

SWT Full Council - 29 March 2022

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, John Hassall, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Dawn Johnson, Marcus Kravis, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Simon Nicholls, Derek Perry, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Nick Thwaites, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: James Barraah, Lesley Dolan, Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, Andrew Pritchard, Jo Comer, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas, Tony Bryant, Gordon Dwyer and Nicky Rendell

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

108. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors L Baker, D Durdan, B Hall, R Lees, A Milne, C Morgan, C Palmer, M Peters, A Sully and T Venner.

109. Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council

(Minutes of the meetings of Full Council held on 8 February 2022, 24 February 2022 and 3 March 2022 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council held on 8 February 2022, 24 February 2022 and 3 March 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

110. 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 M Barr	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Blaker	All Items	Wiveliscombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Cavill	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Govier	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Hunt	All Items	SCC & Bishop's Hull	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Lithgow	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr J Lloyd	All Items	Wellington & Sampford Arundel	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr V Stock-Williams	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Trollope-Bellew	All Items	Crowcombe	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Tully	All Items	West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Wedderkopp	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Councillor A Trollope-Bellew further declared a pecuniary interest on agenda item 14, the Motion on Water Quality and would withdraw from the meeting for that item.

Councillor N Cavill further declared a personal interest on agenda item 14, the Motion on Water Quality.

The following councillors further declared a personal interest on agenda item 11, Annual Pay Policy Statement 2022/23, as members of the Local Government Pension Scheme:-

Councillors I Aldridge, M Blaker, M Hill, M Kravis, S Lees, J Lloyd, D Mansell, H Prior-Sankey, F Smith, A Trollope-Bellew, B Weston and G Wren.

111. **Public Participation**

Mr Sigurd Reimer spoke on agenda item 14, the Motion on Water Quality:-

In September 2020 a report was published by the Environment Agency into the state of England's rivers. It found that 85% of them, including the River Tone, did not reach acceptable standards, either in relation to their ecological status, their chemical status, or both.

On the basis of that report, local groups from Extinction Rebellion protested in Taunton in December 2020 against pollution in the rivers, and the dangers that represented to the environment, and us as a part of that environment.

In April 2021 the head of the Environment Agency drew attention to the fact that over the past decade there had been cuts of over 60% to the total budget of the Environment Agency, which had the responsibility for inspecting and overseeing the quality of the water in our rivers. In short, for protecting us all.

I welcomed the proposal being put to this Council (Item 14 Motion on Water Quality) and would emphasize the importance of restoring adequate funding to ensure that the Environment Agency could carry out its duties effectively. In particular, I request that the Council asked the Government for evidence of any improvements that might have been made in the past 18 months, since the report was published. At the time the Environment Minister had said "More needed to be done and we needed to go further and faster". The question therefore remained, how far and how fast?

Mr Robert Barnes addressed the Council on issues that related to street cleanliness and other concerns on fly tipping.

112. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Chair of the Council**

The Chair of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Chair advised councillors that they needed to submit any mileage claims prior to 1 April 2022.
- Councillors were also reminded that they were required to submit their Related Party Transaction forms by 8 April 2022.
- The Chair reminded councillors about the Concert for Ukraine that was being held on Saturday 30 April 2022.

113. **To receive any communications or announcements from the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Leader highly recommended all attendees to visit the Moon at the Minster.
- The Leader also congratulated Chris Hall on achieving a grant amount of £96k for Changing Places, both located in Minehead and Taunton.

114. **To receive any questions from Councillors in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13**

No questions were received in regards to Procedure Rule 13.

115. **Somerset West and Taunton Council amended Political Allocation and Councillor Appointments to Committees**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Monitoring Officer advised on some amendments on page 39 of the agenda.
- The Group Leaders advised councillors of some changes to the allocations.

Resolved that Full Council approved:-

- a) Political allocation as attached (Appendix A)
- b) Councillor appointments to Committees (Appendix B)

116. **Decision taken under the urgency rules regarding the Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were happy to support the decision, as the latest grants were supporting businesses who were not able to receive the grants in the earlier stages of the scheme.
- Councillors thanked all the officers for their hard work in supporting local businesses.

Resolved that Full Council noted the decision made by the Chief Executive on 12 January 2022 under paragraph 5 of the Budget and Policy Framework within the Council's Constitution in relation to the release of funds to the Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme.

117. **Budget Approval - Electric Vehicle Charging Points**

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors were delighted to support the scheme as many of them were electric vehicle users.

Resolved that Full Council supported the supplementary capital budget allocation of £120k, making a total of £270k of which £136k is secured funding from OZEV.

118. **Annual Pay Policy Statement 2022/23**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors requested clarification on the redundancy policy and what would happen to those types of policies when the New Unitary Council was formed.
- The HR Manager advised that under TUPE legislation, the policies would be transferred to the New Council with the officers.
- Councillors were happy to support the Policy.

Resolved that Full Council approved the Pay Policy statement 2022/23.

119. **Capital, Investment and Treasury Strategies 2022/23 to 2024/25**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillor Kravis left the room for the debate.
- Councillors agreed that the Strategies were compliant.
- Concern was raised on years 2023-24, when Somerset West and Taunton Council was due to end.
The Section 151 Officer advised that the Strategy was relevant for the next year.
- Councillors highlighted that other councils had given estimates in their budget papers.
The Section 151 Officer advised that the report did include estimates and that an update would be given at the next meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee.
- Concern was raised on the Commercial Investment section and that it contained risk.
- Councillors wanted to see other investments in more local projects and climate friendly projects.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources understood their concern but advised councillors that the officers had worked hard in making the decisions on which properties had been chosen.
- Concern was raised as there was no access to the Public Loan Works Board.
- Councillors queried whether work had started on what would happen to the Strategies in the New Unitary Council.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources advised that officers would ensure that the Strategies were included in the work going forward into the Local Government Organisation within the relevant workstream meetings.

