

Full Council Meeting – 15 December 2020

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

Covid-19

Covid-19 continues to present a challenge for both the organisation and our district as a whole.

From a workforce perspective I have been working with the Senior Management Team to maintain staff safety whilst continuing to deliver services. I am pleased to say that our service standards have not dropped throughout this difficult time.

I would like to take a moment to thank Members and staff alike for all of the help and support we have mutually provided to each other and our community through this difficult time.

Remembrance

We were not able to follow our usual programme of events for this year's Remembrance commemorations as we needed to adhere to Government guidelines and keep the community safe. Instead the annual observation of Remembrance was marked with a series of videos which were shared on social media. Members of the public were invited to lay wreaths at Taunton's War Memorial in Vivary Park throughout the Day on Remembrance Sunday. SWT also observed the 'pause' on Armistice Day.

Ex-Councillor, Past Mayor and Freeman of the Borough John Meikle, MBE

It was very sad to hear that John Meikle MBE passed away in early November. John Meikle was a true gentleman and was universally respected for his wisdom and his unparalleled contribution to public life. His dedication to the community he served and the legacy he has left across the wider area has been immense. It was fitting that his tremendous achievements during over 50 years of public service were recognised when he was made a 'Freeman of the Borough' – an honour granted to only a handful of recipients. His passing will be a huge loss to his family and the community that he loved to serve.

Funding for Rough Sleepers Accommodation

SWT has been awarded Government funding to continue providing interim accommodation for rough sleepers during the Coronavirus pandemic. SWT and partners have been providing self-contained accommodation at Canonsgrove for rough sleepers and tenants of homeless hostels who find it difficult to self-isolate and practice social distancing. A whole range of organisations have been working with us to make this possible. The financial support from central government will allow us to build on our work to date. Working closely with partners and with the direct delivery of many supportive services has made fundamental positive changes to the individuals we work alongside.

Great British Sept Clean

I took part in a litter pick at Longrun Meadow and French Weir Park on 12 September. The event was organised by the Taunton Neighbourhood Policing Team

and was supported by the Friends of Longrun and staff from Coach. I was particularly pleased to see SWT's parks and open spaces included in the local clean up. We hear much about the problems caused by litter but we do not very often hear about the efforts of staff and volunteers working all year round to ensure we can all enjoy our parks and open spaces.

Topping Out Ceremony at Quantock House, Taunton

On 29 September I was invited to attend the Topping Out Ceremony at Quantock House, Taunton. The development is due for completion in the summer of 2021. Whilst there I climbed an external staircase to the roof for a photo-shoot and it was amazing to see the skyline of Taunton with all the different cranes and to see how everything is moving forward.

Southwest Tech Gathering

On 24 September I attended the Southwest Tech Gathering and was part of a panel on digital technology and economic recovery in the South West. I was very pleased to be asked to take part and present my views on how local government can shape and use digital innovation to make this happen.

Visit to Arc

On 26 October I attended the opening of Arc's in-house GP surgery which forms part of The Reach Centre – Arc's Wellbeing Hub. Arc is now able to offer this service to rough sleepers and other people who are homeless in the area. As well as a GP service, the clinic and treatment room will be available for use of many healthcare providers enabling homeless individuals to also access support with areas such as mental health, sexual health and more.