SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 23 February 2022

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Ian Aldridge, Simon Coles, Tom Deakin, Ed Firmin, Steve Griffiths, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield and Loretta Whetlor

Officers: Andrew Pritchard, James Barrah, Chris Brown, Stuart Noyce, Kerry Prisco and Steve Hughes

Also Present: Councillors Derek Perry and Francesca Smith

(The meeting commenced at 6.18 pm)

79. **Apologies**

The Chair advised that the running order of the agenda for the meeting had changed. Items eleven and twelve were brought forward in the running order to immediately follow item eight.

Apologies were received from councillors Richard Lees, Dawn Johnson who instead joined the meeting via Zoom, Andrew Pritchard who was substituted by Ian Aldridge, Mark Lithgow who was substituted by Ed Firmin and John Hunt who was substituted by Loretta Whetlor.

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

The Committee resolved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 27th January 2022.

81. **Declarations of Interest**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Councillor or Clerk of a County, Town or Parish Council or any other Local Authority:-

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Reason	Action Taken
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr D Mansell	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Milne	All Items	Porlock	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

82. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

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

The Committee resolved to note the request and recommendation trackers.

84. **Community Scrutiny Forward Plan**

The Committee resolved to note the Community Scrutiny Forward Plan.

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

It was asked whether the Longforth Masterplan and the Wellington and Cullompton Stations Governance Arrangements reports were the same item. Officers responded that they would seek confirmation and provide a written response to the committee.

The Committee resolved to note the Forward Plans.

86. **Sports and Leisure Management (Everyone Active) Bi-Annual Report**

The Chair welcomed David Greenwood and Mark Washington from Sports and Leisure Management Ltd (SLM), Everyone Active.

The Assistant Director for Commercial Services introduced David Greenwood, the Regional Contractor Manager and Mark Washington, Contract Manager for Everyone Active who ran the Council's leisure facilities on behalf of the Council. Updated the Committee that the report came to Community Scrutiny as part of the commitment in place to report every six months on the performance of the contract. The report covered the period Aril-September 2021.

David Greenwood and Mark Washington delivered a presentation on Everyone Active and raised the below points:

- Had been working with the Council as their leisure partner for nearly three years but they had not been a normal three years due to the pandemic. Commenced the contract on 1st August 2019, almost immediately started on the agreed refurbishment programme for the buildings which ran until the end of 2019. The pandemic then began in February.
- The pandemic limited what leisure could be offered at different points over the reporting period. At the start of 2021 a national lockdown was in place. From 29th March outdoor leisure facilities, such as tennis courts were allowed to reopen. Leisure centres were allowed to open from mid-April but with severe restrictions. From May could open up further and then from July could run the leisure centre as normal as all restrictions were removed.
- Performance for April-September 2021 gradually improved over the period. In October there was continued improvement however, from November and December performance dropped again due to the Omicron Variant emerging.
- Gym membership numbers had now picked up. Blackbrook and Wellington were very healthy in terms of membership, Wellsprings was not doing quite as well.
- Swimming lessons are doing well across the centres. There was significant demand for swimming lessons following children not having been able to have them during lockdown. However, there were limited teachers in the industry and there were limited time slots for swimming lessons.
- As part of Community Outreach Everyone Active delivered community walks. The Ruishton and Creech St Michael Health Walks had now resumed following Covid.
- The golf course and high ropes in Vivary Park had done very well and had benefitted from the number of staycations which Covid had led to. However, the recent storm had caused some challenges as a result of trees coming down but Everyone Active were looking forward to the summer and hoped to have another good season.
- Have been planning for events throughout 2022 and would continue to organise more events. In particular, were looking to hold more arts and culture events at Wellsprings.
- Most feedback received had been positive and actions had been taken based on feedback. For example, online booking had been implemented during the pandemic and maintained since based on feedback.
- October was an excellent month but then Omicron slowed progress. However, January trading had been strong as public confidence increased.
- Staffing was a challenge due to the national staffing shortage.
- A new national chain gym was due to open soon in Taunton which could impact upon Everyone Active's recovery.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- It was asked what had been done in terms of marketing to get people back into the gym who had previously attended. It was responded by SLM that significant marketing had been undertaken. Pricing of membership options were also lower than prior to the pandemic to hopefully attract new members. Had done some outreach work and were going to increase this to raise awareness of Everyone Active and attract people in.

