

SWT Full Council

Tuesday, 6th September, 2022,
6.15 pm



Somerset West
and Taunton

The John Meikle Room - The Deane
House

Members: Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair), Richard Lees (Vice-Chair), Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Sue Buller, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, Dave Durdan, Kelly Durdan, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, Barrie Hall, John Hassall, Nicole Hawkins, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Dawn Johnson, Marcus Kravis, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Andy Milne, Chris Morgan, Simon Nicholls, Craig Palmer, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Nick Thwaites, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Terry Venner, Sarah Wakefield, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Agenda

1. Apologies

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee.

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive and note any declarations of disclosable pecuniary or prejudicial or personal interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The personal interests of Councillors and Clerks of Somerset County Council, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes.)

(Pages 7 - 16)

4. Public Participation

The Chair to advise the Committee of any items on which members of the public have requested to speak and advise those members of the public present of the details of the Council's public participation scheme.

For those members of the public who have submitted any questions or statements, please note, a three minute time limit applies to each speaker and you will be asked to speak before Councillors debate the issue.

We are now live webcasting most of our committee meetings and you are welcome to view and listen to the discussion. The link to each webcast will be available on the meeting webpage, but you can also access them on the [Somerset West and Taunton webcasting website](#).

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

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

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

8. Constitution Update - Somerset wide Member Code of Conduct

(Pages 17 - 40)

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life's report into Local Government Ethical Standards recommended that '*the Local Government Association (LGA) should create an updated model code of conduct, in consultation with representative bodies of councillors and officers of all tiers of local government*'. The Local Government Association (LGA) undertook consultation with local authorities and issued a Model Code of Conduct for Elected Members in May 2021.

Somerset County Council adopted the Model Code with effect from 6 May 2022 to support the transition towards the new Somerset Council. The District Council Monitoring Officers are taking reports to their members with a view to recommending adoption of the Code by end September 2022.

9. Constitution Update - Procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations

(Pages 41 - 66)

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts.

The opportunity has been taken to review the Council's arrangements for dealing with Standards Allegations as part of the Local Government Reorganisation work, in collaboration with the Monitoring Officers of the County and District Councils. The report proposes that if this is approved by the Council, that the Monitoring Officer will work with the LGR Governance Workstream to determine when this will be introduced.

10. Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public

During discussion of the following items 11, 12 and 13 (Item 11 ONLY Appendix C & Items 12 & 13 in totality), it may be necessary to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public having reflected on Article 13 13.02(e) (a presumption in favour of openness) of the Constitution. This decision may be required because consideration of this matter in public may disclose information falling within one of the descriptions of exempt information in Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. The Full Council will need to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption, outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Recommend that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next three items of business (Item 11 Appendix C only) on the ground that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

11. Oake Woolaway Housing Refurbishments

(Pages 67 - 78)

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Francesca Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing

This report seeks Full Council approval for the refurbishment and associated works for ten Woolaway homes at Oake which are currently classified as defective non-traditional dwellings. Further approvals are also sought on approving a supplementary budget within the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme and a delegation to the s151 Officer to determine the optimum financing arrangements.

12. Asset Management Lease

(Pages 79 - 94)

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mike Rigby, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation

This confidential report seeks Council approval to enter into a new lease agreement.

13. Heritage at Risk

(Pages 95 - 110)

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Cllr Mike Rigby, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation

This confidential report contains further information and seeks Council approval for further steps in relation to its Heritage at Risk Programme.

14. Re-admittance of the Press and Public

15. Motion to declare a Learning Disability Emergency

(Pages 111 - 114)

To consider a Motion proposed by Councillor Mark Blaker, seconded by Councillor Loretta Whetlor.

The standard Motions Assessment Pro-forma document will FOLLOW.

16. To consider reports from Executive Councillors

(Pages 115 - 172)

Part I – To deal with written questions to the Executive.

Part II – To receive reports from the following Members of the Executive:-

- a) Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts – Leader of the Council
- b) Councillor Derek Perry – Deputy Leader & Sports, Parks, Leisure and Phosphates
- c) Councillor Benet Allen – Corporate Resources
- d) Councillor Christopher Booth – Community
- e) Councillor Caroline Ellis – Culture
- f) Councillor Dixie Darch – Climate Change
- g) Councillor Mike Rigby – Economic Development, Planning and Transportation
- h) Councillor Francesca Smith - Housing
- i) Councillor Andy Sully – Environmental Services
- j) Councillor Wakefield – Local Government Reorganisation

An Executive Councillor shall submit a report to an Ordinary Meeting of the Council as to current and future business of their portfolio for the information of and comment from the Council. Such reports are for discussion and comment only and no motion shall be put to the meeting as to any such item other than those closure motions described in Standing Order 5.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Pritchard', with a horizontal line underneath.

ANDREW PRITCHARD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Please note that this meeting will be recorded. At the start of the meeting the Chair will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being recorded and webcast. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. Data collected during the recording will be retained in accordance with the Council's policy. Therefore unless you are advised otherwise, by entering the Council Chamber and speaking during Public Participation you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of the sound recording for access via the website or for training purposes. If you have any queries regarding this please contact the officer as detailed above.

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions. There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions. Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 3 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chair will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate. Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chair will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors begin to debate the item.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group. These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room. Full Council, Executive, and Committee agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

The meeting room, including the Council Chamber at The Deane House are on the first floor and are fully accessible. Lift access to The John Meikle Room, is available from the main ground floor entrance at The Deane House. The Council Chamber at West Somerset House is on the ground floor and is fully accessible via a public entrance door. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available across both locations. An induction loop operates at both The Deane House and West Somerset House to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team via email: governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

If you would like an agenda, a report or the minutes of a meeting translated into another language or into Braille, large print, audio tape or CD, please email: governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

SWT Full Council - 5 July 2022

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Richard Lees, Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Marcus Barr, Mark Blaker, Chris Booth, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Andrew Govier, Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, Barrie Hall, John Hassall, Nicole Hawkins, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Simon Nicholls, Derek Perry, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston and Loretta Whetlor

Officers: Lesley Dolan, Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, Alison North, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas, Jo Comer, Katherine Church, Jonathan Stevens, Sue Tomlinson and Joe Wharton

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

18. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors L Baker, S Buller, D Durdan, K Durdan, R Henley, D Johnson, M Kravis, A Milne, C Morgan, C Palmer, M Peters, A Pritchard, A Sully, N Thwaites, T Venner, K Wheatley and G Wren.

19. **Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council**

(Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 24 May 2022 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council held on 24 May 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

20. **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 M Barr	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Booth	All Items	Wellington and Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr N Cavill	All Items	SCC & West Monkton	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Darch	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Davies	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr T Deakin	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Govier	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr A Hadley	All Items	SCC	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 R Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	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 D Mansell	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Pugsley	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Rigby	All Items	SCC & Bishops Lydeard	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	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 S Wakefield	All Items	SCC	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

21. **Public Participation**

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

Mr Pakes spoke on agenda item 9:-

Mr Pakes asked why had the Council turned to the use of a Commercial Investment Strategy to make money and fund local services. He mentioned how the High Street Funds would be lost and he made comment on the debate raised at a recent Scrutiny Committee meeting and that information had been kept confidential, which concerned him, as councillors took a vote on unknown information.

The Portfolio Holder for Communications and Corporate Services and the Portfolio Holder for Phosphates, Planning and Transportation both thanked Mr Pakes for his comments and gave some background information as to why the Commercial Investment Strategy had been used and what had happened with the Coal Orchard site.

Mr Ginger spoke on the petition he had submitted to Council regarding Taunton Area Cycling Campaign.

Mr Ginger thanked the Council for the work that had been carried out but acknowledged there was still more to achieve. He raised concerns on the routes that were currently being used in the area and what work needed to be carried out to improve the infrastructure.

The Portfolio Holder for Phosphates, Planning and Transportation thanked Mr Ginger for his comments and advised him that officers were working actively on implementing many of what was being requested as part of the petition. He urged Mr Ginger to re-present his petition to Somerset County Council, as there had been a change of administration since he last raised the matter at their Council meeting.

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

The Chair of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Chair had attended some lovely events within the District, including the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations and Armed Forces Day. She thanked all those who were involved for their hard work.

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

The Leader of the Council advised Full Council that she had been appointed as the representative on the Local Government Reorganisation Implementation Board at the Special Executive meeting that took place prior to the Full Council meeting on 5 July 2022.

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

No questions had been received in relation to Procedure Rule 13.

