

SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 28 October 2021

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Simon Coles, Richard Lees, Sue Lees, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Sarah Wakefield and Loretta Whetlor

Also Present: Councillor Chris Booth (PFH Communities)

(Via Zoom) Councillors Andrew Pritchard, Ray Tully and Francesca Smith (PFH Housing)

Officers: James Barrah, Chris Brown, Paul Fitzgerald, Sam Murrell, Marcus Prouse, Scott Weetch and Jane Windebank

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

40. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Dawn Johnson, Steve Griffiths, who was substituted by Cllr Sue Lees and John Hunt, who was substituted by Cllr Loretta Whetlor.

41. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee

(Minutes of the meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30th September 2021 were circulated with the agenda).

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Community Scrutiny Committee meeting held on the 30th September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

42. Declarations of Interest

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe & District	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Milne	All Items	Porlock	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Pritchard	All items	West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine	Personal	Spoke
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke
Cllr S Wakefield	All Items	Trull, Pitminster & Corfe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllrs Libby Lisgo, Sue Lees, Sarah Wakefield and Loretta Whetlor declared an interest in Item 8 as members of the Working Group reviewing the VCSE grants.

43. **Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to make a statement or ask a question on any item on the Agenda.

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

The comments around the fountain in Wellington were noted.

RESOLVED to note the Community Scrutiny request and recommendation trackers.

45. **Community Scrutiny Forward Plan**

RESOLVED to note and approve the Community Scrutiny Forward Plan.

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

RESOLVED to note the Executive and Full Council Forward Plans.

47. **Review of Voluntary and Community Sector Grants**

Cllr Chris Booth presented the report to Scrutiny and made the following recommendation:-

To recommend the schedule of grants set out within the table 'Proposed Voluntary and Community Sector Grants 2022/23' in section 6.2 of the report to the Executive to be held on 17th November 2021.

Scott Weetch also referred to the comments made by the S151 Officer Paul Fitzgerald in 6.5 of the report.

During the discussion the following points were made: -

- Thanks were extended to the Officers and Councillors who served on the Working Group for their time and expertise in putting the report together.
- The Working Group had been impressed with the strength and depth of work being undertaken by the voluntary sector outlined in the many different zoom presentations they had received.
- CLOWNS - acronym for **C**reating **L**earning **O**pportunities in **W**ester**N** **S**omerset.
- The Wiveliscombe Area Partnership was a greatly valued, multi-agency hub that served the wider community in and around Wiveliscombe. It had been a great source of support during the pandemic and was responsible for amongst many other services the Wivey Link transport group. It was considered a good model for partnership working in a rural area.
- An officer within the council has capacity to incorporate the CIL work which was previously outsourced to the CCS. The Working Group saw the value in returning this to an in-house service.
- Particular mention was made about the good work that both Advice Bureaus carry out across the district and whether any identified underspend could be redistributed to them.
- Concern was raised about longevity and ongoing sustainability of grant funding beyond the life of SWT. It was important for the VCSE to know so that they could plan projects and cashflow before committing expenditure.
 - Some of the contracts will be co-terminus with the life of SWT and are due to end in March of 2023.
 - Others will extend beyond this date and will be honoured for the duration of the contract term but will obviously be reviewed by the successive authority going forward.
- Officers are already having conversations with various groups to determine how it will impact on their services and planning mitigation. This is in line with the other district councils in Somerset who are in a similar position.
- It is not in the power of SWT to make commitments or provide certainty on grants and funding beyond March 2023. This would be the remit of the new Somerset Council or possibly the transitional body/shadow council in setting their budgets for the new authority.
- Councillors and officers will continue to lobby hard to ensure there is as little disruption as possible to the VCSE whilst the transition to the new Unitary Council takes place.

RESOLVED to accept the report recommendations whilst incorporating the key concerns around ongoing sustainability after March 2023 and support for the VCSE.

48. **North Taunton Woolaway Project - Authorisation to make a Compulsory Purchase Order in relation to the North Taunton Woolaway Project**

Cllr Francesca Smith presented the report to Scrutiny via Zoom. Jane Windebank provided a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the current issues.

During the discussion the following points were made: -

- This is a precautionary measure and is aimed at private homeowners who have previously purchased a Woolaway property under the Councils Right to Buy Scheme. It is to ensure that the council has vacant possession of all properties in the North Taunton development area and prevent unnecessary delays on the demolition date. National guidelines recognise the benefit of beginning the CPO process and securing a CPO even if it's not required later. It will also ensure that homeowners are aware of the Council's intentions to proceed with a CPO and thus enter more readily into meaningful negotiations.
- The paragraphs in italics (2.5 and 4.7) will be removed from the final report.
- Issues around decant and moving need to be handled sensitively and supportively. It will be difficult, painful and emotional for some residents to give up their family home. The housing team are working hard to support residents in this situation.
- The CPO only relates to private homeowners and not tenants. The new development is 100% social housing. There is no private home ownership. The options for tenants who have been decanted are that they can remain in the temporary accommodation if they wish to make it their permanent home; move to an alternative new home or can move back to the scheme on completion.
- Since the Council moved to re-develop the North Taunton Area, tenants occupying the Woolaway homes in the scheme have had their Right To Buy frozen. Future purchases on the development area have been put on hold due to the demolition order on the site.
- Due to the well-known inherent problems associated with Woolaway construction, it is difficult to obtain a mortgage and purchase on the open market. This also proves a problem for someone trying to sell as they may be in a negative or low equity situation.
- Tenants are usually waiting for between 12-18months for a suitable property, but this depends on their choices and whether they are waiting for a specific home in a specific road. This can prolong the process. Tenants in decant are moved to gold banding and awarded extra back-dated "waiting points" which gives them high priority for re-housing but they could be competing alongside other tenants who are also in the same decant situation and have the same required housing need. COVID-19 also delayed the re-build on the Phase A development, so those tenants have had to wait longer.

- Financial compensation (disturbance payment) will be offered to those homeowners who are forced to move and the Council offers an incentive scheme to encourage vacant possession over and above the market value of the CPO. This will assist those who are looking to purchase a traditional property on the open market and may be facing a funding shortfall. Equity loans are also available to owner-occupiers, and this has already been taken up and enabled owners to move to new homes.
- Some of the homeowners may consider moving on to social housing via the Homefinder route due to a change in their personal circumstances.

RESOLVED to accept the report recommendations whilst highlighting that the SWT Housing Directorate continues to fully support vulnerable households/individuals who find themselves in these circumstances and are forced to move.

(The Meeting ended at 7.25 pm)