- It was asked if research had been done about the barriers to people re-joining gyms. It was responded by SLM that extensive research had been done. The rate of recovery following Covid had been relatively quick. However, some aspects, such as rehabilitation facilities had not rebounded so quickly as they were aimed at a more vulnerable demographic who were more cautious about returning after Covid. The pattern Everyone Active was seeing was the pattern that would be expected.
- It was asked how events at Wellsprings were advertised. It was responded by SLM that most event promotion was done via social media streams and targeted those most likely to wish to attend. Big ticket platforms such as SeeTickets were also used for promotions and members were sent communications about events.
- It was asked about the roof of one of the buildings which was in need of repair and who had responsibility for it. Officers responded that the repair to the roof was the responsibility of the Council as the Council still owned the building.
- It was raised that there was a lack of leisure facilities in West Somerset compared to Taunton. It was responded by SLM that they were committed to the outreach programme, which included delivering activities in West Somerset.
- It was raised that social media was not accessible for everyone in terms of advertising events.
- It was asked if membership target numbers had been reforecast since Covid. It was responded by SLM that the numbers shown were still the same long-term aspiration numbers.
- It was asked what the churn rate of members was. It was responded by SLM that about 30-40% of members had been lost during the pandemic but that most were now back. The Somerset West and Taunton sites performed at the same level as most other sites Everyone Active had across the country.
- It was asked what the return on investment was for Facebook and Google advertising. It was responded by SLM that this was tracked but they did not have the precise figures to hand.
- It was asked whether events and classes could be taken out to rural areas and about Everyone Active's future plans for its outreach programme. It was responded by SLM that the outreach programme was now starting back up after Covid and would continue to be developed. The outreach programme relied upon local community groups' support.
- It was asked if there was sufficient staff to support the membership and, if not, whether active recruitment was being undertaken. It was responded by SLM that there were sufficient staff to open centres and there was not a risk of this not being the case. However, there were some pinch points where there were limited numbers of staff such as lifeguards and swimming teachers. Active recruitment was being undertaken.

The Chair thanked David Greenwood, Mark Washington and the Assistant Director for Commercial Services for attending the meeting.

The Committee resolved to note the recommendations in the report:

2.1 The scrutiny committee is requested to support the following recommendations: -

a) Note the contents of the six-monthly update for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021

87. **Executive Portfolio Holder for Leisure - Cllr Derek Perry**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Perry.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure raised that SLM had faced challenges during the pandemic but had recovered as well as possible and were committed to starting to reinstate the Outreach Programme and expand it and highlighted that the events SLM put on were varied.

During the debate the following points were raised:

- It was asked if there was a commitment to building a swimming pool in Minehead. It was responded by the Portfolio Holder that land had been set aside and ringfenced for a pool in Minehead but the plans for delivering a pool were not all in place. It was hoped that a community led group would build the pool and deliver it, with support from the Council. However, other options for delivery instead of a community led group were being looked at in case a community led option was not viable. Nothing was guaranteed though. It was added by officers that running a leisure centre was costly, so cost was not just based on building a leisure centre, which would be a multi-million-pound cost, but also the sustainability of running the site. The land that had been ringfenced was the only suitable and viable parcel of land in the Council's ownership in the area for a leisure facility which was why it had been set aside.
- It was raised that a pool being built in the vicinity of Williton or Watchet may serve more people than a pool in Minehead based on population. The Portfolio Holder responded that the idea behind having a pool in Minehead was that fewer people would have to travel to reach it as Minehead was the most populated town in the area.
- It was raised that Everyone Active's outreach programme sessions could be delivered in local halls in West Somerset.
- The Portfolio Holder noted that there was a lack of access to facilities in West Somerset and that this contributed to the lack of opportunity in West Somerset and action should be taken to improve opportunities.
- It was asked if any further details of the intended objectives of the Outreach Programme could be given. Officers responded that Outreach had been part of SLM's bid for the contract. However, no one had anticipated the events over the first three years of the contract. Now that the impacts of the pandemic were lessening SLM would be expected to increase their outreach offer and officers would be discussing the offer with them. More details would be available at the next update to the Community Scrutiny Committee which would likely be in June.
- It was raised that the Steam Coast Trail cycle path was not complete and currently ended at Blue Anchor but would be beneficial to complete. The Portfolio Holder responded that they would look into this. Officers added that there was provision in the budget for the Steam Coast Trail with funding for it having been provided by Hinkley Point C.