25. **Petition - Taunton Area Cycling Campaign (TACC)**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors agreed it was a cross-council piece of work which they supported.
- Councillors stated that they would like to see the connections into the main towns improved.
- Councillors supported the work being carried out in Taunton but would like to see similar work being carried out across the District.
- Councillors highlighted that the petition had already been handed in to Somerset County Council but that it might be worth taking it again since there had been a change in administration.
- Councillors thanked Mr Ginger for all his work on the petition.
- The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation thanked all the councillors for their comments and support.

Resolved that Full Council noted the following:-

1. To support the implementation of a high-quality cycle network by direct implementation where SWT had control, and by influencing others (developers, SCC, National Highways) where it didn't have control
2. To encourage cycling to school
3. To promote with SCC cycle friendly road design
4. To work collaboratively with SCC and TACC

26. **Use of Urgency Powers and Supplementary Capital Budget for Coal Orchard Regeneration Project**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised on the Brewhouse and the impact on their trade due to the works taking longer than expected.
- Councillors thanked officers for all their work to ensure the project was completed, especially when Midas had withdrawn from the contract.
- Councillors requested assurance that if the recommendations were approved that the project would be completed.
The Portfolio Holder for Communications and Corporate Resources advised that nothing was risk free, but he hoped that the space would be in use by August 2022.
- The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation supported the project and gave some background

information on why the costs had changed and gave an update on the works.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 2.1 Noted the use of urgency powers by the Chief Executive who approved the increased capital budget allocation of £675,000 towards the completion of the Coal Orchard regeneration scheme.
- 2.2 Noted the allocation of a refundable £45,000 bond to National House Building Council, approved by the S151 Officer and managed through cash flow.
- 2.3 Approved the transfer of £185,000 from General Reserves to a new Coal Orchard Warranty Earmarked Reserve to manage any potential financial liabilities under warranty claims.
- 2.4 Delegated authority to allocate funds from this reserve and approve related uplifts in relevant budgets to the Director of Development and Place, the Assistant Director Major and Special Projects, and the S151 Officer.
- 2.5 Approved a further supplementary capital budget increase of £100,000 for the Coal Orchard scheme additional £100,000 to be funded by capital receipts.

27. **Blue Anchor - Request for Capital Supplementary Budget Increase**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were very pleased to see the project going ahead.
- Councillors were very happy to support the project.

Resolved that Full Council supported the supplementary capital budget allocation of £262,280 to reflect the additional funding provided by Somerset County Council to deliver the Blue Anchor Coastal Protection Scheme.

Councillor D Mansell abstained from the vote.

28. **Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors supported the recommendations; however, they raised some concern on destroying habitats and how to move them and create new ones without disruption.
- Councillors supported the Vision and Action Plan and the cross-party work carried out on the project.
- Councillors were pleased to see that the report included both local and global factors.
- Concern was raised on the use of the word 'accessible' and that it needed to be meaningful and include all disabilities.
- Councillors wanted to see the Action Plan linked to work being carried out on local transport and hoped there would be a stronger push towards eco-friendly public transport once the New Unitary Council was formed.

- Concern was raised on the number of complaints that councillors had received regarding grass cutting and that more communications were needed to inform residents why certain areas were cut and others were left. A balance needed to be struck on keeping areas tidy for public use and cultivating eco-friendly habitats.
- Councillor F Smith left the room.

Resolved that Full Council approved the following:-

- 2.1 The ecological vision and action plan.
- 2.2 Existing governance arrangements identified in the Somerset West and Taunton /Sedgemoor District Council Joint Climate Change Delivery Partnership were maintained and used as a framework for delivery and monitoring of the action plan.
- 2.3 Somerset West and Taunton with Sedgemoor District Council led the creation and delivery of ecological recovery.
- 2.4 Annual reporting would be undertaken in conjunction with CNCR reporting.

29. **Scheme of Delegation to Officers**

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Concern was raised on the Equality Act and work not being carried out on the Equality Working Group or Impact Assessments.
The Leader of the Council would check the details outside of the meeting.

Resolved that Full Council noted the Scheme of Delegation to Officers (Appendix A).

30. **Local Government Reorganisation: Re-establishment of the Joint Scrutiny Committee**

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Councillors were advised that Councillor M Lithgow would be the Liberal Democrat representative and the Independent Group would advise the Monitoring Officer of who their representative would be.

Resolved that Full Council:-

1. Approved the re-establishment of a Joint Scrutiny Committee together with the County Council and three other District Councils in Somerset constituted in accordance with and having the roles and responsibilities set out in the Terms of Reference attached at Appendix 1 ("Terms of Reference").
2. Nominated two Members from the Somerset West and Taunton Council Scrutiny Committees onto the Joint Scrutiny Committee. Such nominations to be politically proportionate and based upon the political makeup of this council, unless otherwise agreed by Full Council, but only where no member of the authority votes against such a proposal.

31. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public (Appendices Only)**

Resolved that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next items of business (Agenda Item 15 – Appendix 1 only, Agenda Item 16 – Appendix 1 and 4 only) on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 respectively of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

32. **Six Monthly Commercial Property Investment Update**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors supported the work being carried out within the Strategy as it meant that services could still be provided in the local area.
- Councillors understood that the Strategy needed to be used due to lack of funding from Central Government.
- Councillors queried the length of time quoted for the payback period.
The Section 151 Officer gave clarification on the payback period.
- Councillors highlighted that the Strategy was approved by Full Council back in 2019 and advised that the work had been thoroughly checked, and that assets were debated at the Working Group.
- Councillors highlighted that other District Councils had done similar work on commercial investment.
- Councillors thanked the officers for all their work.
- Councillor H Davies requested that the meeting went into closed session.
- Closed session at 8.05pm
- Open session at 8.15pm
- Councillors queried what impact the Unitary Council would have on the work carried out under the Strategy.
- Councillors queried why there was no local investment carried out under the Strategy.
- Councillor B Hall left the meeting.
- The Deputy Leader of the Council gave further information on the different terminology used for local investment which could lead to confusion that there was no local investment when there was.
- The Leader of the Council gave further information on the work to carry the Strategy forward into the Unitary Council.

Resolved that Full Council noted the Commercial Property Investment activity and performance for 2021/22 financial year.

Councillors H Davies and D Mansell abstained from the vote.

33. **Green Space Acquisition**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillor S Wakefield declared a prejudicial interest as a Director of Wellington Mills and left the room for the debate.

- Councillors who represented the Wellington Wards supported the recommendations and were pleased that Somerset West and Taunton Council were purchasing the land and were working with Wellington Town Council (WTC) on their use of the land to provide local services.
- Councillors agreed that they were glad that the land was being acquired and that it was important for WTC and the residents of Wellington.
- Councillors thanked officers for all their work.

Resolved that Full Council approved the recommendations set out the Confidential Appendix 1.

34. **Re-admittance of the Press and Public**

35. **Motion regarding the Cost of Living**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillor S Wakefield returned to the room.
- Councillors S Pugsley and A Trollope-Bellew left the meeting.
- Councillor C Booth introduced the Motion and highlighted the importance of the work to be done.
- Councillors were happy to support the Motion.
- Councillors agreed that the crisis was real and impacted everyone. They further agreed that the Government needed to take action now to assist those who were on Universal Credit.
- Councillors stated that residents were doubled taxed on their electricity bills because they were linked to their gas bills.
- Councillors requested that an update report was taken back through Scrutiny to show the progress with the work requested within the Motion.
- Councillor L Lisgo proposed an amendment to the wording of the recommendation to change the wording to minimum of £50,000, which was duly accepted by the Proposer and Seconder.
- Concern was raised that the Government were not investing in low-cost energy.
- Further concern was raised on the lack of insulation which impacted on cost of energy bills.
- Councillors had all been approached by many of their residents in regard to the increasing costs of energy bills and fuel.
- Councillors agreed it was a national crisis.
- Councillors requested improved signposting to better assist the customers to get the help they needed.

Resolved that Full Council:-

1. Declared a “Cost of Living Emergency”
2. Instructed the leader of this council to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to express the Council’s demands for VAT to be cut to 17.5% for 12 months, for the re-introduction of the pension triple-lock and for the £20 Universal Credit supplement to be restored.
3. Instructed the leader of this council to write to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to express Council’s view that

the Government committed to further fuel duty reductions in rural areas (Somerset was currently not eligible). The leader was to also urge the Government to move faster on cross-party desires to uncouple power prices from gas prices in an effort to cut household bills with prices to increase further in October.

