

SOMERSET WEST AND TAUNTON COUNCIL
CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WRITTEN ANSWERS TRACKER 2022/23

Date of Cttee	Scrutiny Cttee Request for information	Decision Maker /Directorate Responsible	Response to request for information	Date of response	Scrutiny Officer Comments/Update
01/06/2022	Decision taken under the Emergency Rule – <i>Further information requested regarding costings etc</i>	Cllr Benet Allen / Chris Hall	Questions relating to the Coal Orchard Development. Due to commercial sensitivity these will be made available to Councillors confidentially after the public meeting.	06/06/2022	Answers provided by Joe Wharton and uploaded to MOD.GOV.
01/06/2022	Committee asked for further updates on the phosphate situation. <i>Would like a special Scrutiny meeting to highlight these issues.</i>	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall	A members briefing has been set up to take place on 28 July to look at Phosphates and the current five-year housing land supply. The slides from the briefing will be made available afterwards for those who are unable to attend. Chris Hall has also highlighted that the Phosphates on the Somerset levels and moors (somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk) webpage does address most of the concerns. The correct platform for debating phosphate issues is the SWT Phosphates Planning Sub-Committee .	08/06/2022	Answers provided by Chris Hall and Sam Murrell.

06/07/2022	<p>Corporate Performance Report: High proportion of planning refusals have been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate.</p> <p><i>(Page 266 & 272 Agenda) Flagged Red.</i></p> <p><i>Can a breakdown be provided on the proportion of decisions that have been overturned by the Planning Inspectorate following appeals from applicants?</i></p> <p><i>Can this be split between officer delegated decisions and those that were determined by the Planning Committee.</i></p> <p><i>Have any successful appeals resulted in the awarding of costs to the applicant?</i></p>	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall (Planning)	<p>The Local Planning Authority has received 20 appeal decisions from the Planning Inspectorate for the period from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2022. Of these 6 were allowed (equating to 30% of appeals determined in this period). This compares with the target against which performance is measured corporately of 33% which is the national average of appeals allowed.</p> <p>Of those allowed in this period, two were appeals following decisions by the Planning Committee, one of which resulted in a costs award to the applicant. The quantum is yet to be determined – the process is that the applicant must submit their costs and for the Council to determine whether they are reasonable. In the event of a disagreement, it then goes for independent taxation.</p>	25/07/2022	Answers provided by Julie Harcombe / Rebecca Miller and Alison Blom-Cooper
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06/07/2022	<p>Corporate Performance Summary: Our Environment and Economy <i>(Page 264, Item 1)</i></p> <p>“A low-carbon, clean, green and prosperous district that attracts high quality employment opportunities and encourages healthy lifestyles”</p> <p><i>Is it possible to provide examples of high-quality companies being attracted to SWT in the last year?</i></p>	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall (Econ Regen)	<p>SWT do not currently measure the number of high-quality employment new businesses moving into the district. However, in January 2022 SWT purchased a licence to a business data platform, which will enable reporting of various statistics relating to business health and growth in the district. The Economic Development Team are exploring the reporting capabilities of the software. Currently, we are unable to provide a figure in response to the question. The Economic Development team with partner organisations, continue to market SWT to inward investors and account manage inward investment enquiries.</p> <p><i>“This period has seen the completion of a new promotional inward investment-focused website for the district and production of an investment video as part of a ‘SWITCH’ campaign, inviting potential investors to switch to Somerset West and Taunton. The campaign highlights the area’s locational, strengths as well as current growth -industries such as healthcare and med-tech, the circular economy, digital and creative, global marine and current construction opportunities in the energy sector.</i></p> <p><i>12 business ambassadors from varying sectors of the economy have also been recruited to act as business ambassadors for the area.</i></p> <p><i>A launch event with a key business audience of commercial agents and developers took place in May 2022. This has formed a key part of the delivery of the Marketing and Communications plan for Inward Investment.”</i></p> <p>(Excerpt from Cllr Rigby’s latest PFH report)</p>	25/07/22	Lisa Tuck
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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> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">2022/23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Opening Balance</td> <td>(642,538.36)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Emergency Town Centre Fund</td> <td>50,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Budget 22/23 Contribution</td> <td>372,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Provision for Grant</td> <td>80,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Innovation Districts</td> <td>50,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Taunton Town Centre</td> <td>50,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Taunton Together</td> <td>25,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Closing Balance</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	Kerry Prisco
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06/07/2022	Can further information be provided on what the Employment Land Schemes and Williton Shooting Club capital programmes will be spent on?	Mike Rigby / Chris Hall (Econ Regen)	The Employment Land Schemes capital programme is currently looking at potential employment sites in Minehead, but SMT have deferred any capital expenditure requests until Unitary. The Williton Shooting Club was a Hinkley funded project which was completed historically, and the unused budget was returned last year.	22/07/22	Kerry Prisco																				
06/07/2022	General Fund Outturn Report: Capital Programme (Page 322). Economic Regeneration Initiatives. <i>Can a list be provided of how much has been spent on consultancy and to whom?</i>	Cllr Benet Allen / Paul Fitzgerald	A comprehensive breakdown of consultancy fees has been emailed to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.	02/08/22	Paul Fitzgerald																				