- It was raised that Minehead used to have a swimming pool but it was demolished. Any pool newly opened would need to be carefully managed.

The Committee resolved to note the Portfolio Holder for Leisure's report.

Councillors Tom Deakin and David Mansell left the meeting for part of this item so could not take part in the vote on it.

88. **Community Scrutiny Chair's Annual Report**

The Committee resolved to note the report.

89. **HRA Financial Performance 2021/22 Q3**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing introduced the report:
- Noted that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was still experiencing the after-effects of Covid-19.
- Updated that the HRA overspend had been reduced to £354,000 since the last report to the Committee.

The Management Accounting Lead provided a further introduction to the report:
- Raised that the management team had taken a number of steps to reduce the projected overspend and ensure reserves could be preserved. This included improving the voids position by letting an additional 50 garages and reviewing the voids process.

During the debate the following points were raised:
- It was asked what else had been done in terms of efficiency measures to control costs and whether anything which had been done had impacted upon service delivery. Officers responded that the reduction in spending on the capital programme, partly because of Covid, had contributed to the reduced overspend. Services had not been impacted by efficiency measures. Efficiency measures which would be taken had been detailed in a previous report brought to the committee.
- It was asked how many garages remained unrented and whether thought had been given to putting electric vehicle (EV) charging points in garages ready for people with electric vehicles. Officers responded that the number of currently void garages could be provided after the meeting. EV charging points in garages had not been considered and could be looked into. Investing in EV charging points was something the Council was looking at engaging in for some of the new homes the Council was creating but there were costs and challenges which could mean that it would take time to be able to invest in EV chanrging points in garages.
- It was asked how the figures for depreciation were reached. Officers responded that the different components of buildings such as boilers and windows were considered, and it was calculated how much it would cost to replace these elements at current market rate. Those depreciation funds were then set aside and used to fund the replacement of these elements in properties which then leads to appreciation.

- It was asked about the projected underspend on compliance surveys of £326,000 mentioned in the report but that there was also mentioned in the report increased costs due to compliance requirements increasing. It was responded by officers that the compliance budget had been an estimated value and that not as much had been spent as anticipated. The paragraph which mentioned the increasing compliance requirements related to risks and uncertainty around compliance regulations which had not been accounted for in the budget estimates for the year.

The Committee resolved to note the recommendations in the report:

2.1 This report is to be noted as the HRA's forecast financial performance and projected reserves position for 2021/22 financial year as 31 December 2022.

90. **Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent Regeneration**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing introduced the report:

- The report concerned twelve flats at Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent which were in poor condition. A decision on their future was needed and the report highlighted a way forward.

The Assistant Director for Development and Regeneration provided a further introduction to the report:

- Had hoped to carry out decarbonisation activity on these properties to make them more environmentally friendly and bring up the standard of the properties. However, surveys had identified that the structure of these properties was poor. The properties were beyond economic repair and had reached the end of their life so it was recommended that they be decanted and demolished. The funds for decarbonisation and improvements would instead be spent on other properties. All customers currently living in the properties had been spoken to and were generally supportive, as was the one leaseholder who lived in the property. The shops had been more surprised and talks with them were ongoing as their lease would end.
- The report recommended that customers from the properties be given a Gold level banding in Homefinder. It was believed there was sufficient turnover via Homefinder for the customers to obtain suitable alternative residence within the planned timeframe for decanting the buildings. Customers in Wordsworth drive would be given Gold banding first and then a year later customers in Coleridge Crescent would be given Gold banding.
- Permission to purchase the property from the leaseholder was sought as part of the report. Before the report progresses to the Executive the intention is also to add to the report an option that if the owner occupier could not afford to purchase a market like-for-like property at the time as selling their property to the Council then the Council would provide an equity loan.
- The report detailed that compensation would need to be paid to the shop lessees.
- The buildings would be demolished once decanted.
- The report did not include options for future use of the site after demolition but a report on this would be produced on this at a later date. The land could be