4. Endorsed a local Cost of Living Emergency Summit to be led by the leader of this council, with stakeholders including Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Local Trades Unions, Somerset Community Foundation, Spark Somerset, MIND, Chambers of Commerce and invite both local MPs to attend this hybrid meeting
5. Somerset West and Taunton Council would continue working on a minimum of £50,000 support fund for residents suffering from energy and food price increases in conjunction with Citizens Advice to be ready by the end of the summer. This would be funded from an underspend in the previous financial year.

Councillors N Cavill, R Habgood, A Hadley and V Stock-Williams abstained from the vote.

(The Meeting ended at 9.10 pm)

Report Number: SWT 113/22

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 6 September 2022

Member Code of Conduct

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

Report Author: Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager & Monitoring Officer, Kevin Williams and Lesley Dolan, Deputy Monitoring Officers

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The current Standards regime was introduced by the Localism Act 2011, which was enacted on 1 July 2012.
- 1.2 It is a mandatory requirement of the Localism Act 2011 to adopt a Code of Conduct based on the Nolan Seven Principles of Public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. It was down to local authorities to determine their own Code of Conduct, which fulfilled their statutory duty.
- 1.3 The Committee on Standards in Public Life's report into Local Government Ethical Standards recommended that '*the Local Government Association (LGA) should create an updated model code of conduct, in consultation with representative bodies of councillors and officers of all tiers of local government*'. The Local Government Association (LGA) undertook consultation with local authorities and issued a Model Code of Conduct for Elected Members in May 2021.
- 1.4 The opportunity has been taken to review the Council's Members Code of Conduct with the benefit of the LGA's Model Code as part of the Local Government Reorganisation work, in collaboration with the Monitoring Officers of the County and District Councils.
- 1.5 Somerset County Council adopted the Model Code with effect from 6 May 2022 to support the transition towards the new Somerset Council. The District Council Monitoring Officers are taking reports to their members with a view to recommending adoption of the Code by end September 2022.

2 Recommendations

That the Council resolve:

1. To adopt the LGA Model Code of Conduct with local amendments (Appendix A)
2. That the revised Code of Conduct be incorporated into the Council's Constitution and will replace the existing Code;

3. That the Monitoring Officer develops and promotes Member update training to support the implementation of the revised Code of Conduct; and
4. That the adoption of the revised Code of Conduct continues to be promoted with Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) for adoption by Town and Parish Councils.

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 Failure to have a Members Code of Conduct in place would be a breach of the Localism Act 2011, and the Council would not be able to demonstrate a robust ethical governance framework.

4 Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 The role of councillor in all tiers of local government is a vital part of our country's system of democracy. In voting for a local councillor, the public is imbuing that person and position with their trust. As such, it is important that councillors can be held accountable, and all adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role. The conduct of an individual councillor affects the reputation of all councillors.
- 4.2 The role of councillor should be one that people aspire to and want to participate with and we should strive to continue to attract individuals from a range of backgrounds and circumstances who understand the responsibility they take on and are motivated to make a positive difference to their local communities.
- 4.3 The current standards regime was introduced by the Localism Act, 2011 and the operation of the Council's arrangements for members' conduct is fundamental to the Council's compliance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011. By promoting good ethics, the Council is demonstrating its core values as contained in the seven principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- 4.4 The Council adopted its current Members Code of Conduct in March 2019. This was written by the Monitoring Officers in 2012 and covers most of the issues covered in the new LGA Code. However, the Somerset Code has not been updated significantly since 2012 and there are some issues that are not covered such as social media, harassment and disrespectful behaviour from the public.
- 4.5 Following the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report into Local Government Ethical Standards (reported previously to the Committee), the Local Government Association (LGA) undertook consultation in Summer 2020 and issued a Model Code of Conduct for Elected Members in May 2021.
- 4.6 The opportunity has been taken to review the Council's Members Code of Conduct with the benefit of the LGA's Model Code as part of the Local Government Reorganisation work in collaboration with the Monitoring Officers of the other four Somerset councils. Somerset County Council adopted the revised code from 6 May 2022 with the four District Councils aiming to adopt the code in the Autumn of 2022 to support the smooth transition towards the new Somerset Council.
- 4.7 Whilst moving to the new Model LGA Code of Conduct is not a mandatory requirement, a national single code for all elected members, with clear wording, additional guidance,

working examples and explanatory text introduces benefits for Councillors, Officers and the public.

- 4.8 The Model LGA Code has the benefit of written guidance that sits behind it. This guidance provides both those subject to the Code and those charged with assessing complaints, clear expectations and a commonly understood interpretation. This is something which has not been provided since the introduction of the Localism Act in 2011.
- 4.9 However, it is recognised that there are some omissions from the model code that it is felt it would be prudent to address. While changes to the model code to reflect local circumstances should be kept to a minimum the following amendments are proposed to be introduced:
- A new clause 6.2 clarifying that councillors should not take part in the scrutiny of any decision in which they have been involved.
 - A new clause 7B requiring councillors to consider any advice of the S151 and Monitoring Officer.
 - Clarification in 8.2 that trivial or malicious complaints against other councillors will not be made.
 - Deletion of the word “significant” in 9.6 regarding registration of gifts that are refused and adding a requirement to register their refusal within 28 days, where the value of the gift offered is estimated to be at least £50. This ensures consistency with the approach in relation to gifts that are accepted.
 - Amending Appendix B so that you must update interests within 28 days of any change. This is not currently covered. Further amendment to section 9 in relation to non-registerable interests.
 - Adding a new Appendix D which gives guidance on bias and predetermination. This is currently covered in the Somerset Code and omitted from the LGA Code.
- 4.10 The Draft Somerset Code of Conduct can be found at Appendix 1 (the above amendments are highlighted for convenience)
- 4.11 The benefits of adopting the LGA Code (with some minor local modifications) can be summarised as follows:
- Greater consistency of approach to standards cases;
 - Addresses specific areas of concern raised such as additional provisions regarding social media;
 - Has been prepared following national consultation;
 - Provides short guidance below each obligation under the main provisions of the Code, to aid understanding;
 - Provides a model that can be rolled out to the City, Town and Parish Councils in Somerset (albeit it will be a matter for those councils to adopt);
 - The LGA have stated that they will keep it under review so that it remains fit for purpose (thereby meeting the Standards in Public life Best Practice recommendation 15 in relation to an annual review);
 - The LGA have developed the more detailed Guidance which will aid interpretation;
 - It has already been adopted by Somerset County Council in May 2022, and
 - Has been promoted to all Somerset City, Town and Parish Councils.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

5.1 Having a robust ethical governance framework is a fundamental part of delivering the Council's Corporate Strategy.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 None arising from this report

7 Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications

7.1 There are no Unitary Council Financial Implications or S24 Direction Implications.

8 Legal Implications

8.1 Section 27(2) of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Council to adopt a Code of Conduct

8.2 Sections 28(1) sets out that the Code must contain the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

8.3 Section 28(2) sets out that the Code must include the provision that the registration and disclose of – (a) pecuniary interests, and (b) interests other than pecuniary interests.

9 Climate and Sustainability Implications

9.1 None arising from this report

10 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

10.1 None arising from this report

11 Equality and Diversity Implications

11.1 None arising from this report

12 Social Value Implications

12.1 None arising from this report

13 Partnership Implications

13.1 None arising from this report

14 Health and Wellbeing Implications

14.1 None arising from this report

15 Asset Management Implications

15.1 None arising from this report

16 Data Protection Implications

16.1 None arising from this report

17 Consultation Implications

17.1 None arising from this report

Democratic Path:

- **Standards Committee – Yes – the Standards Committee considered this report at their meeting on 26 July 2022 and didn't have any comments to make, other than welcoming the improved Code of Conduct.**
- **Cabinet/Executive – No**
- **Full Council – Yes**

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

List of Appendices

Appendix 1	Somerset West and Taunton Council Code of Conduct
Appendix A	(within Appendix 1) The Seven Principles of Public Life
Appendix B	(within Appendix 1) Registering Interests
Appendix C	(within Appendix 1) The Committee on Standards in Public Life
Appendix D	(within Appendix 1) Guidance on Bias and Predetermination – this does not form part of the Code

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**Somerset West and
Taunton Council
Draft Member Code of**

Introduction

Conduct

The Local Government Association (LGA) has developed this Model Councillor Code of Conduct, in association with key partners and after extensive consultation with the sector, as part of its work on supporting all tiers of local government to continue to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance. It is a template for councils to adopt in whole and/or with local amendments.

All councils are required to have a local Councillor Code of Conduct.

The LGA will undertake an annual review of this Code to ensure it continues to be fit-for-purpose, incorporating advances in technology, social media and changes in legislation. The LGA can also offer support, training and mediation to councils and councillors on the application of the Code and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the county associations of local councils can offer advice and support to town and parish councils.

