

SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 5 October 2022

Present: Councillor Sue Buller (Chair)

Councillors Ian Aldridge, Simon Coles, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Roger Habgood, Marcus Kravis, Janet Lloyd, Nick Thwaites, Brenda Weston and Gwil Wren

Officers: Sam Murrell, Amy Tregellas, Alison North (via zoom), Chris Hall and Jonathan Stevens

Also Present: Councillors Sarah Wakefield and Dixie Darch

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

43. Apologies

Cllr Nicole Hawkins, Cllr Norman Cavill (subs Cllr Roger Habgood), Cllr Libby Lisgo (subs Cllr Brenda Weston), Cllr Loretta Whetlor (subs Cllr Janet Lloyd) and Cllr John Hassall

Cllr Aldridge joined the meeting at 7.00pm.

Cllr Lisgo joined the meeting via zoom, contributed to the discussion but did not vote. Cllr Mansell joined the meeting via zoom to contribute to the discussion on Item 9.

44. Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee

The Committee resolved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 7 September 2022.

(Prop: Cllr Janet Lloyd / Sec: Cllr Nick Thwaites - unanimous)

45. 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 I Aldridge	All Items	Williton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoked and Voted
Cllr M Kravis	All Items	SCC &	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Minehead		
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	SCC & Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

46. **Public Participation**

There were no questions or comments submitted to the Committee in respect of public participation.

47. **Corporate Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

Cllr Farbahi:

Which of the 6 recommendations of the Connected Catapult report have been taken forward? To be followed up on the [Written Answer Tracker](#).

Was the £50k “Innovation Districts” money identified in the table below the money for the Innovation Exchange?

06/07/2022	Can an explanation / update be provided on the Economic Development Initiatives Ear Marked Reserve?	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall (Econ Regen)	<table border="1"> <tr> <td colspan="2">Economic Initiatives EMR (BE019)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">2022/23</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Opening Balance</td> <td></td> <td>(642,538.36)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Emergency Town Centre Fund</td> <td></td> <td>50,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Budget 22/23 Contribution</td> <td></td> <td>372,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Provision for Grant</td> <td></td> <td>80,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Innovation Districts</td> <td></td> <td>50,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Taunton Town Centre</td> <td></td> <td>50,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Taunton Together</td> <td></td> <td>25,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Closing Balance</td> <td></td> <td>(15,538.36)</td> </tr> </table>	Economic Initiatives EMR (BE019)			2022/23			Opening Balance		(642,538.36)	Emergency Town Centre Fund		50,000.00	Budget 22/23 Contribution		372,000.00	Provision for Grant		80,000.00	Innovation Districts		50,000.00	Taunton Town Centre		50,000.00	Taunton Together		25,000.00	Closing Balance		(15,538.36)	22/07/22
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To be followed up on the [Written Answer Tracker](#)

How are legacy assets performing that sit outside the commercial investment portfolio? It is important that these are carried across to the new Authority with clear and transparent performance management. To be followed up on the [Written Answer Tracker](#)

48. **Corporate Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

An officer will attend Corporate Scrutiny in December to discuss the outcomes from the Innovation Exchange, and what opportunities there are to expand on this for the new Council.

The Commercial Investment Report will go to Corporate Scrutiny in January on its route through to Full Council in February. This will include an appendix on legacy assets to be transferred to the new Council.

49. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plan**

The Committee noted the Forward Plans and all the trackers.

(Prop Cllr Buller – unanimous)

50. **Update on Local Government Reorganisation**

This verbal report was introduced by Executive Councillor for Local Government Reorganisation – Councillor Sarah Wakefield, and supported by the Director of Internal Operations, Alison North. Alison presented a series of slides which explained the current position.

The overall position is that works are progressing, despite considerable pressure on staff and there has been some slippage with dates. It is hoped that this will be addressed now that the new CEO, Duncan Sharkey is in post. (His start date was delayed due to overseeing Operation London Bridge, at his previous Council, The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead). One of his first areas of business will be to look at his senior management team and get them into post so that he can start working on the new Council's priorities.

The presentation slides are available to view [here](#).

Comments from the floor included: -

- Concern about the transfer of the Council Housing stock, which was one of SWT's biggest assets, and keeping tenants informed of the process. *This falls under the responsibility of the Housing Directorate and James Barra. This is a "Tranche 1 product" so is considered of vital importance and will need to be up and running on Day1 of the new authority. All processes are being implemented to ensure a safe and efficient transfer, so that tenants are not adversely affected. Tenants are being kept up to date via the website, tenant groups and newsletters so they are informed as much as possible.*
- Will all existing documents that transfer to the new authority be accessible by whatever new website/platform is being used? *Yes, they will. The Council is under a legal obligation to ensure that all public documents are retained and will be made as accessible as possible.*
- General comment was made about the importance of transparency and making sure that everyone was well informed on the processes. Can dialogue remain open and staff made aware of the implications of TUPE and moving away from silo thinking so that knowledge and reassurance is shared across the Council. *All staff currently employed by SWT will transfer to the new authority on vesting day, on the same terms and*

conditions they are currently contracted for. (TUPE). This also includes all assets, housing, information and data. In areas of the business that currently employ agency staff, this will be reviewed. (As they are not employees of the Council, they are not under the same contractual obligations).

