

## SWT Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 1 February 2023

Present: Councillor Sue Buller (Chair)

Councillors Ian Aldridge, Simon Coles, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, John Hassall, Nicole Hawkins, Marcus Kravis, Libby Lisgo, Janet Lloyd, Nick Thwaites and Gwil Wren

Officers: Sam Murrell, Marcus Prouse, Chris Hall, Lisa Tuck, Hattie Winter, Alison Blom Cooper and Colleen Blake.

Also Present: Councillors Brenda Weston, Dave Mansell and Sarah Wakefield (Via Zoom), Cllr Loretta Whetlor

(The meeting commenced at 6.18 pm)

### 87. **Apologies**

Cllr Loretta Whetlor (subs Cllr Janet Lloyd).

Cllr Whetlor attended the meeting in her capacity as Chair of the Public Transport Task and Finish Group.

### 88. **Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

The Minutes of the previous Corporate Scrutiny Meeting held on Wednesday 4 January 2022, were approved as a true record.

*Prop: Hassall / Sec: Coles Unanimous*

### 89. **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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoked and Voted
Cllr M Kravis	All Items	SCC & Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town		
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	SCC & Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

90. **Public Participation**

There were no questions or comments submitted for public participation.

91. **To receive an update on the Local Government Review (LGR) and Community Governance Review (CGR).**

Cllr Sarah Wakefield and Alison North joined the meeting via zoom to provide a verbal update. The key milestones which have been achieved with regard to moving to the unitary council are:-

- The ICT cutover had taken place on the weekend of the 19-23 January which had transferred all SWT systems onto the SCC platform, to enable a smooth transition in April. All ICT staff worked collaboratively and extremely hard over the weekend, to ensure that all systems were working and ready to go on the Monday morning. There were still some teething problems but in the main, the process had gone well.
- Service readiness – Core teams are working through their change lists and product workstream notes to ensure that their services are safe, legal and functioning on Day1 of the new Authority.

The Community Governance update covered the fact that the new Taunton Parish Clerk was now in post. She would be working from an office in Deane House for the time being.

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

There were no comments on the Recommendation Tracker.

It was requested that an answer to the outstanding item on the Written Answer Tracker from 7/12/22 was submitted within 5 working days of the meeting.

07/12/2022	Cllr Lisgo – What is the call abandonment rate for customer services? How long do callers wait before they ring off? Are these callers followed up?	Cllr Benet Allen / Internal Resources	Richard Sealey and Malcolm Riches are looking at the statistics. A full written response will be provided in January, when the outcome is known.  Still awaiting a response.	Alison North / Malcolm Riches
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Officers agreed to follow this up, and circulate the answer to the committee.

93. **Corporate Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan**

No comments were made. The Committee noted the Forward Plan.

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

The Committee noted the Forward Plans. There were no comments or questions arising.

95. **Public Transport Task and Finish Report**

Cllr Loretta Whetlor thanked the members of the Task and Finish Group for their input, and Marcus Prouse for providing administrative support. The work of the group had been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such there had not been sufficient time and resource to provide a written report to the Committee.

Marcus Prouse showed a series of slides which provided an overview on the work undertaken by the Public Transport Task and Finish Group. These had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting, together with a series of conclusions.

Members of the Committee made the following comments:-

- Was the work on the work-place parking levy followed up and what was the outcome? *This had been researched but not implemented. This was mainly due to the impact COVID-19 had on commuting. It was generally accepted that less people were travelling into the offices to work.*
- The introduction of £1/£2 subsidised bus fares across the county was welcomed and had increased use of the bus service. The Committee was also pleased with the re-implementation of the late bus service on certain routes. This allowed workers to use the service and assisted the parking situation at Musgrove Park Hospital.
- It was raised that students were not eligible to claim the subsidised bus fare and were tied into the school transport agreement.
- Although the increased public transport between West Somerset and Taunton was welcomed, there was still a very limited service from Minehead to Bridgwater. There was currently only 1 daily bus each way that served Bridgwater/Taunton College and operated in term time. This was not sufficient because there were as many work opportunities in Bridgwater as Taunton. The free Hinkley Bus alleviated this problem somewhat, but due to the erosion of the coast road at Cleeve Hill, Watchet this now did not travel to the pickup point at Blue Anchor.
- It was asked whether Butlins could be encouraged to provide transport for their guests on change-over days, especially from the Taunton train station. Very often these buses were over-filled by people travelling to

Minehead with their luggage and families. This placed a lot of pressure on the regular service and commuters at peak times.

- There need to be more input at the development stage of new housing estates, to ensure that bus routes and public transport options were built into the early plans and could be provided as part of S106 and Community Infrastructure Levies.
- It was suggested that during peak times a quicker direct service bus could be provided for those commuters who wanted to travel straight to work, rather than take the longer journey through the villages. There was a mismatch at present, because some buses were over full at peak times, whilst others were practically empty.
- Those Councillors who are now part of the unitary council, were asked to support the recommendations and do their best to see they were implemented.
- Concern was expressed about what happens to the subsidised fares after the 31 March. Would the trial be extended?