Definitions

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, a “councillor” means a member or co-opted member of a local authority or a directly elected mayor. A “co-opted member” is defined in the Localism Act 2011 Section 27(4) as “a person who is not a member of the authority but who

- a) is a member of any committee or sub-committee of the authority, or;
- b) is a member of, and represents the authority on, any joint committee or joint sub-committee of the authority;

and who is entitled to vote on any question that falls to be decided at any meeting of that committee or sub-committee”.

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, “local authority” includes county councils, district councils, London borough councils, parish councils, town councils, fire and rescue authorities, police authorities, joint authorities, economic prosperity boards, combined authorities and National Park authorities.

Purpose of the Code of Conduct

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to assist you, as a councillor, in modelling the behaviour that is expected of you, to provide a personal check and balance, and to set out the type of conduct that could lead to action being taken against you. It is also to protect you, the public, fellow councillors, local authority officers and the reputation of local government. It sets out general principles of conduct expected of all councillors and your specific obligations in relation to standards of conduct. The LGA encourages the use of support, training and mediation prior to action being taken using the Code. The fundamental aim of the Code is to create and maintain public confidence in the role of councillor and local government.

General principles of councillor conduct

Everyone in public office at all levels; all who serve the public or deliver public services, including ministers, civil servants, councillors and local authority officers; should uphold the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#), also known as the Nolan Principles.

Building on these principles, the following general principles have been developed specifically for the role of councillor.

In accordance with the public trust placed in me, on all occasions:

- I act with integrity and honesty
- I act lawfully
- I treat all persons fairly and with respect; and
- I lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.

In undertaking my role:

- I impartially exercise my responsibilities in the interests of the local community
- I do not improperly seek to confer an advantage, or disadvantage, on any person
- I avoid conflicts of interest
- I exercise reasonable care and diligence; and
- I ensure that public resources are used prudently in accordance with my local authority's requirements and in the public interest.

Application of the Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct applies to you as soon as you sign your declaration of acceptance of the office of councillor or attend your first meeting as a co-opted member and continues to apply to you until you cease to be a councillor.

This Code of Conduct applies to you when you are acting in your capacity as a councillor which may include when:

- you misuse your position as a councillor
- Your actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that you are acting as a councillor;

The Code applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including:

- at face-to-face meetings
- at online or telephone meetings
- in written communication
- in verbal communication
- in non-verbal communication
- in electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments.

You are also expected to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times when acting as a councillor.

Your Monitoring Officer has statutory responsibility for the implementation of the Code of Conduct, and you are encouraged to seek advice from your Monitoring Officer on any matters that may relate to the Code of Conduct. Town and parish councillors are encouraged to seek advice from their Clerk, who may refer matters to the Monitoring

Officer.

Standards of councillor conduct

This section sets out your obligations, which are the minimum standards of conduct required of you as a councillor. Should your conduct fall short of these standards, a complaint may be made against you, which may result in action being taken.

Guidance is included to help explain the reasons for the obligations and how they should be followed.

General Conduct

1. Respect

As a councillor:

1.1 I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.

1.2 I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.

Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. As a councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. You should not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack.

In your contact with the public, you should treat them politely and courteously. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in councillors.

In return, you have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening you are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the local authority, the relevant social media provider or the police. This also applies to fellow councillors, where action could then be taken under the Councillor Code of Conduct, and local authority employees, where concerns should be raised in line with the local authority's councillor-officer protocol.

2. Bullying, harassment and discrimination

As a councillor:

2.1 I do not bully any person.

2.2 I do not harass any person.

2.3 I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) characterises bullying as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying might be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident, happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or phone calls, happen in the workplace or at work social events and may not always be obvious or noticed by others.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 defines harassment as conduct that causes alarm or distress or puts people in fear of violence and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. It can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and

contact upon a person in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person.

Unlawful discrimination is where someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics are specific aspects of a person's identity defined by the Equality Act 2010. They are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on local authorities. Councillors have a central role to play in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the local authority's performance and strategic aims, and that there is a strong vision and public commitment to equality across public services.

3. Impartiality of officers of the council

As a councillor:

3.1 I do not compromise, or attempt to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority.

Officers work for the local authority as a whole and must be politically neutral (unless they are political assistants). They should not be coerced or persuaded to act in a way that would undermine their neutrality. You can question officers in order to understand, for example, their reasons for proposing to act in a particular way, or the content of a report that they have written. However, you must not try and force them to act differently, change their advice, or alter the content of that report, if doing so would prejudice their professional integrity.

4. Confidentiality and access to information

As a councillor:

4.1 I do not disclose information:

- a. given to me in confidence by anyone**
- b. acquired by me which I believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, unless**
 - i. I have received the consent of a person authorised to give it;**
 - ii. I am required by law to do so;**
 - iii. the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional legal advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or**
 - iv. the disclosure is:**
 - 1. reasonable and in the public interest; and**
 - 2. made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the local authority; and**
 - 3. I have consulted the Monitoring Officer prior to its release.**

4.2 I do not improperly use knowledge gained solely as a result of my role as a councillor for the advancement of myself, my friends, my family members, my employer or my business interests.

4.3 I do not prevent anyone from getting information that they are entitled to by law.

Local authorities must work openly and transparently, and their proceedings and printed materials are open to the public, except in certain legally defined circumstances. You should work on this basis, but there will be times when it is required by law that discussions, documents and other information relating to or held by the local authority must be treated in a confidential manner. Examples include personal data relating to individuals or information relating to ongoing negotiations.

5. Disrepute

As a councillor:

5.1 I do not bring my role or local authority into disrepute.

As a Councillor, you are trusted to make decisions on behalf of your community and your actions and behaviour are subject to greater scrutiny than that of ordinary members of the public. You should be aware that your actions might have an adverse impact on you, other councillors and/or your local authority and may lower the public's confidence in you or your local authority's ability to discharge your/its functions. For example, behaviour that is considered dishonest and/or deceitful can bring your local authority into disrepute.

You are able to hold the local authority and fellow councillors to account and are able to constructively challenge and express concern about decisions and processes undertaken by the council whilst continuing to adhere to other aspects of this Code of Conduct.

6. Use of position

As a councillor:

6.1 I do not use, or attempt to use, my position improperly to the advantage or disadvantage of myself or anyone else.

6.2 I will not take part in the scrutiny of any decision I have been involved in making. However, I may provide evidence or opinion to those undertaking any scrutiny process.

Your position as a member of the local authority provides you with certain opportunities, responsibilities, and privileges, and you make choices all the time that will impact others. However, you should not take advantage of these opportunities to further your own or others' private interests or to disadvantage anyone unfairly.

7. Use of local authority resources and facilities

As a councillor:

7.1 I do not misuse council resources.

7.2 I will, when using the resources of the local authority or authorising their use by others:

- a. act in accordance with the local authority's requirements; and**
- b. ensure that such resources are not used for political purposes unless that use could reasonably be regarded as likely to facilitate, or be conducive to, the discharge of the functions of the local authority or of the office to which I have been elected or appointed.**

You may be provided with resources and facilities by the local authority to assist you in carrying out your duties as a councillor.

Examples include:

- office support

- stationery
- equipment such as phones, and computers
- transport
- access and use of local authority buildings and rooms.

These are given to you to help you carry out your role as a councillor more effectively and are not to be used for business or personal gain. They should be used in accordance with the purpose for which they have been provided and the local authority's own policies regarding their use.

7B Consideration of advice

As a councillor:

7B.1 I will, when reaching decisions on any matter, consider and pay due regard to any relevant advice provided to me by:-

- a) the Council's Chief Finance Officer (S151) and/or**
- b) the Council's Monitoring Officer or the Council's Monitoring Officer and legal advisor (if separate individuals);**

in accordance with their legal requirements.

7B2 I will give reasons for departing from the advice of the Chief Finance Officer (S151) or Monitoring Officer/legal advisor

It is extremely important for you as a councillor to have regard to advice from your Chief Finance Officer or Monitoring Officer where they give that advice under their statutory duties. As a councillor you must give reasons for all decisions in accordance with any legal requirements and any reasonable requirements imposed by your local authority.

8. Complying with the Code of Conduct

As a Councillor:

8.1 I undertake Code of Conduct training provided by my local authority.

8.2 I do not make trivial or malicious complaints against other councillors.

8.3 I cooperate with any Code of Conduct investigation and/or determination.

8.4 I do not intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is likely to be involved with the administration of any investigation or proceedings including the complainant and any witnesses.

