

SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 3rd November, 2021,
6.15 pm

The John Meikle Room - The Deane
House



Somerset West
and Taunton

Members: Gwil Wren (Chair), Nick Thwaites (Vice-Chair), Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Marcus Barr, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Barrie Hall, John Hassall, Libby Lisgo, Danny Wedderkopp and Loretta Whetlor

Agenda

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 1st September 2021 as a correct record.

(Pages 5 - 10)

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive and note any declarations of disclosable pecuniary or prejudicial or personal interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The personal interests of Councillors and Clerks of Somerset County Council, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes.)

4. Public Participation

The Chair to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public who have submitted any questions or statements, please note, a three minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak before Councillors debate the issue.

Temporary measures during the Coronavirus pandemic

Due to the temporary legislation (within the Coronavirus Act 2020, which allowed for use of virtual meetings) coming to an end on 6 May 2021, the council's committee meetings will now take place in the office buildings at the John Meikle Room, Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton. Unfortunately due to capacity requirements the Chamber at West Somerset House is not able to be used at this current moment.

Following the Government guidance on measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), the council meeting rooms will have very limited capacity. With this in mind, we will be recommending that those members of the public who have registered to speak to attend the meetings in person at the office buildings, if they wish. (We will still be offering to those members of the public that are not comfortable in attending, for their statements to be read out by a member of the Governance team). Please can we urge all members of the public who are only interested in listening to the debate to view our live webcasts from the safety of their own home to help prevent the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

- 5. Corporate Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers** (Pages 11 - 14)

To update the Scrutiny Committee on the progress of resolutions and recommendations from previous meetings of the Committee.
- 6. Corporate Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan** (Pages 15 - 16)

To receive items and review the Forward Plan.
- 7. Executive and Full Council Forward Plan** (Pages 17 - 20)

To note the Executive and Full Council Forward Plans.
- 8. Innovation District Update** (Pages 21 - 36)

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Asset Management, Cllr Marcus Kravis.

This report provides an update on the establishment of SWT as an Innovation District as per a request by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.
- 9. To consider reports from Executive Councillors - Cllr Federica Smith Roberts** (Pages 37 - 44)

To consider reports from Executive Councillors on their respective Portfolios;

- i. Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts – Leader of the Council & Communications

3.2 of the Scrutiny Terms of Reference state that the Scrutiny Committee may review and scrutinise and ask questions of the Leader, lead Councillors, the Executive in relation to their portfolios.



JAMES HASSETT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Please note that this meeting will be recorded. At the start of the meeting the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded and webcast. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore unless you are advised otherwise, by entering the Council Chamber and speaking during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact the officer as detailed above.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions. There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions. Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 3 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chair will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate. Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chair will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors begin to debate the item.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group. These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room. Full Council, Executive, and Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

The meeting room, including the Council Chamber at The Deane House are on the first floor and are fully accessible. Lift access to The John Meikle Room, is available from the main ground floor entrance at The Deane House. The Council Chamber at West Somerset House is on the ground floor and is fully accessible via a public entrance door. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available across both locations. An induction loop operates at both The Deane House and West Somerset House to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team via email: governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

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SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 1 September 2021

Present: Councillor

Councillors Nick Thwaites, Benet Allen, Marcus Barr, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, John Hassall, Libby Lisgo, Loretta Whetlor and Janet Lloyd

Officers: Paul Fitzgerald, James Barra, Paul McClean, Andrew Pritchard, Richard Sealy and Alison North

Also Present: Councillors Francesca Smith, Vivienne Stock-Williams and Ross Henley

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

44. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Aldridge, Hall and Wren.

Councillor Lloyd attended as a substitute.

45. Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee held on 4 August 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on the 4th August 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

46. Declarations of Interest

There were no additional Declarations of Interest.

47. Public Participation

There was no Public Participation.

48. Corporate Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers

An update was provided in relation to the Planning Phosphates tracker which was read out by the Governance Specialist.

49. Corporate Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

Bringing forward a review of The Firepool Development to be considered by the Committee following the next All Councillor briefing was requested.

50. Executive and Full Council Forward Plan

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee noted the Executive and Full Council Forward Plan.

51. **2021/22 General Fund Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 1 (30 June 2021)**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the item to the Committee.

The report provided an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Council's General Fund (GF) for the financial year 2021/22 (as at 30 June 2021). The position within the current financial year continued to be significantly affected by the ongoing impact of COVID and the pace of economic recovery; and was relying heavily on the reserves prudently set aside to mitigate business volatility and risk. A thorough analysis of additional risks and uncertainties facing the Council had been identified and careful monitoring of these would continue for early indications of emerging financial pressures.

There was currently headroom in general reserves to cover new in-year pressures, this could fall to minimum levels because of estimated costs to implement a unitary council start to develop. It was prudent to retain funding for what would inevitably be unavoidable costs of structural change not currently within budget. This was the first reported forecast to Members at an early stage in the financial year, and whilst best endeavours were used to forecast with as much accuracy as possible, there was previous experience of changes in forecasts each quarter and to year end. Despite this, the Council remains financially resilient and continued to forecast adequate reserve balances at this stage.

The Revenue Budget forecast was projecting an overspend of £237k.

The total approved Capital Budget was £158.7m. The profiled budget spend for 2021/22 was £76.6m. This was currently forecasting a net overspend of £158k.

The unearmarked reserves were projected to be £5.556m which is £3.156m above the recommended minimum balance.

The earmarked reserves closing balance was projected to be £23m.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- Collation of parking income was requested along with the projected shortfall with comparison to pre pandemic levels.
- Cash payments could be recorded along with pay on foot, colleagues in the parking team track income which was kept up to date monthly to look at trends and analysis to track data.
- Trends in footfall data could be considered to ensure a view is taken in demands and parking requirements. The committee were reminded that this was still not a typical year due to free park and ride provision and ongoing home working as a result of the pandemic.
- Consideration of future budget setting against an income would require a view to have to be formed in years 2022/23.
- £51k savings from the parking budget was questioned.
- Concerns were expressed that there was no indication in the budget that income targets would not be met and no indication in the loss of parking income.
- The current car parking income figures were consistently around a 30% reduction on the pre pandemic levels.
- Concerns were expressed that reserves would be needed to meet the shortfall in parking income.
- Appendix A compared to the budget agreed in February was considered, with a requested for further information in comparison to the detail of the variances.

- Risks were mitigated as a whole when compared to income lines, allocating contingencies aligned to quarterly reporting.
- The importance of ongoing income and accurate monitoring of this was emphasised by the Committee, members were assured that the levels of risk for car parking was assessed and recognised it may not have been communicated effectively in the past.
- Machines operating ineffectively was a criticism for loss of income in some instances, with reference to Tangier car parking machine.
- The future of West Somerset House was a decision for the Unitary authority which would have a bearing across the Council, the building remained as a Council asset and tenants remained based at the location.
- It was questioned what support from central government would be received to address the shortfall.
- It was questioned what the estimated cost of the Unitary Council would be.
- The Committee were reminded that the Asset Management Strategy was on the Full Council forward plan until the end of the year.
- Parking income had not returned to pre-covid levels and the forecast was for this to remain at least for the rest of this financial year.
- The budget estimate set for the year included historical investment properties.
- An assumed 1.75% provision of the staff pay award was set in the budget.
- There was nothing in the forecast spend setting out the Unitary costs.
- There was risk and uncertainty in the estimates with assumptions needing to be made, there was no certainty in relation to car parking funding beyond the end of the financial year.
- With the end of the National Lockdown it was a reasonable assumption the relief would be on the first quarter but it was considered safe to assume there would be no further relief unless there was an event where further lockdown measures impacted on parking. The shortfall would be met by the Councils own reserves.
- The Asset Management plan continued to evolve but had slowed due to staff turnover.
- The narrative for North Hill, Minehead was questioned. There had been some emergency work with the risk assessed of the continued instability of the rock face with vegetation causing this.
- Exposure to liability was estimated at around £800k outside of the existing budget to undertake the work of stabilising the rockface.
- Work had been delayed due to staffing issues and a qualified surveyor required to undertake the work.
- Future estimation of liabilities of assets in terms of maintenance had been undertaken.
- A report around the future liabilities of assets was requested, it was estimated a joint report would be considered early in the new year.
- The station car park work took up a number of spaces, combined with the new car park it was estimated that this had made some impact on the income.
- When reviewing the future local car parks committee members requested officers consult local ward members for their views.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee recommended the Executive:

- a) review and note the Council's forecast financial performance and projected reserves position for 2021/22 financial year as at 30 June 2021.
- b) support the transfer of £1.145m from the Budget Volatility and Risk Earmarked Reserve to contribute towards the estimated shortfall in parking income.
- c) approve a budget virement to realign Capital Budgets funded by Better Care Fund grant income.