- At the current time where there is pressure on services due to staffing issues, these gaps are being filled via the “Mutual Aid” policy which is where one or more of the five councils assists another. Alternatively, in some of the statutory services such as planning, agency workers are proving a necessity unfortunately. This is unavoidable due to the national shortage of planning officers, and they can be more expensive to engage.
- What is happening to all the historic information like Minutes and Emails for those Councillors who will not be engaged after the 1 April? *There is a legal requirement to retain all Minutes of past Council meetings and official documentation. This is being managed according to the Council’s retention and GDPR policies. All ICT equipment that is currently held by staff and SWT Councillors will need to be handed back prior to vesting day so that it can be wiped and if necessary re-distributed.*
- Councillors expressed a wish to help staff as they transition to the new Council. It would be helpful if they are made aware of any existing pressures on services, so that they can provide reassurance to staff and customers.

Cllr Aldridge joined the meeting at 7.00pm

- How will ICT equipment be transferred and or implemented to those Cllrs who are likely to form the shadow Taunton Town Council? *Amy Tregellas advised that a detailed implementation plan on the Community Governance Review (CGR) including ICT requirements was currently being drawn up and would be a public document as part of the democratic process.*
- A query was raised about the precept setting for the 22/23 Council Tax and which authority was responsible for this and what mechanism would be used? *Somerset County Council as the continuing council for the new Somerset Council was in the process of setting the precept, taking into account the challenges presented by the Medium-Term Financial Plan, the rising costs associated with Adult Social Care and the high likelihood of no trickle-down grants from Central Government this year. There is a workstream within the LGR process, which is solely concerned with this area, and will ensure that Council Tax bills are sent out with the new branding within the legal timescales to ensure that payments can be made from April 1st 2023. Parish Councils should be setting their own precepts based on their own spending requirements and budgets. It is unlikely that there will be any changes to assets in the short term, so they should precept as normal for their usual services.*

Cllr Ed Firmin left the meeting at 7.20pm

Cllr Buller wrapped up the discussion by thanking Cllr Wakefield and Alison North for the update. She was reassured by the action being taken and pleased that

this monthly standing item, was providing a valuable insight into the work being undertaken under the LGR programme.

Cllrs were asked to note the report.
(Prop: Buller / Sec: Wren – unanimous)

51. **Strategic Flood Alleviation Schemes and Overview of Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) and Flood and Coastal Protection Board (F&CPB)**

This report was introduced by Executive Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, Cllr Dixie Darch and presented by Jonathan Stevens, Assistant Director Climate Change Regulatory Services and Asset Management.

Councillors had reviewed the report and made the following comments: -

- Gwil Wren – Written Answer – Can an update be provided on the current flood management schemes that are going on in the Milverton area?
- Janet Lloyd – Written Answer – Can an update be provided on the current flood management schemes that are going on in the Pinksmoor Area, because during times of heavy rain there is still a lot of surface water in the lanes which is slow to drain away.
- The point was made that the purpose of the report was to highlight flood risk management NOT to prevent flooding. All measures being implemented were the steps that were being taken to control water, but this might not necessarily be enough to stop areas being flooded. The EA and SRA would also be concentrating on high-risk areas where homes and livelihoods were vulnerable and mitigating against this. It may mean that areas of the highway were left to slowly drain away, so that other areas could be dealt with first.
- Cllr Mansell was pleased that the content of the report especially in natural flood management. It was asked whether these schemes were being monitored to evaluate their effectiveness? *A lot of evidence-based work is being undertaken by both the Environment Agency (EA) and Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) to evaluate the natural environment and habitats because of the work in this area.*
- The SRA benefits from bringing a whole variety of stakeholders to the table with various diverse views. They only invest in projects that are evidence based and can provide value for money. Some areas such as Sampford Brett in West Somerset have benefitted from being members of the SRA, even though they have very little capital/budget to spend on flood alleviation schemes themselves.
- Cllr Aldridge stressed that it was important that flood management work is not undertaken in isolation and that the agencies concerned respond to strategic planning enquiries and other matters relating to local infrastructure. It is vitally important that development land especially is managed properly to ensure that houses are not built on flood plains and store up problems for the future. *It is likely that this problem will be alleviated in the future when the unitary council will ensure more joined up working, especially between planning, infrastructure, and highways*

management. (The majority of the drainage issues currently come under the Highways responsibility).

- Jonathan Stevens is currently the workstream lead for this area of the LGR programme, so the various concerns will be noted and considered.
- Currently the SRA precept via the Council Tax, and this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The new Somerset Council will be the hosting authority for collection of the Council Tax going forward and they need to vote to confirm their acceptance of this. There has been a proposal for the SRA to become a precepting body, but this has not yet been agreed by central government.
- Concern was expressed by Brenda Weston about the destruction of trees and habitats along the canal path between Firepool and Obridge. Could residents be updated on the plans as there was concern that the flora and fauna would be adversely affected. *Woodland management and thinning would be happening, but it would only remove some of the trees along the canal bank, and not at a time when wildlife would be nesting. The work would not extend as far as the Children's wood which was not part of this scheme.*
- Cllr Farbahi asked if the current budget of 15million was enough to deliver the schemes that were prioritised and was there any additional Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money that could be drawn down? *All projects are on track and CIL receipts are already in hand and must be spent on flood management where applicable as defined by the EA. The short-term projects are being delivered, whilst the longer-term priorities are being worked on for the future. This may mean that additional funding will need to be secured from other providers.*
- Short term spending is categorised as any financial project under 10years duration.

The Chair summed up the report by saying that it was clear that a lot of people were working very hard to address the flood management issues, and she herself had seen signs of improvement since 2013, in her ward areas of Henlade and Ruishton.

The committee noted the report.
(*Prop: Buller / unanimous*)

(The Meeting ended at 8.16 pm)