8.5 I comply with any sanction imposed on me following a finding that I have breached the Code of Conduct.

It is extremely important for you as a councillor to demonstrate high standards, for you to have your actions open to scrutiny and for you not to undermine public trust in the local authority or its governance. If you do not understand or are concerned about the local authority's processes in handling a complaint you should raise this with your Monitoring Officer.

Protecting your reputation and the reputation of the local authority

8 Interests

As a councillor:

8.4 I register and disclose my interests.

Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of interests of members of the authority.

You need to register your interests so that the public, local authority employees and fellow councillors know which of your interests might give rise to a conflict of interest. The register is a public document that can be consulted when (or before) an issue arises. The register also protects you by allowing you to demonstrate openness and a willingness to be held accountable. You are personally responsible for deciding whether or not you should disclose an interest in a meeting, but it can be helpful for you to know early on if others think that a potential conflict might arise. It is also important that the public know about any interest that might have to be disclosed by you or other councillors when making or taking part in decisions, so that decision making is seen by the public as open and honest. This helps to ensure that public confidence in the integrity of local governance is maintained.

You should note that failure to register or disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest as set out in **Table 1**, is a criminal offence under the Localism Act 2011.

Appendix B sets out the detailed provisions on registering and disclosing interests. If in doubt, you should always seek advice from your Monitoring Officer.

9 Gifts and hospitality

As a councillor:

- 9.4 I do not accept gifts or hospitality, irrespective of estimated value, which could give rise to real or substantive personal gain or a reasonable suspicion of influence on my part to show favour from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the local authority or from persons who may apply to the local authority for any permission, licence or other significant advantage.**
- 9.5 I register with the Monitoring Officer any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 within 28 days of its receipt.**
- 9.6 I register with the Monitoring Officer any **significant** gift or hospitality **with an estimated value of at least £50** that I have been offered but have refused to accept **within 28 days of the offer.****

In order to protect your position and the reputation of the local authority, you should exercise caution in accepting any gifts or hospitality which are (or which you reasonably believe to be) offered to you because you are a councillor. The presumption should always be not to accept significant gifts or hospitality. However, there may be times when such a refusal may be difficult if it is seen as rudeness in which case you could accept it but must ensure it is publicly registered. However, you do not need to register gifts and hospitality which are not related to your role as a councillor, such as Christmas gifts from your friends and family. It is also important to note that it is appropriate to accept normal expenses and hospitality associated with your duties as a councillor. If you are unsure, do contact your Monitoring Officer for guidance.

Appendices

Appendix A – The Seven Principles of Public Life

The principles are:

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must disclose and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Appendix B Registering interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office or within 28 days of your interests changing you must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests)**.

"Disclosable Pecuniary Interest" means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

"Partner" means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest. Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.
5. Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in **Table 2**), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in Table 1) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –
 - a. your own financial interest or well-being;
 - b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate; or
 - c. a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registerable Interests as set out in **Table 2**you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied.

9. Where a matter (referred to in paragraph 8 above) **affects** the financial interest or well-being:
 - a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
 - b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

In the event that your non-registerable interest relates to -

- (1) an unpaid directorship on a company owned by your authority or
- (2) another local authority of which you are a member,

subject to your declaring that interest, you are able to take part in any discussion and vote on the matter.

10. Where you have an Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in the [Relevant Authorities \(Disclosable Pecuniary Interests\) Regulations 2012](#).

Subject	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the

	<p>councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council —</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land and Property	<p>Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council.</p> <p>‘Land’ excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.</p>
Licenses	<p>Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer</p>
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to the councillor’s knowledge)—</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the council; and</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to the councillor’s knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were</p>

	spouses/civil partners have a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.
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* 'director' includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

* 'securities' means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

Table 2: Other Registrable Interests

<p>You must register as an Other Registerable Interest :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) any unpaid directorships b) any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority c) any body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) <p style="text-align: center;">of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management</p>

Appendix C – the Committee on Standards in Public Life

The LGA has undertaken this review whilst the Government continues to consider the recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in their report on [Local Government Ethical Standards](#). If the Government chooses to implement any of the recommendations, this could require a change to this Code.

The recommendations cover:

- Recommendations for changes to the Localism Act 2011 to clarify in law when the Code of Conduct applies
- The introduction of sanctions
- An appeals process through the Local Government Ombudsman
- Changes to the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012
- Updates to the Local Government Transparency Code
- Changes to the role and responsibilities of the Independent Person
- That the criminal offences in the Localism Act 2011 relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests should be abolished

The Local Government Ethical Standards report also includes Best Practice recommendations. These are:

Best practice 1: Local authorities should include prohibitions on bullying and harassment in codes of conduct. These should include a definition of bullying and harassment, supplemented with a list of examples of the sort of behaviour covered by such a definition.

Best practice 2: Councils should include provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with any formal standards investigation and prohibiting trivial or malicious allegations by councillors.

Best practice 3: Principal authorities should review their code of conduct each year and regularly seek, where possible, the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities.

Best practice 4: An authority's code should be readily accessible to both councillors and the public, in a prominent position on a council's website and available in council premises.

Best practice 5: Local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format, such as CSV.

Best practice 6: Councils should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which allegations are filtered.

Best practice 7: Local authorities should have access to at least two Independent Persons.

Best practice 8: An Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation, and should be given the option to

review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial.

Best practice 9: Where a local authority makes a decision on an allegation of misconduct following a formal investigation, a decision notice should be published as soon as possible on its website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.

Best practice 10: A local authority should have straightforward and accessible guidance on its website on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes.

Best practice 11: Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.

Best practice 12: Monitoring Officers' roles should include providing advice, support and management of investigations and adjudications on alleged breaches to parish councils within the remit of the principal authority. They should be provided with adequate training, corporate support and resources to undertake this work.

Best practice 13: A local authority should have procedures in place to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation. Possible steps should include asking the Monitoring Officer from a different authority to undertake the investigation.

Best practice 14: Councils should report on separate bodies they have set up or which they own as part of their annual governance statement and give a full picture of their relationship with those bodies. Separate bodies created by local authorities should abide by the Nolan principle of openness and publish their board agendas and minutes and annual reports in an accessible place.

Best practice 15: Senior officers should meet regularly with political group leaders or group whips to discuss standards issues.

The LGA has committed to reviewing the Code on an annual basis to ensure it is still fit for purpose.

Appendix D

Guidance on Bias and Predetermination –This does not form part of the Code of Conduct

- Where you have been involved in campaigning in your political role on an issue which does not impact on your personal and/or professional life, you may participate in a decision on the issue in your political role as a councillor. However, you must not place yourself under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence you in the performance of your official duties.
- The courts have sought to distinguish between situations which involve predetermination or bias on the one hand and predisposition on the other. The former is indicative of a ‘closed mind’ approach and likely to leave a decision susceptible to challenge by Judicial Review. Whereas being predisposed on a matter is acceptable provided you remain open to listening to all the arguments and changing your mind in light of all the information presented at the meeting.
- Section 25 of the Localism Act 2011 provides that a councillor should not be regarded as having a closed mind simply because they previously did or said something that, directly or indirectly, indicated what view they might take in relation to any particular matter.
- In the circumstances, when making a decision, consider the matter with an open mind and on the facts made available to the meeting at which the decision is to be taken.
- As a councillor you will always be judged against an objective test of whether the reasonable onlooker, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would consider that you were biased. If you have predetermined your position, you should withdraw from being a member of the decision-making body for that particular matter.

Report Number: SWT 114/22

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 6 September 2022

Procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations

This matter is the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts

Report Author: Amy Tregellas, Governance Manager & Monitoring Officer, Kevin Williams and Lesley Dolan, Deputy Monitoring Officers

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The current Standards regime was introduced by the Localism Act 2011, which was enacted on 1 July 2012.
- 1.2 It is a mandatory requirement of the Localism Act 2011 to have arrangements in place to investigate any allegations relating to the behaviour and conduct of Councillors where it is alleged that they have breached their Code of Conduct.
- 1.3 The opportunity has been taken to review the Council's arrangements for dealing with Standards Allegations as part of the Local Government Reorganisation work, in collaboration with the Monitoring Officers of the County and District Councils.
- 1.4 It is proposed that if this is approved by the Council, that the Monitoring Officer will work with the LGR Governance Workstream to determine when this will be introduced.

2 Recommendations

That the Council resolves:

1. To adopt the Procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations (Appendix A)
2. To adopt the revised Code of Conduct for Councillors complaint form (Appendix B)
3. That Appendix A and Appendix B be incorporated into the Council's Constitution and will replace the existing documents
4. That delegated authority is given to the Monitoring Officer to work with colleagues in the LGR governance workstream to determine when this will be introduced

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 Failure to have an appropriate procedure in place for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints about Councillors would be a breach of the Localism Act 2011, and the Council would not be able to demonstrate a robust ethical governance framework.