Resolved that Full Council approved the CIT Strategies and MRP Statement for adoption with effect from 1 April 2022.

The following Councillors abstained from the vote: Councillors S Buller, N Cavill, H Davies, A Govier, L Lisgo, D Mansell, A Pritchard, B Weston and L Whetlor.

120. **Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent Flats Regeneration, Taunton**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillor S Pugsley left the meeting.
- Councillor H Farbahi left the room during the debate.
- Councillors were happy to support the recommendations and advised that the report sparked a good debate when it was taken to Community Scrutiny Committee.
- Concern was raised on recommendation G, on future use of the site, councillors were concerned that the site could be left empty for a long period of time.
- Councillors wanted to see housing back on the site as quickly as possible.
- The Portfolio Holder for Housing agreed with the comments and would like to see housing return to the site but understood that the land might have to stay fallow for a period of time to enable officers to apply for better funding opportunities.

Resolved that Full Council approved:-

- a) The decanting of tenants from Wordsworth Drive Flats with the awarding of gold band status in April 2022. Gold band status would support tenants secure alternative suitable accommodation.
- b) The decanting of tenants from Coleridge Crescent Flats with the awarding of gold band status at a time to be determined by the Director of Housing and Communities in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.
- c) The purchase through mutual consent one leasehold property at Wordsworth Drive flats and compensate the owner in line with statutory compensation requirements.
- d) To make available to the leaseholder the opportunity of a SWT Equity Loan to help secure alternative private accommodation.
- e) Noted officers would agree the closure date and compensation with the shop leasee to ensure Wordsworth block was available for demolition.
- f) The demolition of Wordsworth Drive and Coleridge Crescent Flats at a time to be determined by the Director of Housing and Communities in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.
- g) Officers to return to the Council with options for the future use of the site.
- h) A supplementary budget of £1,111,700 and to delegate the funding of the scheme to the Section 151 Officer.

121. **Motion on Water Quality**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillor A Trollope-Bellew left the room for the debate.
- Councillor D Darch thanked the public speaker for their comments and support on the Motion.
- Councillor Darch introduced the Motion as the proposer, which was duly seconded by Councillor G Wren.
- Councillors were happy to support the Motion.
- Councillors requested that the two local Members of Parliament (MP) were included in the letters to be sent out.

The proposer and seconder agreed and accepted that the MPs be included.

- Councillors highlighted that they had attended an Environmental Debate and had asked questions about river quality and had received some disappointing answers from the relevant organisations.
- Some concern was raised on the comments made in the Motion with regards to farmers and that the councillors could have asked for further information.
- Councillors mentioned issues on phosphate pollution.
- Councillors requested whether the Rivers Authority could be included in the letters.

The proposer advised that the Somerset Rivers Authority were responsible for flood management and that it was the Environment Agency who were responsible for maintaining the water quality.

- Concern was raised on water/sewage treatment centres and their effectiveness.
- Councillors agreed that society had accepted that water quality had declined over the years.
- Councillors highlighted an article in a newspaper that related to a clean river campaign and that there was a lot of work to be done to get the water quality back up to standard.
- Councillors understood that farmers had done a lot of work to improve the pollution caused but that it had not gone far enough. Concern was raised on the replacement of soil that had washed away, along with fertilisers, into the rivers.
- The Leader of the Council was happy to support the Motion and if it was resolved, write letters to the relevant organisations mentioned in the recommendations.

Resolved that Full Council approved that the Leader of the Council write to the following:-

- The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs calling for the Government to make these commitments and provide evidence of any improvements made in the last 18 months as host nation of COP-26.
- The Chairperson of the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee to advocate for greater enforcement of existing regulatory powers.
- The Chief Executives of South West Water and Wessex Water as the local utility companies for the South West, calling for urgent action to address the impact of waste-water discharges on our local rivers.
- The Regional Director of the National Farmers' Union requesting clarification on the action being taken locally by farmers to prevent nutrient run-off.
- The charities River Action and The Rivers Trust expressing this Council's support for their campaign to restore the health of Britain's rivers.
- Both local MPs, Ian Liddell-Grainger and Rebecca Pow.

122. **Motion on the use of Hybrid Meetings**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillor Trollope-Bellew introduced the Motion as the proposer, which was duly seconded by Councillor G Wren.
- Councillors were happy to support the Motion.
- Councillors agreed there were pros and cons with the use of virtual meetings.
- Councillors agreed that each council should have the choice of which type of meeting they used, face-to-face, hybrid or virtual.
- Councillors agreed that Central Government should have put legislation in place sooner to benefit local councils.
- Concern was raised on what would happen if there was bad internet connectivity and the additional support required for the technology.
- Councillors queried the process that would need to be put in place to ensure the meetings were managed effectively.
- Councillors agreed that the use of virtual or hybrid meetings would support the work being carried out on climate change.
- Councillors believed the use of virtual or hybrid meetings would improve engagement.
- Councillors highlighted that face-to-face meetings should still be used, as it was important for good communications and team building.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 1) Supported the petition launched by ADSO and LLG on 5 January with regard to remote and hybrid meetings.
- 2) Agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities calling on the Government to change the law to allow councils the flexibility to hold such meetings when they deem appropriate within agreed rules and procedures.

123. **Corporate Scrutiny Committee - Chair's Annual Report - For Information Only**

Resolved that Full Council noted the Annual Report.

124. **Community Scrutiny Committee - Chair's Annual Report - For Information Only**

Resolved that Full Council noted the Annual Report.

125. **Audit and Governance Committee - Chair's Annual Report - For Information Only**

Resolved that Full Council noted the Annual Report.

(The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm)