SLT and the Service Alignment and Improvement Board
- 2.2.** To provide feedback on the options considered

3. Background

- 3.1.** In 2019, the five Somerset Local Authorities each recognised or declared a 'Climate Emergency' and agreed to collaborate in producing a joint Climate Emergency Strategy. Whilst each declaration was slightly different, all aspired to achieving carbon neutrality in their own operations and to work towards achieving this across the geography of their administrative area. Given the alignment of the declarations, it was agreed that a cross-authority Strategy be developed to identify ways in which the county of Somerset can become 'Carbon Neutral' by 2030

Upon the adoption of the Strategy by all five Somerset Local Authorities, a governance structure was implemented to oversee the delivery of Strategy.

The actions and progress of the five Somerset Local Authorities' response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency is currently overseen by the cross-authority Climate Implementation Board. This Board is comprised of Members with responsibility for the Environment and/or Climate Change, alongside a Member nominated from each Authority. Upon Vesting, this Board will no longer be effective due to the majority of Members and the organisations that they represent being replaced by the new Authority.

- 3.2.** The Climate and Water sub-workstream (Environment sub-workstream 1) of Local Government Reorganisation were charged with developing options to ensure the effective governance and oversight of Climate and Ecological matters in the new Authority as a Tranche 1 product.
- 3.3.** When developing the options, the group were keen to ensure corporate ownership of the issues and the governance arrangements should be sufficiently high-profile to enable this.
- 3.4.** A number of the issues were identified with the current governance arrangements that needed to be addressed in any new governance arrangements:
 - they have no delegated authority;
 - they are not decision making,
 - not budget raising
 - only limited to internal membership.
- 3.5.** Following discussions with Democratic Services, five options were developed and subsequently presented to the current Climate Implementation Board, the Service Alignment and Improvement Board and at a meeting of the SLT/Exec of Somerset County Council.
- 3.6.** The options developed are:
 1. Retain existing Climate Implementation Board, but with refreshed membership
 2. Accountability and delivery of Climate Emergency Strategy and Climate and Ecological Emergency activity becomes the responsibility of the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.
 3. Creation of new Climate and Ecological Emergency Sub-Committee (as a sub-committee of the Executive)
 4. Creation of new Climate and Ecological Emergency Partnership Board
 5. Creation of new Climate and Ecological Emergency Sub-Committee and Partnership Boards.
- 3.7.** The risks and opportunities for each respective option were identified and are presented, below:

3.8. Option 1

Retain existing Climate Implementation Board as is but with refreshed membership from new authority.

Opportunities

- No impact on current constitution
- Can be resourced within existing capacity.

Risk

- No delegated authority to make decisions.
- No budget.
- Board is narrow and limited to internal membership.

3.9. Option 2

Embed Climate and Ecological Emergency work within Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.

Accountability and delivery of Climate Emergency Strategy and Climate and Ecological Emergency activity becomes the responsibility of the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.

Opportunities

- Can be resourced within existing capacity.

Risk

- Danger of Climate and Ecological Emergency activities not receiving highest priority within new authority.
- Existing SCC constitution only allows voting for Members of the Executive.
- Committee would be narrow and limited to internal membership.
- No delegated authority to make decisions.
- No budget.

3.10. Option 3

Creation of new Climate and Ecological Emergency Sub-Committee (as a sub-committee of the Executive)

- To have delegated responsibility for delivery of climate and ecological emergency agendas, working to an action plan of work and budget agreed with Executive.

- Scrutinised by Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee

Opportunities

- Increased accountability, both via Environment and Place Scrutiny and Full Council.
- To have Executive decision-making powers on policy matters.
- Some budget raising authority.
- Creates a higher profile for Climate and Ecological Emergency agendas, both within new Council and externally.

Risks

- Existing SCC constitution only allows voting for Members of the Executive.
- Committee would be narrow and limited to internal membership.
- Would require additional resourcing when compared to current arrangements.

3.11. Option 4

Creation of new Climate and Ecological Emergency Partnership Board

- A non-decision making partnership board, comprised of other relevant public and private sector organisations.
- Designed to provide new Somerset Council with a place to influence and contribute to Climate Emergency Strategy outcomes they have no direct control over.
- Somerset Council attendance would predominantly be relevant senior staff, with input from Lead Member.

Opportunities

- Brings a wider focus to Climate and Ecological Emergency work.
- Raises the profile of Climate and Ecological Emergencies across the county.
- Sharing of best practice and strategy across sectors.
- Enhanced prospect of joint working and funding (including savings from economies of scale).
- Outcomes where the Council is reliant on other bodies are easier to achieve.
- Development of a consistent approach to tackling Climate and Ecological Emergencies within Somerset.

Risk

- Board would not be decision making.
- Board would be on invitation basis, so no guarantee that other organisations would agree to join.
- No guarantee that all members will agree or co-operate effectively.
- No budget allocation.
- Experience from other partnership boards demonstrate differing levels of success.
- Would require additional resourcing when compared to current arrangements.
- Somerset Council will not have overall control of agenda.
- Terms of reference and membership criteria would need to be very tight to ensure focus is maintained.
- There is potential for the Board to become unwieldy given the number of partners that could be included.
- Conversely, there is also potential of alienation if some partners are not invited to join.