4 Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 The role of councillor in all tiers of local government is a vital part of our country's system of democracy. In voting for a local councillor, the public is imbuing that person and position with their trust. As such, it is important that councillors can be held accountable, and all adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role. The conduct of an individual councillor affects the reputation of all councillors.
- 4.2 It is, therefore, important to have appropriate arrangements in place for dealing with any complaints that are made in relating to the behaviour and conduct of Councillors where it is alleged, they have breached the Code of Conduct.
- 4.3 The Monitoring Officers of the County and District Councils have been working together through the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) governance work stream. Reviewing the procedure for dealing with any Standards Allegations has been part of their workload. This has culminated with a Procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations (Appendix A) and a revised Code of Conduct for Councillors complaint form (Appendix B).
- 4.4 It is proposed that if this is approved by the Committee and recommended to Council, that the Monitoring Officer work with colleagues in the LGR governance workstream to determine when this will be implemented.
- 4.5 The LGR governance workstream are working on the transitional arrangements that will be put into place including a joint independent person panel to be in existence by the late autumn and some joining up of investigations by a date to be agreed.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Having a robust ethical governance framework is a fundamental part of delivering the Council's Corporate Strategy.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 None arising from this report

7 Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications

- 7.1 There are no Unitary Council Financial Implications or S24 Direction Implications.

8 Legal Implications

- 8.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires Councils to have arrangements in place to investigate any allegations relating to the behaviour and conduct of Councillors where it is alleged that they have breached their Code of Conduct.

9 Climate and Sustainability Implications

- 9.1 None arising from this report

10 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 None arising from this report

11 Equality and Diversity Implications

11.1 None arising from this report

12 Social Value Implications

12.1 None arising from this report

13 Partnership Implications

13.1 None arising from this report

14 Health and Wellbeing Implications

14.1 None arising from this report

15 Asset Management Implications

15.1 None arising from this report

16 Data Protection Implications

16.1 None arising from this report

17 Consultation Implications

17.1 None arising from this report

Democratic Path:

- **Standards Committee – Yes.** The Standards Committee considered this report at a meeting on 26 July 2022. The Committee endorsed the report with the slight amendment of removing daytime and evening telephone numbers from the Complaint form (Appendix B) and asked instead that it be listed as landline or alternative telephone number (other than a mobile number which is also listed)
- **Cabinet/Executive – No**
- **Full Council – Yes**

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Procedure for dealing with Standards Allegations
Appendix B	Code of Conduct for Councillors complaint form

Contact Officers

Name	Amy Tregellas
Direct Dial	0300 304 8000
Email	a.tregellas@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

New Somerset Council logo

How to make a **Complaint**

about the behaviour of a
local authority councillor
in Somerset

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILLORS: INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE FOR POTENTIAL COMPLAINANTS

1. Code of Conduct complaints

- 1.1 Somerset Council (“the Council”) has adopted a Code of Conduct for councillors which is available using the following link: [\(insert link\)](#)
- 1.2 This guidance sets out how you may make a complaint that a Somerset councillor has failed to comply with the Council’s Code of Conduct.
- 1.3 The Council is also responsible for dealing with complaints that City, Town, or Parish councillors in Somerset have breached their particular council’s Code of Conduct. Somerset Council provides a copy of City, Town or Parish Council Code’s upon its website. Please search against the name of the relevant City, Town or Parish council.
- 1.4 The responsibility for considering written complaints against elected or co-opted councillors of Somerset Council and the City, Town and Parish Councils within our area sits with Somerset Council’s Constitution and Standards Committee.
- 1.5 This Committee is a group of councillors appointed by Somerset Council to help maintain and promote high ethical standards. In addition to councillors from Somerset Council, parish council representatives are also co-opted onto this Committee. The Council also appoints independent persons to advise the Committee.
- 1.6 This guidance sets out how the Council will deal with your complaint once received.

2. Making a complaint

- 2.1 **If you wish to make a complaint, please write to the Monitoring Officer at the address set out at the end of this guidance.**
- 2.2 The Monitoring Officer is a senior officer of the Council who has statutory responsibility for maintaining the register of councillor’ interests. They are responsible for administering the process in respect of complaints of alleged councillor misconduct on behalf of the Constitution and Standards Committee.
- 2.3 In order to ensure that we have all of the information which we need to be able to process your complaint, we would recommend that you use our standard complaint form. This is available on request or can be downloaded at the following link :

[XXXXXXXX](#)

- 2.4 Your complaint must be made in writing. If a disability prevents you from making your complaint in writing we will offer to put your complaint

into writing and you will be asked to sign or otherwise indicate that you want to make a complaint in the terms set out. It will be your responsibility to provide any supporting documentation. If you are unwilling to sign the documentation or indicate your satisfaction, your complaint will be rejected unless the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that the circumstances justify an exception being made. We can also help if English is not your first language.

- 2.5 You are encouraged to read all of this guidance before submitting your complaint. We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days.

3. Is this a complaint that can be dealt with?

- 3.1 The assessment of a complaint will follow a two stage process. The first stage is to establish whether we can deal with your complaint.
- 3.2 The points listed under First Stage at Paragraph 4 below will help you decide whether this is something that can be dealt with by the Monitoring Officer on behalf of the Standards Committee. You should speak to the Monitoring Officer if you are not clear whether we can consider your complaint.
- 3.3 Please note that trivial, frivolous, vexatious and politically motivated tit-for-tat complaints are likely to be rejected.

4. First stage

- 4.1 When a complaint is received, the Monitoring Officer will carry out a jurisdictional test against which complaints will be filtered to determine whether the allegation is within these procedures and, if so, whether it should be rejected or proceed to Second Stage assessment.
- 4.2 When there is insufficient information to make a determination as to whether the conduct complained of may demonstrate a potential breach of the Code of Conduct the Monitoring Officer may offer you a further 14 days to provide further information to support the complaint. If further information is not provided within 14 days of being requested, the complaint will be rejected.
- 4.3 The Monitoring Officer (or his/her deputy) or the Standards Committee (as appropriate) will make the decision about what action, if any, to take on your complaint. The matters that will be considered at this stage of the process are:-
- Your complaint must be about one or more named councillors of the authorities listed on the attached Schedule A.
 - Your complaint must be about conduct that occurred while the councillor(s) complained about were in office. Conduct of an individual before they were elected, co-opted or appointed to the authority, or after they have resigned or otherwise ceased to be a councillor, cannot be considered.

- Your complaint must be that the councillor has, or may have, breached the relevant Council's Code of Conduct.
- Your complaint must relate to matters where the councillor was acting as a councillor or representative of their council and therefore is not a private matter.
- Your complaint, if proven, would be a breach of the Code of Conduct under which the councillor was operating at the time of the alleged conduct.

4.4 This First Stage process will normally be completed within approximately five working days.

5. Complaints against a council as a whole

5.1 Complaints against a council as a whole will be rejected and need to be referred directly to the council in question for consideration under their own procedures. We can tell you who to contact. These complaints should be pursued through the relevant council's own internal complaints procedure. For example, if a complaint relates to a councillor's behaviour in relation to the determination of a planning application, this procedure will relate only to the councillor's conduct and will not comment on the decision relating to the planning application, save to the extent necessary to explain the decision in relation to the code of conduct complaint.

6. Complaints about employees

6.1 Complaints about the actions of people employed by the relevant council e.g. the clerk of a city, town or parish council, also do not fall within the jurisdiction of the Standards Committee. Again these complaints should be pursued through the relevant council's own internal complaints procedure.