03/08/2022	<p>Taunton Garden Town Update: Query from Cllr Hassall regarding possible conflict between introducing a bus lane into East Street Taunton whilst making it a pedestrianised area.</p> <p><i>Is there any update on the current position?</i></p>	<p>Cllr Mike Rigby / Sarah Ellwood (Project Manager – Active Travel and Regeneration).</p>	<p>In 2020, during the closure of East St to general traffic to allow social distancing, SWT embarked on a project to explore possible concept designs for a longer term pedestrianisation of East St. Following highly successful stakeholder workshops in summer 2021, concepts for restricting general traffic on East St to allow safer, more accessible active travel and public realm improvements were created and shared with SWT Executive in October 2021. Further work has been carried out to assess impact on people with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010.</p> <p>Although there are still strong aspirations to offer some form of pedestrianisation on East St, no budget for capital delivery has been assigned. SCC has, however, in recent months been successful in receiving funding for a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which is highly likely to impact East St and the surrounding area. SCC colleagues responsible for BSIP have assured SWT officers that the East St proposals will be considered when exploring the potential for bus service improvements for the town centre and we will remain involved in the feasibility work.</p>	08/08/22	Jenny Clifford / Sarah Ellwood
01/09/2022	<p>General Fund: Financial Performance Report Qtr1</p> <p>Cllr Lisgo queried how the virements within the External Operations had been arrived at.</p>	<p>Cllr Benet Allen / Internal Operations</p> <p>Chris Hall External Operations</p>	<p>The table identifies that the £302k virement is made up of some reductions in parking enforcement activity, savings identified in Street Scene, some savings and increased income from Parks and Open Spaces, and some savings and additional income from Bereavement Services. The largest single movement is created by increased income in bereavement services, this is a demand led service and in year changes in income are not uncommon. As a reminder these efficiencies against the budget are being used to support a reduction in income from off street car parking.</p>	14/09/22	Chris Hall / Kerry Prisco

Can there be a clearer representation of the variances within that Directorate which clearly show the movement of the budgets? Ref Page 32 of the report. Can a table please be provided?

Can this be circulated to the Committee.

**Commercial Services
22-23 Budget
Review**

	Parking & Enforcement	Street Scene	Parks and Open Spaces	Bereavement Services
Expenditure Budgets	-£20,040	£60,000	£42,000	-£20,000
Income Budgets	£302,040	£0	£10,000	-£150,000
Net	£282,000	£60,000	£52,000	-£170,000

This table has been added to the Executive report and Scrutiny's comments have been referenced.

01/09/2022

Cllr Lisgo/Lloyd: Corporate Performance Report Qtr1 – Can a breakdown be provided of the different Directorate complaints? This is to enable a clearer view on where there may be pressures in the business and tweak out common themes.

Cllr Benet Allen / Internal Operations

Examples of the types of complaints for each directorate are:

Internal Operations:

Council Tax recovery, handling of calls, website issues, claim decisions for discounts/exemptions/benefits and processing times.

External Operations:

Response time to reports, communication on ongoing cases, standard of service and parking machine faults.