3.12. Option 5

Creation of new Climate and Ecological Emergency Sub-Committee and Partnership Boards.

- Combination of option 3 and 4.
- Sub-Committee and Partnership Board would operate in tandem but independent of each other.
- Sub-Committee owns Climate Emergency Strategy outcomes, but shares with Partnership Board to explore opportunities where joint working and funding is required.
- Designed to give Climate and Ecological Emergency agendas high profile and accountability internally via Sub-Committee, whilst using the Partnership Board to provide Somerset Council opportunity to influence and contribute to Climate Emergency Strategy outcomes they have no direct control over.
- Members of Partnership Board retain sovereignty and accountability for delivery of own organisational plans, but Board is the conduit to identifying joint working and funding requirements.
- Based on outcomes in the Climate Emergency Strategy, examples of Partnership Board members could include (but not be limited to) Somerset CCG, distribution network operators (i.e. Western Power), housing associations, Environment Agency, Somerset Wildlife Trust, National Farmers Union, Chambers of Commerce, Exmoor National Park Authority.
- Suggested Somerset Council attendance on Partnership Board would

predominantly be relevant senior staff, with input from Lead Member.

- Members of the Partnership Board would be accountable to the Climate and Ecological Emergency Sub-Committee, providing regular updates on progress against Climate Emergency Strategy Outcomes.

Opportunities

- Increased accountability, both via Environment and Place Scrutiny and Full Council.
- To have Executive decision-making powers on policy matters.
- Some budget raising authority.
- Creates a higher profile for Climate and Ecological Emergency agendas, both within new Council and externally.
- Brings a wider focus to Climate and Ecological Emergency work.
- Raises the profile of Climate and Ecological Emergencies across the county.
- Sharing of best practice and strategy across sectors.
- Enhanced prospect of joint working and funding (including savings from economies of scale).
- Outcomes where Somerset Council is dependent on other bodies are easier to achieve.
- Development of a consistent approach to tackling Climate and Ecological Emergencies within Somerset.
- Positions Somerset Council as the leader in tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergencies within Somerset.

Risk

- Existing Somerset Council constitution only allows voting for Members of the Executive (relevant to sub-committee only).
- Would require additional resourcing when compared to current arrangements.
- Board would be on invitation basis, so no guarantee that other organisations would agree to join.
- Terms of reference and membership criteria for Partnership Board would need to be very tight to ensure focus is maintained.
- There is potential for the Partnership Board to become unwieldy given the number of partners that could be included.
- Conversely, there is also potential of alienation if some partners are not invited to join the Partnership Board.

3.13. The unanimous preferred option of the sub-workstream, Exec/SLT, the Climate Implementation Board and the Service Alignment and Improvement Board was Option 5 - the Creation of a new Climate and Ecological Emergency Sub-

Committee and a Partnership Board.

The establishment of a new Climate and Ecological Emergency sub-committee gives the climate and ecological agendas the accountability and gravitas that is required within the new Council. Delegated powers passed down from Executive also provides the new sub-committee with some teeth to drive the agenda.

The creation of a separate Partnership Board does generate risk for this option. The board could quickly become cumbersome to operate and there is no guarantee that invitees would be prepared to join. There would likely be further challenges around member organisations not co-operating, as well as defining the criteria for membership, which may lead to dissatisfaction from other groups who have not been included.

A terms of reference for the Partnership Board would need to be very tight to keep discussions focussed and the Board effective.

However, at least 50% of outcomes within the Climate Emergency Strategy are either out of Somerset Council's direct control or are reliant on other partners, and a Partnership Board offers a solution that could bring together those partners.

It could also ensure a consistent approach was adopted to tackling climate issues and managing the environment and buildings across the county, as well as offering opportunities to jointly fund schemes and reduce climate impact by better sharing of resources.

This approach would position the new Somerset Council as the leader on the climate and ecological agenda across the County.

4. Consultations undertaken

4.1. The options have been widely consulted upon.

The options were developed in conjunction with the Climate Emergency Senior Responsible Officer, Michele Cusack, Director of Commissioning, Economic and Community Infrastructure, Somerset County Council and Chair of the Climate Implementation Board and Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change at Somerset County Council, Cllr Sarah Dyke.

4.2. The options were presented to the Climate Implementation Board on 10 October 2022, to the LGR Service Alignment and Improvement Board on 8

January 2023 and at a meeting of the Somerset County Council Exec/SLT on 23 January 2023.

- 4.3.** The options have also been developed in conjunction with the Strategic Manager, Democratic Services at Somerset County Council

5. Implications

- 5.1.** The creation of a new Sub-Committee of the Executive of Somerset Council, alongside any delegation of authority will require an update to the constitution. These implications will be discussed with the Strategic Manager, Democratic Services at Somerset County Council who will advise on the next steps.

5.2.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** N/A

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author