52. **2021/22 Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring as at Quarter 1 (30 June 2021)**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report.

This report provides an update on the projected outturn financial position of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the financial year 2021/22 (as at 30 June 2021).

The revenue position was under significant pressure as it continued to be affected by the ongoing impact of COVID and operating within an environment of economic recovery. The service had a backlog of responsive and planned maintenance and compliance works to be undertaken. Costs were escalating in terms of materials, staffing, compliance, and servicing costs. Future financial pressures were still to be confirmed in terms of staff pay award, income collection, cost of implementing regulatory changes, and the cost of implementing a unitary authority. A thorough analysis of risks and uncertainties facing the HRA had been undertaken and careful monitoring of these would continue for early indications of emerging financial pressures.

There was sufficient capacity in general reserves to cover new in-year pressures identified to date and the current forecast outturn position. This significantly reduced the HRA's headroom to react to any new pressures that could emerge in this or future financial years.

Whilst best endeavours were made to forecast with as much accuracy as possible, a historical change had been expected in forecasts each quarter and to year end. However, action was required to control spending to ensure the outturn was on or close to budget.

The housing senior management team were working through options to see what could be done to contain the overall position.

The current HRA Revenue Budget forecast is a projected overspend of £610k. The HRA Capital Programme has a total approved budget of £118m. The profiled budgeted spend for 2021/22 is £29m and this is currently forecast to underspend by £7.7m.

The unearmarked reserves were projected to be £2.273m which is £273k above the recommended minimum balance of £2m. The earmarked reserves opening balance was £1.1m. It was proposed that some earmarked reserve balances would need to be returned to general reserves to mitigate in 1 year budget pressure.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- It was questioned how levels of rent collections had impacted on the HRA and the how the cut in Universal Credit had impacted this.
- The rent recovery and income team supported customers with advice and communication to support tenants through the pandemic.
- Information had been broken down into arrears which related to Housing Benefit and Universal credit arrears.
- A newsletter was being provided to tenants to provide support to those in arrears.
- The North Taunton Project remained on course for delivery.
- The capital financing requirement had generated a saving due to changes in the right to buy scheme.
- The service charge offset areas of work which contributed to grounds maintenance and communal areas. There were many pressures and repairs and

maintenance costs was a recognised challenge for budget setting, the service charge was based on trends and known costs.

- There had been a revenue forecast overspend of £610k, with the recommendation setting out £869k, information relating to the variance in the figures was requested.
- The staff pay award was included in the recommendations due to the costs being met through reserves rather than budget reductions.

1. The Corporate Scrutiny Committee recommended that the Executive review and note the HRA's forecast financial performance and projected reserves position for 2021/22 financial year as at 30 June 2021.
2. The Executive recommends that Full Council approves the reallocation of £869k of earmarked reserves to general reserves to support the Revenue Budget.
3. The Executive agrees in principle that the final pay award will be funded from General Reserves.

53. **Corporate Performance Report**

The portfolio holder introduced the report.

The paper provided an update on the council's performance for the first quarter (1st April 2021 – 30th June 2021) of the 2021/22 financial year. The report included information for a range of key performance indicators and included the key business risks for the council.

As part of the Councils commitment to transparency and accountability the report provided an update on performance for a number of key indicators. The pandemic continued to have a significant impact and the council's response was being achieved in addition to the regular day-to-day responsibilities.

The table in Appendix 1 included the councils Key Performance Indicators and set out how the council had performed for the first quarter of 2021/22 financial year. For this financial year, the number of key performance indicators had been increased so that more council services were included.

The table included a "direction of travel" arrow to show whether performance had improved, worsened or stayed the same, since the end of 2020/21. The key performance indicators had been aligned to the 4 key themes of the Corporate Strategy.

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- The average relet time was set at 44 days, the turnaround time was questioned and considered if it could be improved.
- There were two types of voids, minor and major voids. There were more major voids experienced with extensive refurbishment works required such as kitchen and bathroom replacements.
- Average relet times had been 22 days but due to various checks and challenges around staffing some trades had increased the turnaround time with the performance of reletting voids delayed and how services worked collectively across teams. This was also common across housing associations with the sector coping with delays due to staffing and the pandemic.
- It was questioned what engagement was undertaken with the private sector.

- CR11 and cyber security were considered, it was considered this would be a higher priority than other risks due to the threat. Actions were ongoing to reduce the risk in relation to cyber security which had recently been reduced to reflect the position at the end of quarter 1.
- Average call wait times were considered, with a significant improvement experienced in the last two years.
- The Somerset Waste Partnership change in providers was considered along with the means of redress with the performance of the new provider was questioned with more resources used due to the additional volume in calls relating to waste.
- There were provisions in the contract to seek redress where there were service failings. This had been picked up on behalf of all partners and was being pursued with negotiations and discussions ongoing with the contractor.
- Additional costs of delivering the service due to Covid and service failings were being considered in conjunction.
- Members were reminded of the Member ICT and Cyber Security briefing scheduled on 6th September and Councillors were encouraged to attend due to the limited attendance.
- More information was requested in relation to the resolution of the issues around phosphate impact and delays on Planning applications.
- It was questioned if the report due to be considered at a future Executive Committee would be an update or a plan to provide a solution to delays in Planning applications due to Phosphates.
- Assurance was provided that work to address the phosphates situation was ongoing and looked encouraging.

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the report.

(The Meeting ended at 8.21 pm)

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL
CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN ANSWERS TRACKER 2021/22

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Cttee Request for information	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Response to request for information	Date response of	Scrutiny Officer Comments/Update
07/07/21	Q) <i>Outturn Report - Can the Finance team provide a comparison with this year's outturn and last years on debts written off?</i>	Cllr Ross Henley/Finance			Understood this information can be provided.
07/07/21	Q) <i>Performance Report – Extensions to Planning applications due to phosphates – further detail on how many had had multiple extensions?</i>	Cllr Mike Rigby / Planning	We don't hold that information and I am not clear of the relevance of whether they have had multiple extensions. The more pertinent information is the number of applications which are currently held in abeyance due to the need to provide measures to mitigate the impact of development on the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site. As Rebecca reported to Planning Committee we currently have approximately 100 applications equating to approximately 2,300 dwellings and 13 sites awaiting the	01/09/21	N/A

			discharge of conditions equating to approximately 450 dwellings.		
01/09/21	<i>2021/22 General Fund Financial Monitoring as at Qtr1</i> Q) Collation of parking income was requested along with the projected shortfall with comparison to pre pandemic levels.	Cllr R Henley & Cllr M Rigby / Finance/ Parking			
01/09/21	<i>2021/22 General Fund Financial Monitoring as at Qtr1 –</i> Q) Appendix A compared to the budget agreed in February was considered, with a requested for further information in comparison to the detail of the variances.	Cllr R Henley / Finance			
01/09/21	<i>2021/22 – HRA Financial Monitoring as at Q1</i> - There had been a revenue forecast overspend of £610k, with the recommendation setting out £869k, information relating to the variance in the figures was requested.	Cllr F Smith / Housing			

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL
CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION TRACKER 2021/22

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Recommendation	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Final Decision/ Response to recommendation/	Date of response	Implemented?	Officer Comments/Update
2/06/21	<p>Resolved:- The Corporate Scrutiny Committee reviewed performance against the Commercial Property Investment Strategy (CPIS) and supported the following recommendations to the Executive;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For transparency, gross and net income from the commercial investments to be made more readily available from the six monthly reviews with a link to be provided in future reports to the SWT website where this information is posted. 2. The communications underpinning the CPIS both internally and externally need to be improved upon considerably, as it was considered important that people understood what the Council was 	Full Council - Cllr R Henley – PFH Corporate Resources	<p>Full Council – 7th September 2021 –</p> <p>The Corporate Scrutiny Committee reviewed performance against the Commercial Property Investment Strategy (CPIS) and supported the following recommendations to the Executive; [NB this paper did not go to the Executive - therefore these recommendations will be considered by the Commercial Investment Board] For transparency, gross and net income from the commercial investments to be made more readily available from the six monthly reviews with a link to be provided in future reports to the SWT website where this information is posted. The communications underpinning</p>	7 th September 2021	Not clear if CIB has considered these recommendations have been adopted.	Report not planned to go to Executive – response to be reported in Full Council report and in introduction by PFH which has indicated the recommendations will be considered by the Commercial Investment Board in due course.