Housing & Communities:

14/09/22

Alison North / Malcolm Riches and Jess Thomas

			<p>Timescales for repairs/upgrades, standard of work, communication issues and perceived lack of action regarding ASB.</p> <p>Development & Place: Planning; timescales for decisions, handling of applications and perceived lack of action regarding breaches.</p>		
05/10/2022	<p>Cllr Farbahi: Catapult Report – Which of the 6 recommendations outlined in this report have been taken forward?</p>	<p>Cllr Mike Rigby / Economic Development</p>	<p>Please see the supplementary sheet for a full written answer.</p>	18/10/22	<p>Chris Hall /Lisa Tuck / Mark Wathen</p>
05/10/2022	<p>Cllr Farbahi: Is the £50K “Innovation Districts” money identified in the Economic Initiatives EMR (BE019) table the money set aside for the Innovation Exchange?</p>	<p>Cllr Mike Rigby / Economic Development</p>	<p>Yes. It cost £35k in total to stage the Somerset Innovation Exchange event. £20k was secured from the Somerset £4m Business Rates Pool pot and so only £15k of SWT funds was utilised to stage the event. Income generated from ticket sales amounted to £1.5k, which further off-set the cost, resulting in a final cost to SWT of only £13.5k.</p>	18/10/22	<p>Chris Hall /Lisa Tuck / Mark Wathen</p>

05/10/2022	Cllr Farbahi: What are the outcomes of the Innovation Exchange? What options are there to expand on this for the new council?	Cllr Mike Rigby / Economic Development	Chris Hall to arrange for a member of the Economic Development team to attend Corporate Scrutiny in December, to provide an update to Members on the outcomes. Please see the supplementary sheet for a full written answer.	06/10/22	Chris Hall /Lisa Tuck / Mark Wathen
05/10/2022	Cllr Farbahi / Habgood 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.	Cllr Mike Rigby / Economic Development/ Cllr Benet Allen / Internal Resources	The Commercial Investment Report will come to Corporate Scrutiny in January on its route to Full Council in February. An appendix will be added to the report to cover the legacy assets that produce an income. (It will be a table with the name and income per annum).	05/10/22	Chris Hall / Joe Wharton / Harvey Gardner
05/10/2022	Cllr Gwil Wren – could a written update please be provided of the current flood management schemes currently taking place in the Milverton area.	Cllr Dixie Darch / Climate Change	Reply from the SRA can be accessed here .	07/11/22	Chris Hall / Jonathan Stevens

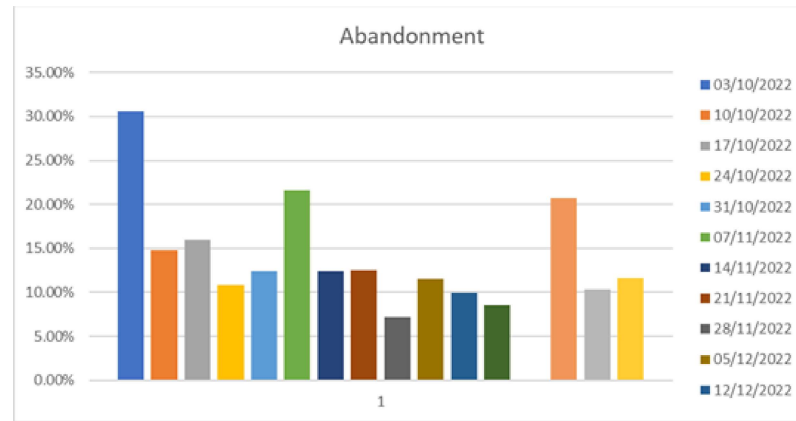
05/10/2022	Cllr Janet Lloyd - can a written update be provided on the current flood management schemes that are going on in the Pinksmoor Area.	Cllr Dixie Darch / Climate Change	Reply from the SRA can be accessed here .	07/11/22	Chris Hall / Jonathan Stevens
05/10/2022	Cllr Dave Mansell - can a written update be provided on the current flood management schemes that are going on in the Wiveliscombe Area.	Cllr Dixie Darch / Climate Change	Reply from the SRA can be accessed here .	07/11/22	Chris Hall / Jonathan Stevens
07/12/2022	Cllr Farbahi – What steps are being taken by SWT to tackle the Water Companies actions which are contributing to the slowing of planning applications. (Phosphates issues).	Cllr Rigby / Planning	Chris Hall will provide a full expanded update when the planning performance report is discussed in the January Corporate Scrutiny Committee. Captured in Planning Performance update on 04/01/23	08/12/22	Chris Hall / Alison Blom Cooper

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

The call abandonment rate is the percentage of calls which are terminated by the caller before being picked up by a call handler and is directly related to average waiting times. It's our aim to keep this percentage below 10%. From the chart below you will see a weekly average of abandonment results, while 10 weeks in the range the results are close to or under 10% we have had 5 weeks where this has not been possible. Since the beginning of October our average abandonment rate has been 14.41%.



Over the same period (October 22 - January 23) callers abandoned calls on average after 4 minutes 17 seconds. Unfortunately, we do not have the facility within the 8x8 system to arrange call backs for abandoned calls, we will be transferring to the Genesys system used by Somerset County Council in three weeks which has a function currently in Beta which should provide this functionality. I am unsure if this is a feature that will be brought into service for the future council at this time.

02/02/22

Alison North / Richard Sealy / Malcolm Riches

02/02/22

Richard Burge

31/01/2023	<p>In response to the question raised by Cllr Farbahi at the Shadow Taunton Town Council meeting on 31st January 2023 “How many 'quality' jobs have been created in Taunton since the garden town designation in 2017?”</p> <p>This is the latest response following on from the question being asked in Corporate Scrutiny on 1/12/21 and 6/7/22.</p>	Cllr Mike Rigby – Economic Development	<p>The Council does not collate information on the number of quality jobs created either at District scale or specific to Taunton and the Garden Town. The Council does not collate, measure or report the number of quality jobs as a corporate key performance indicator.</p> <p>Datasets relating to ‘job quality’ are available via the Office of National Statistics, however, these are collated at County level and do not include self-employment. These are evolving datasets recently expanded in 2021 from low pay, satisfactory hours, and desired contracts. To include terms of employment, pay and benefits, health, safety, and psychological wellbeing, nature of work, social support, voice and representation, and work-life balance. Therefore, year on year comparisons are not available.</p> <p>Further information can be found here: Job quality in the UK – analysis of job quality indicators - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk) Job quality indicator tables, UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)</p>	14/02/23	Jenny Clifford
01/02/2023	Can students travelling to college in Taunton / Bridgwater take advantage of the £1 bus fare?	Cllr Mike Rigby – Transportation	Yes, the £2 single fare is available for any passengers (including students) travelling on bus routes where operators have opted into the scheme – most routes within Somerset are part of the scheme	10/02/23	Marcus Prouse

01/02/2023	What happens to the subsidised funding on the bus fares from the 1 st April 2023?	Cllr Mike Rigby – Transportation	When the £2 single fare scheme ends (which is a government initiative they have introduced across England) then passengers will revert to their previous fares. For a lot of students this will be the £5 day return on subsidised College routes or could be whichever ticket option they were buying direct from the bus operator.	10/02/23	Marcus Prouse
01/02/2023	When will the bus hub in Taunton likely open?	Cllr Mike Rigby – Transportation	The Taunton mobility hub is still at feasibility stage, with consultation and detailed design stages yet to follow. We are currently aiming for the hub to be open and operational during 2024 but the exact date is yet to be determined.	10/02/23	Marcus Prouse
01/02/2023	<p>Cllr Buller asked if some statistics could be provided on how successful this has been in other areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall success of the scheme • Jobs Created / work experience / apprenticeships / events etc • Targets secured? 	Cllr Mike Rigby – Economic Development	<p>The projected figures are only targets, and Sedgemoor District Council currently work closely with the contractor to ensure they are met. 9/10 occasions they are exceeded. If they are not met, there will usually be a very good reason and there can be no redress.</p> <p>A copy of the table can be viewed below.</p>	02/02/23	Hattie Winter / Lisa Tuck