Cllr Lisgo proposed that the report was passed to the Executive before Somerset West and Taunton Council ceased to exist, so that the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation – Cllr Mike Rigby could take it forward to the new Somerset Council for their appropriate consideration. This recommendation was seconded by Cllr Janet Lloyd, and unanimously supported by the Committee.

Cllr Whetlor agreed to add a recommendation to the report, in respect of an improved service between Minehead/West Somerset and Bridgwater, in recognition of the significant number of educational and employment opportunities that are there.

## 96. **Local Labour Agreement Policy**

The report was introduced by Lisa Tuck, Service Manager for Economic Development, supported by Hattie Winter and Colleen Blake.

Corporate Scrutiny Committee was asked to note the formal adoption of the SWT Local Labour Agreement Policy into the Council's Policy Framework.

Currently only Sedgemoor District Council has such an agreement in place as part of their Local Plan, and this will be picked up and adopted by the new Somerset Council. SWT wants to implement this agreement as a material planning consideration going forward, so that it too can become part of the former Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council Local Plans. When these become the new unitary local plans, this planning policy will transfer as part of the process. It is also hoped that this will provide a model for other councils to emulate.

Comments from the Committee included: -

- Members were supportive of the aspirations outlined in the report and agreed that contributing to the local economy via up-skilling and employment were improving opportunities for inward investment.
- The aim of the policy to try and ensure that at least 25% of the workforce is employed locally. This would be promoted via the Department of Work Pensions (DWP), Employment Hubs, Skill Up, Somerset Skills and Learning and via roadshows.
- Current gaps in the labour market are a legacy of COVID-19 which has adversely affected the tourism and hospitality sector. The Economic Development team recognise this and are doing what they can to ensure that new recruits to those industries are employed from the local workforce. They are aiming for 25% local uptake. The team will be working with developers as part of the planning process in the very early stages. Therefore, it needs to be factored in as a material planning consideration.
- It will only apply to large scale development, which is currently classified as 50+ dwellings.
- Concern was expressed about the policy affecting the viability of sites coming forward and might deter developers from building. *Alison Blom Cooper stated that as with all planning policies, there would be various concerns about viability, but these would be addressed and assessed as sites came forward, and would be considered alongside other issues such as transport links, health and education policies.*
- It was queried whether there were currently enough planning staff to implement the policy once it was adopted? *SWT currently had a full complement of planning officers, but it was a volatile employment market and was under considerable pressure from the private sector. It was an ever-changing picture. The implementation of the Local Labour Agreement would be monitored and facilitated by the Economic Development team, and there was more capacity to cover this type of work. Currently in Sedgemoor District Council, there is a full-time labour and skills employee who builds up a skills plan with employers to identify labour gaps and how these can be filled. It's a model that can be transferred to other councils.*
- It was queried whether SWT had worked with the construction industry and the supply chain whilst drawing up the policy. *The team had taken advice from the CITB (Construction Industry Training Board), DWP and other district councils such as Sedgemoor, who already had the policy in place. It was an ongoing process and would be monitored and developed as the scheme became embedded in the planning policy.*
- It was asked how the policy would be affected by the current phosphate situation. *At the present time it is mainly the smaller sites which are being held (which amounts to approximately 3000 properties). As this policy relates to larger future sites, which will build in phosphate mitigation as part of the planning process, it is not envisioned that this will be a problem.*
- It was asked how Councillors will be made aware of the policy if it is not going to Full Council for consideration. *The policy will be signed off as an Executive Decision, and then the Economic Development team will ensure that it is actively promoted to ensure members are aware of the policy. This can be achieved via Member Briefings, the website and newsletters. It is also important that the future Somerset Council, abides by the terms of the policy especially regarding any new council housing development.*

- The Committee was informed that even though the Local Labour Agreement was only now being adopted, previous developments at Seaward Way and North Taunton tried to recruit locally. They had this built into the work contracts to try and encourage the sub-contractors to employ apprentices and use local supply chains. This Local Labour Agreement policy would be formalising the process.
- Officers were congratulated for their hard work in finally bringing the Local Labour Agreement through the democratic process. It was an important piece of work which would leave a legacy for SWT.
- The definition of local for the purposes of the Agreement would conform to the boundaries of the relevant Local Planning Agreement. (So currently split between West Somerset and Taunton Deane).
- Cllr Buller concluded by saying that most of the report was aspirational and she was not sure whether it was achievable. She asked if successful examples could be provided by other councils who already had a process in place. (It was agreed by Hattie Winter to come back with a written answer). Please see Tracker.

The Councils Corporate Scrutiny Committee did not make a specific recommendation in relation to this report. The comments made were noted by the project team. The comments will be considered during the implementation of the policy to ensure the objectives of the policy and aspirations of the Council are realised.

(The Meeting ended at 8.07 pm)