	<p>trying to do and why, and how this work inter-linked with the Corporate Priorities of the Council.</p> <p>3. The Corporate Scrutiny Committee was pleased to be informed that the legacy commercial properties will be incorporated in the next scheduled review paper that is to go to Full Council in December, but in advance of this, a light-touch document is requested to be circulated to the Committee.</p>		<p>the CPIS both internally and externally need to be improved upon considerably, as it was considered important that people understood what the Council was trying to do and why, and how this work inter-linked with the Corporate Priorities of the Council. The Corporate Scrutiny Committee was pleased to be informed that the legacy commercial properties will be incorporated in the next scheduled review paper that is to go to Full Council in December, but in advance of this, a light-touch document is requested to be circulated to the Committee.</p>			
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Total Recommendations for 21/22:

Agreed:

Agreed in Part:

Not Agreed:

TBD:

CORPORATE SCRUTINY

Meeting	Draft Agenda Items	Lead PFH/ Lead Officer
3rd November 2021	Reports from Executive PFH - Leader of the Council	Cllr F Smith-Roberts
SRD = 22 October	Taunton Innovation District Report	Cllr M Kravis & M Wathen
Exec RD = 5 November		
Informal Exec RD = 5 Oct		
SMT RD = 22 September		
1st December 2021	Financial Performance 2021/22 Q2	Cllr R Henley / P. Fitzgerald
SRD = 19 November	Corporate Performance Report Q2	Cllr R Henley / M. Riches & R. Sealy
Exec RD = 3 December	Tower Street	N. Kirbyshire & Cllr M Rigby
Informal Exec RD = 2 Nov	General Fund 2022/23 Draft Budget Update	Cllr R Henley / P. Fitzgerald
SMT RD = 20 October	Public Transport Task and Finish Report	Cllr L Whetlor / M Prouse/S. Murrell
5th January 2022	Reports from Executive PFH - tbc	
SRD = 17 December	Infrastructure Funding Statement	Cllr M Rigby & A. Blom-Cooper
Exec RD = 7 January		
Informal Exec RD = 30 Nov		
SMT RD = 17 November		
26th January 2022	General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23	Cllr R Henley / P. Fitzgerald
Budget Special	Council Tax Setting 2022/23	
SRD = 14 January		
Exec RD = 28 January		
Informal Exec RD = 4 Jan		
SMT RD = 8 December		
2nd February 2022	Reports from Executive PFH - tbc	
SRD = 21 January		
Exec RD = 4 February		
Informal Exec RD = 4 Jan		
SMT RD = 8 December		
2nd March 2022	Financial Performance 2021/22 Q3	Cllr R Henley / P. Fitzgerald
SRD = 18 February	Capital Investment and Treasury Strategy 2022/23	Cllr R Henley / P. Fitzgerald
Exec RD = 4 March	Corporate Performance Report Q3	Cllr R Henley / M. Riches
Informal Exec RD = 1 Feb	Reports from Executive PFH - tbc	
SMT RD = 19 January		
6th April 2022	Reports from Executive PFH - tbc	
SRD = 25 March		
Exec RD = 6 April		
Informal Exec RD = 8 March		
SMT RD = 23 February		

FULL COUNCIL

Meeting	Report Deadline	Draft Agenda Items	Lead Officer
19 October 2021	7 October 2021	Community Governance Review for the Unparished Area of Taunton - Publication of Terms of Reference	Marcus Prouse/Amy Tregellas
Special Meeting		NO MORE ITEMS	
16 November 2021	4 November 2021	To consider a proposal for a Local Government Reorganisation Joint Scrutiny Committee	Kevin Williams
Special Meeting		Appointment of CEO	?
		NO MORE ITEMS	
7 December 2021	25 November 2021	Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review	Scott Weetch
		North Taunton CPO	Chris Brown/Jane Windebank
		Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town – Feedback	Fiona Webb
		Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide	Fiona Webb
		Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23	Mark Antonelli
		Statement of Licensing and Gambling Policy	John Rendell
		NO MORE ITEMS	
18 January 2022	6 January 2022	Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan	Graeme Thompson/Tim Bacon
Special Meeting		Asset Management Strategy	Andrew Pritchard/Chris Hall
		Half year review of the Commercial Investment Strategy	Joe Wharton
		NO MORE ITEMS	
8 February 2022	27 January 2022	CCTV	Sally Parry/Scott Weetch
		Housing Revenue and Capital Budget Setting 2022/23 including Dwelling Rent Setting 2022/23 and 30 Year Business Plan Review	Paul Fitzgerald
		Tower Street	Natalie Kirbyshire
		Marina Lease	Andrew Pritchard/New AD
		External Audit Arrangements	Paul Fitzgerald

		Employment Land Feasibility Study in West Somerset	Robert Downes
24 February 2022	14 February 2022	General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23	Paul Fitzgerald
Budget Only		Council Tax Setting 2022/23	Paul Fitzgerald
Special Meeting		NO MORE ITEMS	
29 March 2022	17 March 2022	Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategy 2022/23	Paul Fitzgerald
		Longforth Masterplan	Sarah Povall
		SWT Pay Policy	Sean Papworth
10 May 2022	28 April 2022	Annual Council Meeting	
		Council Committees for 2021/2022 and their Terms of Reference	Amy Tregellas
		Appointment of Representatives on Outside Bodies	Amy Tregellas
		To authorise the sealing or signing of documents to give effect to any decisions taken	Amy Tregellas

EXECUTIVE

Executive Meeting	Draft Agenda Items	Lead Officer
20 October 2021	To consider a proposal for a Local Government Reorganisation Joint Committee	Amy Tregellas/Kevin Williams
venue =		
Exec RD = 8 October		
Informal Exec RD = 7 September		
SMT RD = 24 August		
17 November 2021	Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Review	Scott Weetch
venue =	Public Realm Design Guide for Taunton Garden Town – Feedback	Fiona Webb
Exec RD = 5 November	Somerset West and Taunton Districtwide Design Guide	Fiona Webb
Informal Exec RD = 5 October	North Taunton CPO	Chris Brown/Jane Windebank
SMT RD = 22 September		
15 December 2021	Financial Performance 2021/22 Q2	Paul Fitzgerald
venue =	Corporate Performance Report Q2	Malcolm Riches
Exec RD = 3 December	Tower Street	Natalie Kirbyshire
Informal Exec RD = 2 November	Housing Revenue Account 2022/23 Draft Budget Update	Emily Collacott
SMT RD = 20 October	Firepool Design Guidance and Masterplan	Graeme Thompson/Tim Bacon
	General Fund 2022/23 Draft Budget Update	Emily Collacott
19 January 2022	CCTV	Sally Parry/Scott Weetch
venue =	Housing Revenue and Capital Budget Setting 2022/23 including Dwelling Rent Setting 2022/23 and 30 Year Business Plan Review	Paul Fitzgerald
Exec RD = 7 January	Longforth Masterplan	Sarah Povall
Informal Exec RD = 30 November	Marina Lease	Andrew Pritchard/New AD
SMT RD = 17 November	Employment Land Feasibility Study in West Somerset	Robert Downes
Budget - 9 February 2022	General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Estimates 2022/23	Paul Fitzgerald
venue =	Council Tax Setting 2022/23	Paul Fitzgerald
Exec RD = 28 January		
Informal Exec RD = 4 January		

SMT RD = 8 December		
16 February 2022		
venue =		
Exec RD = 4 February		
Informal Exec RD = 4 January		
SMT RD = 8 December		
16 March 2022	Financial Performance 2021/22 Q3	Emily Collacott
venue =	Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategy 2022/23	Paul Fitzgerald
Exec RD = 4 March	Corporate Performance Report Q3	Malcolm Riches
Informal Exec RD = 1 February		
SMT RD = 19 January		
20 April 2022		
venue =		
Exec RD = 6 April		
Informal Exec RD = 8 March		
SMT RD = 23 February		
Items to be Confirmed	RIPA Policy	Amy Tregellas
Officer/Portfolio Holder Key Decision	Title	Lead Officer/PFH
31/08 - 28/09 - decision on 29/09/21	Award of construction contract for affordable housing development at Seaward Way Minehead	James Barra/ Cllr F. Smith
31/08 - 28/09 - decision on 29/09/21	Award of contract for the installation of Air Source Heat Pumps in Council Housing Stock	James Barra/ Cllr F. Smith

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 3rd November 2021

Innovation District Update

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Marcus Kravis

Report Author: Mark Wathen, Lead Specialist Economic Development and Prosperity

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This paper contains an update on recent activity and progress and follows a request to explore the links between the resolutions made by the Executive in November 2018 and the activity to deliver inward investment and the Innovation District.
- 1.2 The EiBC consultancy contract was completed in line with the scope and expected outcomes of the contract which allowed for consideration of alternative approaches.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 This report is provided as an update paper to note.

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 This report is an update on progress to establish SWT as the Innovation District for note by the Scrutiny Committee.