7. Second Stage

7.1 Complaints that satisfy the initial jurisdictional test at the first stage will then be considered further to determine whether they merit further investigation. The criteria to be taken into account in reaching a decision are set out below. Your complaint will usually be rejected at this stage if, in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer, any of the following criteria applies:

- It appears the complaint relates to a councillor acting in their private capacity;

- The complaint is the same or substantially the same as a complaint previously dealt with whether submitted by you or some other person;
- It is over 6 months since the alleged behaviour occurred and it would be unfair, unreasonable or otherwise not in the public interest to pursue unless there are, in the Monitoring Officer's opinion, exceptional circumstances, such as there has been a failure to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest which would warrant the complaint being progressed;
- The allegation is anonymous and there are no exceptional compelling reasons to progress the complaint;
- The allegation discloses a potential breach of the Code of Conduct, but the complaint is not serious enough to merit any action and
 - (i) the resources needed to investigate and determine the complaint are wholly disproportionate to the allegations; and/or
 - (ii) whether, in all the circumstances, there is no overriding public benefit in carrying out an investigation;
- The complaint appears on an objective basis to be malicious, vexatious, politically motivated or tit-for-tat or is part of a series of complaints from the complainant and it is not in the public interest to pursue it;
- The councillor has remedied or made reasonable endeavours to remedy the issues to which the complaint relates and the complaint does not disclose sufficiently serious potential breaches of the Code of Conduct to merit further consideration;
- The complaint is about a person who is no longer a councillor of a relevant council and there are no overriding public interest reasons to merit further consideration;
- The complaint is from a councillor about another councillor of their council and the Monitoring Officer considers the allegations to be such that the issues between the councillors ought to be capable of resolution between them, whether with or without the assistance of their Clerk or some other person; and
- That a simple apology, training or conciliation would be the appropriate response;
- That a reasonable offer of local resolution is offered by the councillor but is rejected by you;
- It would otherwise be inappropriate to expend the Council's resources on determining the complaint having regard to the circumstances of the complaint, any previous related complaints and the public interest.

Commented [MW1]: Six months is what is suggested by the LGA. The Ombudsman is 12 months.

7.2 It is important to note that not every complaint that falls within the jurisdiction of the Standards Committee will be referred for investigation. The Monitoring Officer or the Standards Committee (as

appropriate) must decide whether this is appropriate. The Monitoring Officer will endeavour to resolve complaints without the need for a formal investigation wherever possible.

8. Behaviour that constitutes a criminal offence

- 8.1 Where a complaint is received which discloses behaviour that may constitute a criminal offence the Monitoring Officer will determine whether to refer such allegations to the police or other appropriate body. If the conduct relates to the failure to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest this will be done by initially undertaking the assessment of the complaint in the manner set out at the First Stage 1 prior to referral in order to determine if a potential failure to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest has occurred.
- 8.2 Where a complaint is referred to the police or some other body the Council will not take any action on the complaint, other than the referral, until the body to whom the complaint has been referred to decide to take no action or any action they take has been finally determined.
- 8.3 The Council will take such action as is necessary to ensure that it does not compromise the integrity of any investigation or proceedings undertaken by another body in relation to the allegations.
- 8.4 If the police or other body decide to progress the complaint, then no further action will be taken on the complaint by this Council. If they decide not to progress the complaint, the Council will proceed to consider the complaint at Second Stage of the process (see paragraph 7 above).

9. Multiple complaints about a councillor

- 9.1 There may be instances when a number of complaints will be received about the same councillor from different complainants that relate to the same incident. When a complaint is substantially the same, it will be processed as a single complaint taking into consideration all of the complaints received up to the time the complaint is processed. A single decision notice will be issued and will reflect the fact there has been more than one complainant associated with the matter, though all may not be named. If further complaints relating to the same matter are received after the complaint is being processed these will not be added to the complaint but the complainants will be advised that a complaint about this matter is already being considered.

10. Complaints about a matter that has been assessed

10.1 There are occasions when a complaint is received on a matter that is the same or similar to a matter that has already been assessed. If this is the case the complaint will be rejected. In these circumstances you will be sent a copy of the decision notice that has previously been issued. The name of the original complainant(s) will be redacted from the decision notice.

11. Anonymous complaints

11.1 The Council will not normally allow anonymous complaints as that would be against the principles of transparency and fairness and make matters more difficult to investigate. However, there may be exceptional compelling reasons as to why an anonymous complaint could be accepted without detriment to the process and where the allegation can be evidenced without reference to the complainant.

12. What happens once you submit your complaint?

12.1 First Stage: When you submit your complaint we will write to you to let you know we have received it, usually within 3 working days. The Monitoring Officer will then consider whether the complaint meets the jurisdictional tests at the First Stage (see paragraph 4 above). The Monitoring Officer will advise you within 5 working days as to whether your complaint meets the test at Stage 1 and if so, the procedure that will then follow to consider whether the Second Stage criteria (at paragraph 7 above) are met.

12.2 Second Stage: Complaints will be categorised as follows and an assessment will be made as to whether there is some evidence which would suggest that there may have been a material breach of the Code of Conduct. The decisions that can be reached at any of these levels are;

- No further action should be taken in relation to the complaint
- The complaint should be dealt with through a process of informal resolution in the first instance
- The matter should be referred for formal investigation

12.3 In reaching this decision, no finding of fact will be made.

Level 1 Complaint

12.2.1 Complaints which are about procedural issues or unhappiness with decisions and are not Code related or which do not contain any evidence of any breach of the Code or are technical minor breaches will be determined at this stage by the Monitoring Officer without further inquiry and the Complainant advised accordingly within approximately 15 working days of receipt of the complaint. The Monitoring Officer may confer with an Independent Person where he/she thinks fit, when determining a complaint at Level 1. This is an individual who is not a

Commented [MW2]: This is the criteria most of us currently have. Should we make any changes?

Commented [MW3]: The LGA guidance seems to suggest 15 working days for the process. This is not very long. Should we change ours to 20 working days. Mine is currently 25!

councillor and who the Council is required to appoint to assist it in dealing with complaints against councillors.

12.2.2 The authority may also notify the councillor that a complaint has been received against them and invite their comments on it within ten working days. In deciding whether or not to notify the councillor we will weigh up different factors. For example, would telling the councillor risk the complainant being intimidated or evidence destroyed, or if the complaint seems to fall outside of the jurisdiction of the Code of Conduct is there any need to hear from the councillor? If the decision is made not to notify the councillor about the complaint but the councillor becomes aware of the complaint and wishes to know what has been alleged and the identity of the complainant, then this information will be provided to them (unless the complainant has requested confidentiality and the Monitoring Officer has agreed to this request).

12.2.3 If the Monitoring Officer receives numerous complaints about a councillor, all of which could be classed as Level 1, then the Monitoring Officer can decide to treat ~~any~~ of those complaints as a Level 2 complaint.

Level 2 Complaint

12.2.4 If the complaint does not fall within Level 1 then we will notify the councillor to whom the complaint relates, provide details of the complaint and invite them to make representations. These must usually be received by the Monitoring Officer within 10 working days of receiving the notification. The Monitoring Officer may also contact the clerk of the City, Town or Parish council, where appropriate and such other persons as the Monitoring Officer feels appropriate, to provide additional information.

12.2.5 The Monitoring Officer will assess the complaint, any representations by the councillor and any additional information requested. However the purpose of this stage is not to conduct a formal investigation and only preliminary enquiries will be made, such as to establish whether a councillor was in fact present at the meeting to which the complaint relates.

12.2.6 On the completion of this initial assessment the Monitoring Officer will contact you to advise you whether your complaint relates to a potential breach of the code of conduct and what action is proposed, if any. The councillor will be similarly informed. This will all happen within an average of 15 working days of the date we receive your complaint or additional information (where requested). Before making any decision, the Monitoring Officer will discuss your complaint with the "Independent Person".

Commented [MW4]: Comment as above

13. Informal Resolution

13.1 An informal resolution is a more proportionate way of dealing with relatively minor allegations, one-off incidents or underlying disagreements between individuals. It is important to note that dealing

with a matter by alternative resolution at the initial assessment stage is making no finding of fact as there has been no formal investigation.

13.2 Matters which the Monitoring Officer might consider appropriate for informal resolution may include:

- the same particular breach of the Code by many councillors, indicating poor understanding of the Code and the authority's procedures;
- a general breakdown of relationships, including those between councillors and officers, as evidenced by a pattern of allegations of minor disrespect, harassment or bullying to such an extent that it becomes difficult to conduct the business of the relevant council;
- misunderstanding of procedures or protocols;
- misleading, unclear or misunderstood advice from officers;
- lack of experience or training;
- interpersonal conflict;
- allegations and retaliatory allegations from the same councillors;
- allegations about how formal meetings are conducted;
- allegations that may be symptomatic of governance problems within the council, which are more significant than the allegations in themselves.

13.3 Informal resolution could either be directed at the councillor who is the subject of the complaint, the councillor and yourself as complainant, or at the council more generally.

13.4 Informal resolution can include such things as training, providing an apology, withdrawing a remark, mentoring, conflict resolution, mediation.

13.5 Both yourself and the councillor will be consulted before a decision is made to proceed with informal resolution.

14. Referral for Investigation

14.1 If the Monitoring Officer considers that the complaint is both very serious in terms of the potential breach of the code and an investigation is warranted in the public interest *to establish* the facts then the Monitoring Officer or someone acting on their behalf will undertake this. Only very exceptionally will a complaint result in an investigation.