left fallow for a while as it would likely allow more grant funding to be obtained.
- Ongoing tests would be undertaken on the properties until the decant took place to ensure the building and area remained safe throughout the process.

During the debate the following points were raised:
- It was asked how the equity scheme would work and whether it would be paid directly paid from the Council. It was responded by officers that this would be direct through the HRA and use HRA funds. The scheme had been used successfully previously on the North Taunton site.
- Concern was raised about leaving the land fallow for a period of time. Officers responded that leaving the land fallow for 3 to 7 years would enable significant grant funding to be obtained and that building new affordable homes would continue elsewhere in the district in the meantime.
- It was suggested that it would be worthwhile making representations to the relevant bodies regarding the issue of land needing to be kept fallow to obtain grant funding as it hindered homes being built.
- It was asked why customers needed to be put through Homefinder and why they could not just be moved from one property to another as if they had to bid for properties then they may lose the bidding process. It was responded by officers that Homefinder was a fair system for people looking for housing. It allowed customers to have choice between available properties. The customers would have Gold banding which would mean that their bid would be competing against fewer other bids and their bids would be more likely to be successful. The target was to rehouse everyone within a year of them receiving Gold banding. If there was a customer with particular needs it may be possible to directly transfer them to a suitable property, but this was not common and Homefinder was used where possible.
- It was asked if the equity loan was a lifed loan and what interest had to be paid on it. Officers responded that the equity loan was an interest free loan. Instead, the Council would receive a proportion of the growth of the property value the customer had used the equity loan to buy when they either came to sell the property or decided to buy the Council out.
- It was asked whether if the site was sold to a housing association they would be able to obtain grant funding to build homes sooner than the Council would be able to and whether this could be done to avoid leaving the land fallow. Officers responded that they would provide a written response as to whetehr this would be possible. Valuations for the site were currently being sought.
- If was asked if an equity loan was made, if it was 10% of the value of a property that was bought, as the property appreciated, the 10% would be a stake which would increase in value as the property increased in value. Officers responded that was correct.
- It was raised that if the properties were demolished then there would be fewer properties to bid for on Homefinder. Concerns were also raised about customers being able to move to local properties and stay within their local area. Officers responded that most customers had been supportive of the plans, with only two instances of customers being disappointed. Work had begun with Homefinder to look at where housing would be available. Housing needs assessments for each customer had also begun to be undertaken. It could also provide an opportunity for customers to move to properties which

better suited their needs. They may also be able to move to more energy efficient properties.
- Exploring and considering other uses relating to housing for the land if left fallow was encouraged.

The Committee resolved to note the recommendations in the report:

2.1 The Community Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the following recommendations prior to the report's progression to the Executive Committee:

(a) To approve the decanting of tenants from Wordsworth Drive Flats with the awarding of gold band status in April 2022. Gold band status will support tenants secure alternative suitable accommodation.
(b) To approve the decanting of tenants from Coleridge Crescent Flats with the awarding of gold band status at a time to be determined by the Director of Housing and Communities in conjunction with the portfolio holder for Housing.
(c) To approve the purchase through mutual consent one leasehold property at Wordsworth Drive flats and compensate the owner in line with statutory compensation requirements.
(d) To note officers will agree the closure date and compensation with the shop lessee to ensure Wordsworth block is available for demolition.
(e) To approve the demolition of Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent Flats at a time to be determined by the Director of Housing and Communities in conjunction with the portfolio holder for Housing.
(f) Officers to return to the Council with options for the future use of the site.
(g) To approve a supplementary budget of £1,111,700 and to delegate the funding of the scheme to the Section 151 Officer.

(The Meeting ended at 8.30 pm)