4 Statement of Portfolio Holder

- 4.1 Statement by Cllr Marcus Kravis *“As Portfolio Holder for Assets and Economic Development, I confirm that I am content that the resolutions made by Taunton Deane Borough Council (TBDC) in 2018 have been taken into account when taking the activity to deliver the innovation district and inward investment forward and am proud of the achievements of this Council to date.”*

5 Summary

- 5.1 The Innovation District action plan is in its early formative stage and will continue to be a long term evolving programme of activity responding to new and emerging opportunities and policy direction for investment from Government, academia, research and development businesses and the private sector, working collaboratively.

- 5.2 In July 2020 the Education and Innovation Business Consultancy (EiBC) were appointed to produce a feasibility report which assessed and validated and refined an initial concept or proposed an alternative concept for the development of an innovation/technology park in Somerset West and Taunton.
- 5.3 During the research and development of the report EiBC, Council officers and stakeholders found a considerably changed innovation landscape in 2020/21 when compared to 2018 and that matters had progressed significantly over the intervening period including:
- i. The business case for a Taunton Digital Innovation Centre.
 - ii. The Somerset NHS Foundation Trust 50/50 private sector led Joint Venture (JV) with Rutherford Diagnostics Ltd to establish a Community Diagnostics Centre including healthtech innovation space, the first of its kind in the UK.
 - iii. Strategic masterplanning of the Firepool regeneration site including innovation and commercial 'move on' employment space.
 - iv. An outline masterplan for Nexus 25 employment land and potential Local Development Order.
 - v. The final publication of the Taunton Garden Town Prospectus and Taunton 2040 Vision.
 - vi. The development of the "Gravity" campus and enterprise zone.
- 5.4 During the research and development stage of the feasibility study it was identified that there was a significant opportunity to extract more value from existing employment land allocations and to make individual assets greater than the sum of their parts.
- 5.5 Through the research it became apparent that the potential to utilise current available employment land would ensure employment, education, business growth and local supply chains were supported across the entire district rather than a focus on a single innovation campus site within the District.
- 5.6 To that end, the concept of a networked Innovation District was born (alongside other actions) and adopted by SWT, the public summary published on SWT's business facing website in March 2021. The work to develop this activity further was outlined in the SWT Economic Development Strategy approved by Full Council in February 2020.
- 5.7 The Innovation District work programme continues to progress the recommendations of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (November 2018) and the decision by the Executive in November 2018 to "Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre. TDBC and the subsequent Council should undertake a prompt detailed feasibility study into the viability of such a centre. Effective use of appropriate partnership working [will be] crucial to the success of such a venture."
- 5.8 The EiBC consultancy contract was completed in line with the scope and expected outcomes of the contract which allowed for consideration of alternative approaches to a single Innovation campus within SWT, other options to be considered.
- 5.9 This approach ensured that the contract would produce a realistic and deliverable plan that could be taken forward with short-, medium- and long-term benefits for the District, rather than limiting to the consideration of one option only. This approach ensured that SWT were considering best use of public funds and benefiting from the professional opinion of the independent consultants.

- 5.10 The next phase of the Innovation District work programme includes further conversations with education providers in the region, leading innovation, research and development business and agencies as part of the establishment of the District as the first Rural Market Town Innovation District in the UK.
- 5.11 During the next phase of the Innovation District work programme further conversations will be had with SWT Members, following presentations of the work carried out and evidence base collected during the next phase, to ensure members are able to input into the development of the Innovation District.

6 **SWT Innovation Framework in March 2021 under the delegated authority of the Portfolio Holder**

- 6.1 Over the last few months, SWT has been working to understand its knowledge economy and innovation assets, clusters and businesses to help further develop the knowledge economy opportunities for its businesses and residents looking to the future and as a commitment made in the Economic Development Strategy published in March 2020.
- 6.2 It has provided a clear way forward for developing **a framework for action for the short term but with an eye to a longer term gain**, as the initial innovation clusters and innovation board is established, building on immediate opportunities.
- 6.3 **It is to be stressed that this is the start of an evolving journey involving a range of partners linked to the emerging Somerset West and Taunton Innovation District concept.**

7 **Update on the significant progress made in the 9 months since the adoption of the Innovation District Framework**

- 7.1 Since the approval of the Innovation District Framework (and EiBC recommendations), work has been taking place on:
- working up the Innovation District concept to put to the market
 - aligning SWT town centre, marketing and inward investment work programmes with the Innovation District
 - continuing the dialogue with the high-tech businesses and innovation organisations that will 'anchor' the Innovation District. Further conversations are planned with the Director of Regional Innovation and Impact at Exeter University.
 - continued discussion with the Local Enterprise Partnership about the shape and commissioning of LEP wide innovation support.
 - discussions relating to the integration of the Barclays Lab virtual innovation ecosystem across the UK to support peer to peer knowledge transfer and events.
 - the opening of the Rutherford Diagnostics Centre for healthtech and the start on site for build of the Digital Innovation Centre
 - discussion with Host Somerset about developing student accommodation with our regeneration team in Taunton on behalf of Bridgwater and Taunton College and University Centre Somerset.
 - the feasibility study of additional employment land in West Somerset to meet the express demand of businesses looking to expand in the West Somerset geography and grow the local knowledge based talent pool.

- consideration of partnering with a leading independent and impartial organisation with expertise in connecting businesses and public sectors to cutting edge research on the development of innovation centres, and how to grow new markets. The organisation would provide capacity and expertise to the Innovation Leadership Group and deliver a routemap through the process of establishing an Innovation District. This work would help to facilitate future conversation with members and wider stakeholders about the critical stages of the innovation journey and routemap, as they support other innovation districts across the UK. Discussions with Somerset County Council and other Districts in Somerset to position this work are underway that takes into account the transition to a Unitary Council and into a Somerset wide Innovation Place, examining how we might collectively unite the innovation assets and innovation support under collective stewardship and oversight.

Excitingly, new market opportunities have arisen during this time which the Innovation District work is capitalising on including:

a) Artificial Intelligence(AI)/Big Data & Digital:

- With funding confirmed in September 2021, build will commence on a £9.5m Innovation Centre on Firepool in October/November.
- UKHO have undertaken a £0.5m commercialisation accelerator programme linked to the utilisation of its maritime AI/Big Data.
- Visit Somerset is developing an AI/Big Data platform for the visitor economy utilising latest digital technologies and techniques.

b) Healthcare, medtech and e-health:

- The Joint Venture between Somerset NHS Foundation Trust at Musgrove Park and Rutherford Diagnostics Ltd has led to the opening of the innovative Rutherford Diagnostics Centre in October 2021.
- Healthcare partners and Bridgwater and Taunton College have run 12 week National Re-training Skills Bootcamps in e-health and digital upskilling. SWT officers are working with Sedgemoor District Council to support a Levelling Up bid to support the establishment of a centre of excellence in Social Care aligned to the SWT Innovation District work. SWT officers have worked with Plymouth and Exeter Universities and the Academic Health Science Network on a LEP wide healthcare technopole.
- An Expression of Interest has been submitted to the Connected Places Catapult “Homes for Healthy Ageing Programme” to secure support for SWT to be a “demonstrator site” to match solutions from healthtech and care innovators with insights and capabilities of local authorities and housing associations to harness innovation and growth to build a healthier future for the UK. If successful SWT could be one of 5 organisations receiving up to £0.5m to support this work during 2021-2022.

c) Creative/cultural:

- SWT secured funding from the £4m Business Rates Pool to support the capacity of both our cultural and digital sectors. A £0.5m Community Renewal Fund bid was submitted in June 2021 by the Somerset Arts and Business Cultural Alliance (SABCA) to support innovation and growth within the creative and digital industries. SWT officers have submitted a Levelling up bid

for Wellington's ToneDale Mill which has support from the creative, cultural, fashion and textile industries.

- The opening East Quay in Watchet, a cultural, creative and makerspace enabling collaboration and sector innovation.
- The Collar Factory, a new co-working space in Taunton, is opening offering creative studios, meeting, networking and event space to supportive innovation in the sector.

d) Innovation ecosystem and higher level skills (education)

- The launch of 'T' levels and University Centre Level 6 courses in Information Technology and 'Big Data', Nursing and Healthcare supported by the Institute of Technology.
- Bridgwater & Taunton College (BTC) has been approved by the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) to deliver a Nursing Degree and Nursing Degree Apprenticeships across Adult Nursing and Mental Health pathways. The NMC has also recommended the approval of the Trainee Nurse Associate programme. All the programmes are validated by the University of the West of England (UWE), with the apprenticeships due to start this year. Bridgwater & Taunton College has become the first college in the UK to achieve this recommendation. These degree pathways enhance the degree provision at University Centre Somerset and have been developed in direct response to Somerset's skills gaps in nursing.
- A Somerset wide Bootcamp for 10 businesses (4 of which are in the SWT area) to help inform future innovation ecosystem development.

e) Circular natural capital economy:

- Plans are continuing on the development of circular sustainable economies in West Somerset, including the development of an Exmoor strategy which recognises the opportunity for new entrepreneurial start-ups in sustainable circular economy businesses, using its natural capital to counter climate change.

f) Renewable energy/nuclear:

- SWT officers are working with the HotSW LEP, Nuclear South West, EDF and the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency to ensure that opportunities for supply chain, education and training are maximised and aligned with the development of the Innovation District.

g) Inward investment and place making and promotion:

- Appointment of a marketing and communication agency to develop a marketing and communications plan, and a range of propositions to target and attract inward investment to the area, including the innovation, clean tech and clean energy sectors.
- The Nuclear South West proposition is already well developed and more recently an Autonomous Maritime Vessels national proposition incorporating the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) was produced with the Department for International Trade.

- Inward Investment articles have been published in the South West Insider Investment magazine which was circulated around the UK as well as profiling the Innovation District at the annual UK Science Park Association conference.

7.2 Further developments are expected during the course of 2021/22 including building on the launch of the Government's Innovation Strategy and Levelling Up White Paper which will have more detail around innovation places and a multi-year approach to the UK's Prosperity Fund from 2022 onwards.

8 **Specific responses to the final resolutions of the Affordable Employment Land Task and Finish Group 2018**

8.1 This section aims to respond specifically to explore the links between the final resolutions related to the Affordable Employment Land Task and Finish Group's report, which was affirmed by the Executive in November 2018 and the eventual EIBC report. The resolutions made in 2018 have been delivered by a diverse approach and are not solely found in the EIBC report.

The recommendations in the 2018 report were:

Resolved that the Executive noted the Task and Finish Group's Report and recommended the following:-

1. Affordable Employment Land:

- a) TDBC and the subsequent Council must build on the Affordable Employment Land Report undertaken by Peter Brett Associates by commencing an urgent reappraisal of all employment sites
- b) TDBC and the subsequent Council to explore the delivery of Affordable Starter Employment Units via different delivery models including varying forms of Local Development Orders, and expedient Council enabling through a standalone approach or development partner involvement.

2. Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre:

- a) TDBC and the subsequent Council should undertake a prompt detailed feasibility study into the viability of such a centre. Effective use of appropriate partnership working was crucial to the success of such a venture.

8.2 **The response in respect of gap analysis of each of the above in turn is as follows:**

1a) Affordable Employment Land

Somerset West and Taunton Local Plan development - the National Planning Policy Framework requires the planning system to be genuinely plan-led. The Council will be reviewing its employment sites through the Local Plan review process considering them for their sustainability, appropriateness, deliverability, attractiveness as employment sites, infrastructure requirements and other local

benefits that could be delivered. The Council will also consider where employment development should be retained in order to deliver sustainable communities. The Planned approach to reviewing employment sites ensures that decisions on the location of new employment and the specific sites is considered in conjunction with all other strategic planning matters and not in a silo.

This process will be informed with up-to-date evidence on employment land needs. Emerging evidence suggests a need for 44,800 sqm office floorspace and 53 ha of industrial land between 2020-40 although the appropriate target will be determined through the Local Plan review.

1b) Affordable Starter Units

A Rural Local Development Order received Full Council Approval on 29th September 2020 - during the early part of 2019, the economic development team working with our planning colleagues made the development of affordable starter employment units a priority in accordance with the Executive Resolution from 2018 and developed a Rural Local Development Order which has subsequently been published and launched and fully adopted by the Full Council on 29th September 2020.

[Employment Local Development Order \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/employment-local-development-order)

- This LDO is a proactive planning tool to enable increased delivery of small-scale employment space in rural parts of Somerset West and Taunton, and was developed in response to demand from small businesses to set up or expand their existing operations.
- The LDO and accompanying Design Code will provide clarity on how to deliver high quality small-scale employment space appropriate to the site. It will ensure that a high and consistent standard of design is delivered, providing sustainable and stimulating working environments whilst at the same time enabling the diverse requirements of individual occupiers to be met.
- The LDO sets out to grant planning permission for small scale office, research and light industrial space across the Council area removing the need for a planning application to be made. Development must accord with all aspects of the Design Code in order to benefit from the permitted development rights confirmed by the LDO.

Other support for progress delivery of allocated employment land in response to need

- **Firepool business case was approved in November 2020.** This will provide circa 600 residential units, subject to planning and circa 20000 sq/m of commercial, office and leisure uses. The site has been fallow since the cattle market closed 12 years ago. Our estimate is that this will provide FTE 350 direct jobs and up to 3000 construction jobs over the course of the programme. The space also provides space for the Digital Innovation Centre being developed in partnership with Somerset County Council.
- **Coal Orchard**, was built in 2020/21 in a location where the market could not make viable. This build continued through the Pandemic. This has provided 40 apartments, 8 commercial units and car parking for 40 cars, including EV charging. SWT have enhanced public realm and access to river, and flood mitigation is built into the design. The site has the propensity to create 94 Jobs.
- **Seaward Way, Minehead, West Somerset.** SWT built two much needed employment spaces in 2020 and this project came in under budget and produced a

4.9% yield for income. In total, 32,000 sq ft of commercial / light industrial space was built. Both units have been let, one to a local company who have been based in Minehead for 20+ years who was desperately in need of larger and more modern facilities to expand.

- **Additional employment space review is underway in West Somerset** - being able to find new employment land for industrial purposes in West Somerset has been a significant problem for many years. Aside from the recent Snazaroo development and the units next to West Somerset Railway, no new sites have come forward in over a decade. A review is being undertaken to identify land and employment site options in West Somerset to help to continue to deliver growing employment opportunities and to respond to their immediate needs.
 - **SME A** in Minehead employ 33 staff and produce products for security, medical and military personnel. They are seeking 1,200 sqm of space (12-15k sq. ft) and will create 10 new jobs. The company would be content with a discreet premise and would prefer the Minehead area.
 - **SME B** employs some 30-40 staff and produce scientific research instruments. They are seeking 2,800 sqm (30k sq. ft) and will create 15 new jobs initially. They would prefer a high profile site preferably in the Minehead area. One of the two businesses is likely to move away from the area if a site is not found. Both businesses are content with renting space from the Council and are happy to wait on the outcome of this report. They are both currently looking at options to temporarily expand. In addition to this it is recognised that one of the sites identified should be large enough to accommodate other future units if possible.
- **Town Centre/High Street affordable employment space.** SWT are also working with Town Centre locations to explore the opportunities afforded to start-up companies by using the available space created by vacant retail locations. In Wellington, a feasibility study has also been undertaken on an enterprise centre and hotdesking centre in the High Street, making use of vacant retail space as appropriate. All of these initiatives aim to respond to the need in a post Covid19 environment and be more agile in helping to meet those needs in a more flexible manner, building on the existing enterprise centre network of the County Council in Minehead, Williton, Wiveliscombe and potentially in Wellington.

2a) Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre:

Research has shown that there is adequate site provision in our District – there is no evidence of need for additional office for a Research and Innovation centre space. The current offers include:

- Over the next 3 years a network of new innovation centres will be delivered in Taunton (2), Bridgwater (3), Yeovil (1).
- Additionally 3 sites in SWT (Firepool TDIC, Nexus and Blackbrook) offer further opportunities for grow-on space for knowledge based businesses with a capacity in excess of 600,000 square feet in Taunton.
- This is in addition to a further 300,000 square feet of general business and light manufacturing space at the Crown Estate and over 300,000 square feet at the Gravity site.
- Firepool has a capability to accommodate a Phase 2 innovation centre and Blackbrook, already the home of health based knowledge based

businesses, has a key undeveloped site adjacent to the Rutherford Diagnostics innovation Centre, whilst the 40 acre Nexus site can accommodate around 377,000 square feet of knowledge based business.

- Outside Taunton, Watchet can also accommodate at least 54,000 square feet of business space at the former papermill site. All of these sites are committed and most are 'shovel ready'.
- Excluding the Crown Estate and Gravity sites and the other innovation centres coming on stream elsewhere in Somerset, the remaining SWT sites deliver in excess of half a million square feet of space with a potential to accommodate up to 4,600 direct knowledge based jobs in addition to jobs that are indirect and induced economic impacts .
- On 9th July 2021, a meeting of the initial inaugural group of over 12 private and public sector stakeholders representative of the five domains of the Innovation District were brought together to help inform the development of the workplan over the next year and to move to a more formalised stewardship group, which was avidly received by all the participants, including links to the LEP and their Innovation Board. This collaborative approach to the Taunton Innovation District embeds the principles of the integrated project delivery approach which was highlighted in the 2018 work and still has a long way to go, but the foundation pieces are beginning to be laid.

9. **Next steps**

9.1 The next steps for the 2021-2022 Innovation District work programme will continue to be developed in line with corporate plan commitments. Some of the immediate components of the workplan are illustrated here and will be overseen by the stewardship of the recently convened Innovation Leadership Group (ILG).

9.2 **Infrastructure**

Activity will include:

- Finalise the funding package to enable the start on site build of the Digital Innovation Centre.
- Continue to support local knowledge based businesses expand into grow-on space (two companies are actively seeking support) and engage more in detail with businesses.
- Identify regeneration opportunities and locations for student accommodation build for the healthcare sector in Taunton so that this supports full-time and part-time Higher Education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) growth.

9.3 **Clusters** (groups of inter-related industries that drive wealth creation in a region)

- Identify ways in which the clusters can be strengthened by providing more operational capacity.
- Undertake more detailed cluster segmentation and mapping to identify unique characteristics and unique selling points and opportunities for joint collaboration and funding.
- Start the mobilisation of other clusters including biomanufacturing, waste and circular economy.

9.4 **Innovation support**

- Commission innovation support for Digital Innovation centre in 2021/22 and collaborate with plans to establish a HotSW Innovation Technopole service.

9.5 Talent Development

- Work with Bridgwater and Taunton college and local businesses to engage young people in the innovation district through innovation and enterprise placements.
- Align the education pathways and skillsets of young people to develop the talent pool needed by businesses within the Innovation District.

9.6 Place marketing and promotion

- Work with the marketing and communication consultants appointed over the course of the next year to update marketing and propositions for inward investment and establish place marketing protocols, ensuring they are complementary to surrounding regional clusters and add value.

9.7 Funding opportunities

- Review opportunities on the horizon and identify immediate needs.

9.8 Stewardship

- Support the establishment of the Innovation Leadership Group in terms of its terms of reference and composition.
- Identify cluster development groups/leads to engage and network the private sector businesses and the college and universities.

10 Links to Corporate Strategy

See 7.1

11 Finance / Resource Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision required that would have financial or resource implications

12 Legal Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision required that would have legal implications.

13 Climate and Sustainability Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have climate or sustainability implications.

14 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have safeguarding or community safety implications.

15 Equality and Diversity Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have equality and diversity implications.

16 Social Value Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have social value implications.

17 Partnership Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have partnership implications.

18 Health and Wellbeing Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have health and wellbeing implications.

19 Asset Management Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have asset management implications.

20 Data Protection Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have data protection implications.

21 Consultation Implications

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have consultation implications.

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny - Yes**
- **Cabinet/Executive - No**
- **Full Council - No**

Contact Officers

Name	Mark Wathen, Lead Specialist Economic Growth and Prosperity
Email	m.wathen@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk
Name	Lisa Tuck (was Redston), Economic Development Operational Manager
Email	l.tuck@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Appendix

Relevant Policies and Strategies informing the approach taken and continuing evolution of the SWT Innovation District

The recent policies and associated timelines that have informed and are aligned to the Innovation District and its direction of travel are as follows:

Affordable Employment Land Task and Finish Group's report November 2018 (Taunton Deane Borough Council)

TDBC Executive Decision November 2018 to “Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre. TDBC and the subsequent Council should undertake a prompt detailed feasibility study into the viability of such a centre. Effective use of appropriate partnership working was crucial to the success of such a venture”.

SWT Council's Corporate Strategy October 2019 was approved by Full Council and relevant objectives that relate to the Innovation District include:

Environment and Economy

- Work towards making our District ***carbon neutral by 2030***.
- Shape and protect our built and natural environment, supported by a ***refreshed Local Plan***, develop our heritage, cultural and leisure offer, including a ***clear vision and delivery plan for the Taunton Garden Town***.
- Encourage wealth creation and economic growth throughout the District by ***attracting inward investment, enabling research and innovation, improving the skills of the local workforce*** and seeking to ***ensure the provision of adequate and affordable employment land*** to meet different business needs.
- ***Support the town centres*** throughout the District to meet the challenge of changing shopping habits.
- ***Facilitate the development of the commercial parts of the Firepool site*** in Taunton.
- Support the ***enhancement of arts and culture provision*** within the District.

LEP's Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) published in 2020

This has superseded the *South West and South Wales Science and Innovation Audit referenced in the 2018 Task and Finish Group*, prioritising those aspects that are of most relevance to the LEP's greatest chances of success. The LIS subsequently identified ***three key priorities to build on the expertise and distinctive assets of the LEP area, whilst moving to a greener economy:***

They are:

- ▶ **energy**; stemming from the construction, and legacy benefits, of one of Europe's largest infrastructure projects – the UK's first nuclear power station in twenty years at Hinkley Point C – and pioneering the development of the next generation of marine renewables;
- ▶ **engineering**: leading on the development and commercialisation of marine autonomy, and supporting the sustainable aviation challenge through development of rotary technologies and electric planes; and
- ▶ **digital**; specifically through environmental intelligence, the marine geospatial innovation market, and health and agri-technologies.

SWT's Economic Development Strategy approved at Full Council in February 2020

A key stated objective was to encourage wealth creation and clean economic growth throughout the District by:

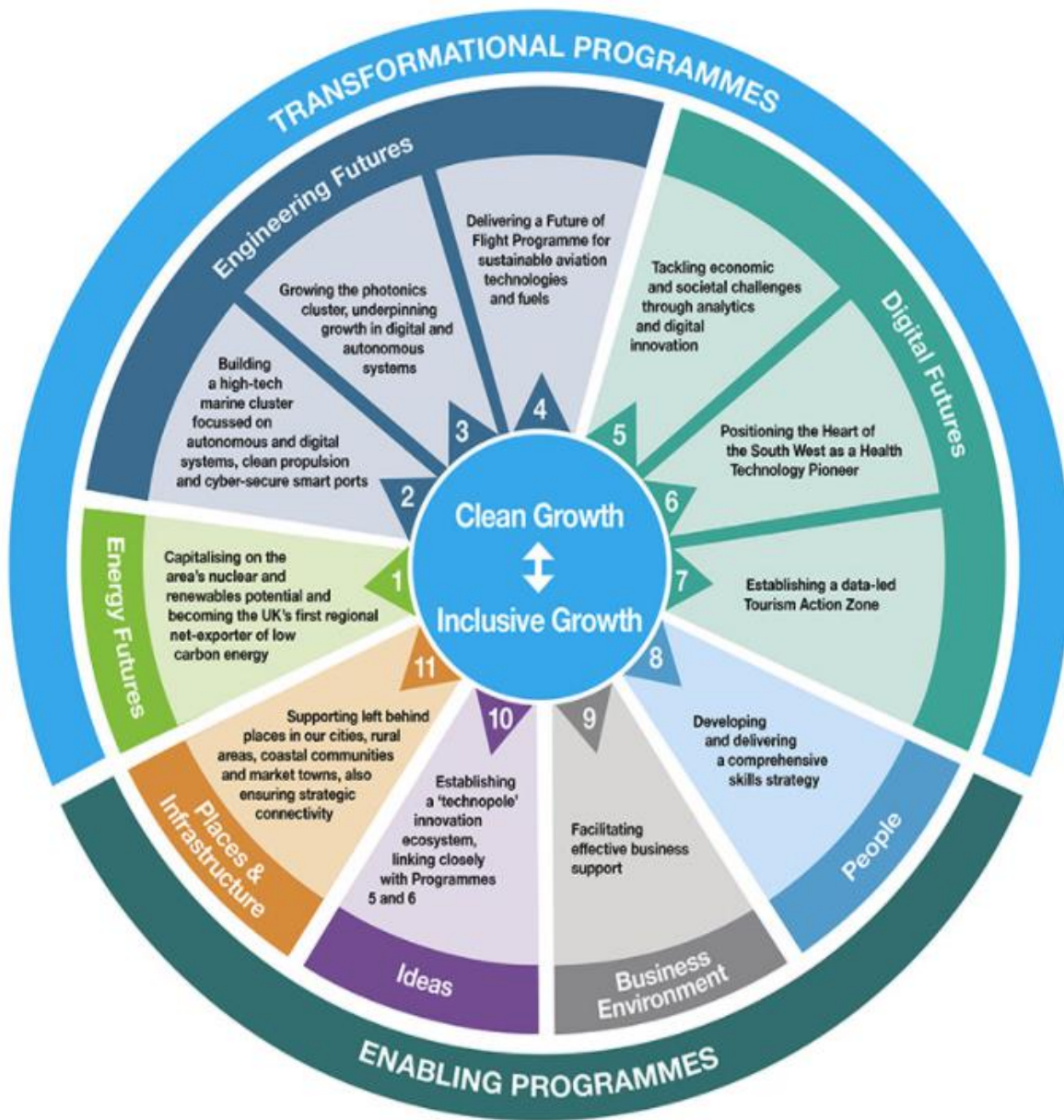
- **Attracting inward investment and enabling research and innovation.**
- SWT also committed to **explore a Higher Level Educational Research Institution and Innovation Park to explore and validate emerging knowledge economy opportunities** such as AI/Big Data and digital technologies, remote healthcare delivery and low carbon renewable energy and environmental technologies as well as exploring the circular economy and natural capital, including plastic waste recycling.
- Reviewing business and innovation support to determine the **most appropriate approach to building a sustainable Somerset wide local business and innovation ecosystem.**
- Strategic employment site development, specifically referencing **Firepool** and the development of an innovation zone.
- **Implementing a Rural Local Development Order**, supporting and promoting **Nexus 25** and our **own commercial assets and sites.**
- **Taunton Garden Town** becoming a dynamic economy of cultural, creative and digital businesses as part of a future Tech Nation Corridor.

Somerset Economic Recovery and Growth Plan March 2021

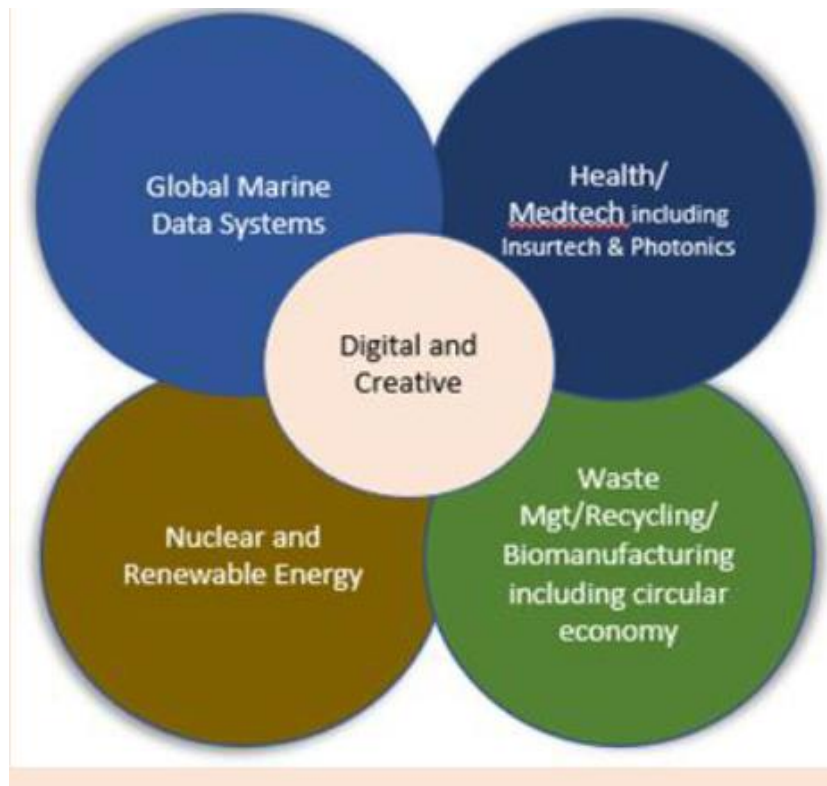
The Plan was developed and **agreed by 5 Local Authorities in Somerset in January 2021** and submitted to Government and replaces the Somerset Growth Plan which was developed pre-pandemic.

The plan differentiates activities and interventions across the different phases of recovery (**Lockdown, Restart, Revitalise, Grow**), which has been adopted widely by partners across the Heart of the South West LEP.

- **LEP's Build Back Better Plan March 2021** - the Build Back Better Plan is not on its own a recovery plan from COVID-19, but is rooted in the ambitious vision of our Local Industrial Strategy (LIS), which has a distinctive focus to deliver on clean and inclusive growth.



Source: EIBC Innovation District Framework 5 Domains



Source: HoTSW LEP Building Back Better Plan Priorities 2021

The specific opportunities from the diagram and SWT's innovation domains align in the following ways:

- **Energy Futures: capitalising on the area's nuclear and renewables potential**
- **Engineering Futures: UKHO's involvement in building a high-tech marine cluster and commercialising its AI/Big Data assets**
- **Digital Futures: tackling societal challenges through digital innovation** and positioning the Heart of the South West as a **Health Technology Pioneer** and establishing a **data-led Tourism Action Zone**, with Visit Somerset now deploying AI/Big Data platforms
- **Enabling programmes (Ideas):** establishing a **'technopole' innovation ecosystem** which is not focused on Universities but on **any business undertaking R and D** and connecting them with other businesses & the knowledge base and future R&D funding opportunities

Full Council Meeting – 27 July 2021

Report of Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts – Leader of the Council

Future High Streets funding

In May SWT was awarded just under £14m to help deliver its ambitious proposals to transform our high streets into vibrant hubs for future generations.

I am delighted that we have secured this funding which represents a real opportunity to enhance our retail environment and realise our aspirations for growth, creating a place where people want to live, work and shop. The award will enable the delivery of our ambitious regeneration plans, helping to protect and create jobs, and deliver opportunities and prosperity to our communities.

The award of £13.9m from the Future High Streets Fund will be used for Active Travel links in Taunton town centre including cycle and pedestrian improvements, as well as contributing towards to the redevelopment of Coal Orchard and Firepool.

The award includes a specific allocation towards an outdoor performance space (amphitheatre) at Firepool, which is part of the original public realm design for the site and is in addition to the multi-purpose venue proposal that is subject to ongoing feasibility studies and discussion.

SWT has been working with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to review and prioritise the projects after the provisional offer was made representing 69% of the original bid for £20.2m of funding.

Stronger Somerset

On 15 June, one week on from positive support in the local poll, I met with the Leader of Sedgemoor District Council to discuss next steps in the establishment of a new Western Somerset unitary council.

Stronger Somerset, the plan for two councils, Western Somerset and Eastern Somerset, to replace Somerset's existing five county and district councils, was the overwhelming choice of local residents in the poll, winning 65% of the vote.

While we await the decision of the Local Government Secretary, Robert Jenrick, we must begin making arrangements to ensure a smooth transition. This will involve closer working together as two district councils and joint working with the county council.

We will need an agreed implementation plan in just a few months' time, so there is no time to waste and we have invited our colleagues from the county council to now join us in this important work.

The decision of the Local Government Secretary on the future of local government in Somerset is due before the summer Parliamentary recess on 22 July.

Somerset Green New Deal Economy Forum (Build Back Better)

On Sat 22 May I attended an online event of the Somerset Green New Deal Economy Forum (Build Back Better).

The emphasis of this event was on our economy and in particular how we can all contribute locally and practically to help the transition to a green economy, with social justice and health and wellbeing at its heart

The intent is to create a shared sense of purpose and consensus across all political parties and communities and will support a regenerative approach to green jobs which will help deliver a thriving carbon neutral, innovative and fair Somerset by 2030 and it will:

- Set the national and local context.
- Showcase local examples of businesses transitioning towards zero carbon and fair and just employment practice
- Explore key issues for start-ups
- Build partnerships and identify sources of help.

Levelling Up Fund - A vision for Tonedale

Somerset West and Taunton, in collaboration with community groups, businesses, residents and supported by Rebecca Pow, MP for Taunton Deane and many regional and national stakeholders, are proud to have submitted a bid into the Levelling Up fund.

The aim of this bid is to transform and sustainably regenerate the nationally significant heritage site at Toneworks and consolidate the green lung of Wellington with community and culture, people and ecology at the heart of the regeneration scheme for Tonedale.

The proposal seeks to deliver the next stage of repair of the Grade II Toneworks site, bringing a building that was close to dereliction, back into functional life with commercial, cultural and creative uses. The community land acquisition project connects the heritage mill sites, improving access and connectivity through neighbouring green and blue infrastructure whilst integrating a number of community led initiatives into the space, enhancing the natural environment and serving the residents of Wellington and beyond.

Action on Litter

A staggering three skips have been filled with litter collected from residential streets, highway verges and open spaces across the district in just two months. SWT targeted problem areas throughout April and May to ensure our streets and open spaces are clean and welcoming for residents and visitors as we come out of lockdown.

A team of three litter pickers visited around 60 open spaces and estates in Taunton, Wellington and West Somerset so far and will be continuing their rounds over the coming weeks. This is on top of the normal work done by the Council's street cleansing contractor.

They have also been busy linking up with the grass cutting teams to litter pick the day before the verges are cut in problem areas such as the main routes into Taunton and Wellington, minimising the amount of rubbish that is shredded.

Each of the three 15-yard skips filled weighed approximately two tonnes when taken away for separation. This is in addition to ten shopping trolleys collected.

As part of the initiative to keep our district litter free the Council is calling on members of the public and community groups to join the fight against litter.

It has already supported six community groups who have held litter picks in Taunton, Wellington, Trull, Pitminster, Minehead and Exford, collecting approximately 25 bags of mixed waste.

I am grateful to these groups and individuals for taking the initiative and joining us in the fight against litter. The volume of litter collected by our team and the volunteers shows just how important it is that we tackle this problem together and encourage people to be more socially responsible.

The Great British Spring Clean

Our neighbourhoods, parks and public spaces have become ever more popular with people taking outdoor exercise in line with Government advice during the past year.

Unfortunately, in some areas this has led to an increase in litter, so as restrictions ease and the nation prepares to come out of lockdown SWT will be making sure our streets and open spaces are clean and welcoming for residents and visitors, targeting problem areas such as residential streets, highway verges and open spaces.

We have some amazing open spaces in and around our towns and it is wonderful that so many people have taken the opportunity to get out and appreciate them. It has also been really heartening to see the community spirit that has grown in our residential areas.

We are always alert to reports of litter which Council staff and our contractors make every effort to clear up but it would be so much better for everyone's health and well-being if we can prevent the problem in the first place. Our aim is to educate, inform and empower people so that together we can make a difference and transform our streets, roadsides and open spaces for good.

From 28 May to 13 June 2021 SWT staff increased the tackling of litter in locations across the district. The Council's Open Spaces team worked to remove litter, overgrown vegetation and dead and damaged trees at Hankridge Nature Reserve to improve the light which will help maintain the health of the existing tree stock. SWT

has also reinstated the old paths which had been lost under thick mud over the years, as well as creating mounds which have been sown with wildflower seeds.

The work strikes a balance between the increasing demand for quality recreational areas and the needs of the local wildlife population in line with our commitment to give equal importance to ecological issues alongside climate emergency actions to provide a better future for everyone.

Meetings with Town and Parish Councils

On 28 April myself and the Chief Executive met with Watchet Town Council to discuss any issues of concern as part of our regular quarterly meeting schedule. This is part of a rolling programme to meet with our town councils and our parishes councils (if they wish) to discuss common themes and address concerns or celebrate successes.

Communications

Communications has continued to play an important role in keeping our residents and business informed of Council decisions and initiatives, promoting transparency and openness about what we do and how we spend their money.

Press releases highlighting the Council's strategic priorities have included progress on our commercial investment strategy, climate initiatives including the roll-out of electric vehicle charging points and the e-scooter trial expanding into West Somerset, the marketing of residential properties at our flagship Coal Orchard development and the award of Future High Streets funding to help realise our aspirations for growth.

There has also been a particular focus on keeping our streets and open spaces clean and litter free with regular releases giving details of work being undertaken by the Council and information on how our residents can help. These have included features on our taking pride in our parks and open spaces, responsible dog ownership, how to discourage gulls from scavenging food waste, and the amount of litter collected so far by staff and volunteers.

All press releases issued by the Council are also followed up with social media posts and images giving us an opportunity to reach a wider audience and tag partner organisations, raising their profile and ours.

We share content as a matter of course from partner organisations including the district and county councils, the Somerset Waste Partnership, the NHS and Public Health. We also share and support social media from community groups and organisations working with SWT across the directorates' particularly economic development, housing and localities.

Our social media specialist has been finalising videos introducing Executive Members. The aim is for these to be followed by regular update videos on projects being carried out by each of the portfolio holders.

Our specialist also works with teams throughout the council to support internal events and projects, and helping to create content and videos for sharing externally and internally.

Social media plays a key role in supporting and promoting civic events, working with the Civic Officer.

In May the Civic Office supported the Annual Meeting of Council where Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey was re-elected as Chair and Cllr Richard Lees appointed as Vice-Chair.

The Taunton Charter Trustees also held their Annual Meeting where Cllr Sue Lees was duly appointed as Mayor of Taunton and we welcomed Cllr Brenda Weston as Deputy Mayor.

The Chair of SWT and Mayor of Taunton will be supporting the local branch of Cancer Research UK during their term in office.

A Remembrance Bench, purchased by the Charter Trustees, has been installed in Vivary Park in commemoration of the centenary of the Royal British Legion and those affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic. A small ceremonial blessing was held on 6 June following the D-Day 75 wreath laying at the Normandy Stone.

Two Armed Forces Day Flag Raising Ceremonies were held on Monday 21 June ahead of Armed Forces Day which fell on Saturday 26 June this year. The ceremonies took place at our main office sites – Deane House and West Somerset House and were hosted by the Mayor of Taunton and the Chair of SWT. Attendees included local veterans, representatives from 40 Commando and The Rifles alongside civic dignitaries.

The diary is starting to get busy with civic engagements again which is encouraging after more than a year of Coronavirus restrictions. Plans will soon commence for a Civic Service, Emergency Services Day and our annual Remembrance activities.

Following the gradual easing of restrictions the events and marketing specialist has been working with Environmental Health, the Somerset Covid Support Officer, and the Safety Advisory Group to ensure we are able to help event organisers to use our parks and open spaces to hold their events in a safe and controlled way in line with current Government Guidance.

It has been great to see the Taunton Independent Market return to Castle Green in Taunton which have been a huge success and saw a significant increase in the number of visitors to the town. The events and marketing officer worked with the event organiser to ensure she was able to hold both the April event which required a change in traffic management for the highway, and the May event which had to be delayed a week due to a bad weather forecast; a successful event also took place in July despite the weather.

In May, we were also able to welcome back the French Weir Fun Fair. This took place over the bank holiday weekend and saw a high number of visitors attending

and a number of positive comments on social media and at the event. Our events and marketing specialist worked with the event organiser to ensure they had all the relevant safety measures in place, and were able to proceed safely; also that notice was given to local residents and all previous concerns were taken into consideration.

We are working with organisers of a number of different events due to take place across the district this summer. These includes 'Bands in Blenheim Gardens', Taunton Pride, Taunton Fake Festival, Taunton Flower Show and Minehead Triathlon. Following the recent announcement from the Government in relation to the delay moving into step 4, there are likely to be some changes to some of these events and we are in conversation with organisers about how they will be adapting their planned event or whether they can still take place under the current Government Guidance.

A new Internal Communications Officer joined the team in May and has picked up the ongoing work of editing the Weekly News Round-up, hosting the CEO Team Talk, organising screen savers, checking and editing documents and sending out messages to staff. These regular tasks have involved liaising mainly with HR, Health and Safety and IT. Other work includes being part of the team developing a new Intranet for SWT and ensuring staff are aware of the most recent Annual Plan and how their work aligns to it.

MJ Awards

On 17 September I attended the MJ Awards in London. Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) was shortlisted for this year's MJ Achievement Awards in recognition for its work to support neurodiversity in the workplace.

I am pleased to say that, whilst we did not win the award overall, we were highly commended, which is fantastic.

SWT's People Business Partner team and myself attended a live awards ceremony along with five other nominees for the Innovation in Building Diversity and Inclusion' category. A project to support neurodivergent needs was initiated by the council's Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources, Cllr Ross Henley, with support from Strategic HR Lead, Julie Jordan, following a rise in mental health issues experienced by staff. It was recognised that the cause of these issues had emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic and following a significant transformation programme to merge the former Taunton Deane and Somerset West councils in April 2019. Neurodiversity covers a range of conditions including attention deficit disorders, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's. It is estimated that more than 15 per cent of people in the UK are neurodivergent, meaning they learn and process information differently. The aim of the project was to support staff, customers, Councillors and partners with neurodivergent needs through a review of the council's recruitment processes and by raising awareness through learning and development.

A working group comprising staff with direct or indirect experience in neurodivergent issues was established to help shape policy and make recommendations for change.

Local Government Reorganisation

Since my update at Full Council in September we have continued to work at Member and Officer level collaboratively setting up governance. Officers have been working hard to shape the implementing plan that will transition all authorities into the new unitary council.

As you will be aware Chief Executives were requested by the Dept for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to submit proposals for boundaries and councillor numbers. You will know from our briefings that the task was large, the timescale short and was a complex piece of work. Firstly, I would like to thank our elections team for all their hard work in completing this task.

The options have now been forwarded to the Dept for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities at the agreed timescale they set along with our District and County Colleagues. We will now await the draft Structural Change Order to understand the Secretary of States thinking on these proposals.

Thank you also Councillors for your engagement in this.