14.2 The Monitoring Officer will let all those involved know that this is the case and the process that will be followed.

14.3 At the end of an investigation, the Monitoring Officer will issue a draft report and invite comments from the complainant and councillor. The Monitoring Officer will then issue a final report which he/she send to the complainant, the Standards Committee, the councillor complained about, the Independent Person and the Clerk to the City, Town/Parish Council (where relevant).

Option 1 - If the investigation reveals no failure to comply with the code or a minor/technical breach may have occurred or identifies a training requirement as opposed to any other form of sanction as being the appropriate response, then the Monitoring Officer, after consulting with the Independent Person, is authorised to issue guidance to either party, close the matter and issue the report to the complainant and the councillor complained about. The Monitoring Officer has the discretion to refer the matter to the Standards Committee before exercising that power if they consider it appropriate.

Option 2 - If the investigation reveals a more significant failure to comply with the code (which is not minor or technical in nature or where a need for training is not really the issue) then the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person is authorised to seek a local resolution of the complaint providing all parties agree (acting reasonably). If a local resolution is not appropriate or not agreed by the parties then the outcome of the investigation will either be (1) reported to the Hearings Panel (*a Sub-Committee of the Constitution and Standards Committee*) for a local oral hearing or (2) where local resolution is considered by the Monitoring Officer to be appropriate but has not been agreed by the parties, the outcome of the investigation will form the basis of an Investigation Outcome report which will be published and issued to all parties. This will set out the nature of the complaint, the outcome of any investigation, the local resolution suggested by the Monitoring Officer and the response from the parties to this.

Commented [MW5]: Correct name of Hearings sub-Committee to be inserted

14.4 The decision as to whether to proceed with Option 1 or 2 above shall rest with the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Independent Person. In making his/her decision, the Monitoring Officer will have regard to the relative costs involved and which option best serves the public interest.

14.5 **Oral Hearing stage** - In the event of an oral hearing, this hearing will generally be held in public and although it will be conducted on a relatively informal basis, both parties will be able to make representations and call witnesses. At the end of the hearing the Panel, after consulting with the Independent Person will decide whether, on the balance of probabilities there has been a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and what "sanction" or "sanctions" (if any) should be imposed.

14.5.1 If an oral hearing is required and reaches a finding that there has been a failure to comply with the Code then there is a limited range of sanctions available as set out at Appendix B to this guidance. There is no ability for the Standards Committee to suspend or disqualify a councillor.

14.5.2 Although there is no right of appeal against the decisions of the Monitoring Officer or Panel, if you are unhappy with the procedures followed (as opposed to the outcome) then you are still entitled to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman or challenge a decision through the Courts by way of Judicial Review.

14.5.3 The procedure the Council has adopted is designed to be proportionate, timely and fair to both sides. Its overriding objective is to seek to provide pragmatic local solutions to local problems wherever possible and to avoid costly and time consuming investigations/hearings.

15. How should I set out my complaint?

15.1 It is very important that you set your complaint out fully and clearly, and provide all the information at the outset. You should also provide any documents or other material that you wish to be considered. If a complaint does not contain sufficient information then it may be rejected.

15.2 We recommend that you use our complaint form or provide a covering note summarising what you are complaining about, especially if your complaint includes a lot of supporting documentation. In the summary you should tell us exactly what each person you are complaining about said or did that has caused you to complain. If you are sending supporting documentation please cross-reference it against the summary of your complaint.

15.3 You should be as detailed as possible and substantiate your complaint where you can. Although you are not required to prove your complaint at this stage of proceedings, you do have to demonstrate that you have reasonable grounds for believing that the councillor(s) complained about has breached the Code of Conduct.

15.4 You may wish to take consider taking advice, for example from the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

16. I am the complainant but I don't want my identity revealed

16.1 If you ask for your identity to be withheld, this request will be considered by the Monitoring Officer at the First Stage of the process.

16.2 As a matter of fairness and natural justice, the councillor you complained about should usually be told who has complained about them and receive details of the complaint. However, in **very** exceptional circumstances, the Monitoring Officer may withhold your identity. Each case will be considered on its merits and the following will be taken into consideration:-

16.3 Whether on request from you, or otherwise, the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that:-

- (1) You have reasonable grounds for believing that you or somebody closely connected to you, will be at risk of physical harm if your or their identity is disclosed,
- (2) You are reasonably concerned about the consequences to your employment or that of somebody closely connected to you, if your or their identity is disclosed,

- (3) That you or someone closely connected to you suffers from a medical condition and there is evidence of medical risks associated with your or their identity being disclosed or confirmation from an appropriate medical professional that this is the case
- (4) Whether the specifics of the complaint will disclose who has made the complaint even without confirming your identity; and
- (5) The public interest: in some cases the public interest in proceeding with the complaint may outweigh your wish to have your identity withheld.

16.4 If the Monitoring Officer decides to refuse your request for confidentiality, they will offer you the option to withdraw the complaint, rather than proceed with your identity being disclosed. The Monitoring Officer will balance whether the public interest in taking action on a complaint will outweigh your wish to have your identity withheld.

17. What you should do if you wish to submit a written complaint

- Get a copy of the code of conduct for the relevant council to see whether the behaviour you wish to complain about is covered by their code. **If it is not covered by the relevant code then we will not be able to deal with it.**
- Talk to / raise the matter with the Council's Monitoring Officer for general advice before submitting a formal complaint.
- Fully complete the attached complaint form (or ensure your letter of complaint addresses, in full, all of the issues covered in the complaint form).
- Submit the written complaint by post, e-mail or fax to the address set out below, as soon as possible after the date of the alleged breach.

Address for submission of a written complaint

Monitoring Officer
Somerset Council
Address
Tel:

Or e-mail the Monitoring Officer at :-

(insert email address)

Behaviour covered by the Somerset Council Code of Conduct

You can complain about a councillor breaking any part of their council's Code of Conduct. As each council can adopt their own code there is no longer a standard code of conduct that applies to all local authorities. This means you need to have seen the code of conduct relating to the councillor about whom you wish to complain and that the behaviour you wish to complain about is covered by the code. The Standards Committee cannot consider any complaints that fall outside of the relevant code of conduct.

The code that relates to councillors of Somerset Council covers the following areas:-

- Treating others with respect
- Not bullying any person
- Not harassing any person
- Promoting equalities and not discriminating unlawfully against any person
- Not compromising or attempting to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for or on behalf of the Council
- Not intimidating any person likely to be involved in any investigation or proceedings about someone's misconduct
- Not disclosing confidential information given in confidence or acquired or improperly using information gained as a result of their role for the advancement of those connected with them or preventing anyone from getting information they are entitled to by law
- Not bringing their role or the Council into disrepute
- Not using their position improperly, to their own or someone else's advantage or disadvantage
- Not misusing the Council's resources
- When using resources or authorising their use, acting in accordance with the Council's requirements and not used for political purposes
- Undertaking Code of Conduct training and co-operating with any Code of Conduct investigation and/or determination
- Not making trivial or malicious complaints against other councillors

- Complying with any sanction imposed where they have been found to have breached the Code of Conduct
- Failing to register or disclose their interests
- Taking part in the discussion or making a decision where they have a “disclosable pecuniary interest”
- Failing to register any gifts or hospitality (including its source) that they have received in their role or refused as a councillor worth over £50.

Any breaches in relation to requirements around “disclosable pecuniary interests” are matters for the Police as a criminal offence may have been committed. We suggest you speak to the Council’s Monitoring Officer first as they should be able to advise you whether or not it is a matter for the Police.

Although we have encouraged the Town & Parish Councils to adopt similar provisions they are not required to do so. Accordingly, their code may look quite different so you do need to see a copy. The Clerk to the relevant City, Town or Parish Council should be able to provide you with a copy. Alternatively, once provided, we hold copies of all City, Town and Parish Council codes on our website. The Code adopted by this Council is also available on our website at [\(insert web link\)](#)

Sanctions available to Standards Committees

The sanctions available to the Standards Committee are as set out below. In relation to the Town & Parish Councils in our area, we can only **recommend** a particular sanction to them but we do not have the power to enforce compliance.

The Standards Committee does not have the power to suspend or disqualify a councillor. The sanctions available are:-

- Report its findings to Council or City/Town/Parish Council for information;
- Issue (or recommend to City/Town/Parish to issue) a formal censure
- Recommending to the councillor's Group Leader (or in the case of ungrouped councillors, recommend to council) that he/she be removed from any or all Committees or Sub-Committees of the Council (or recommend such action to the City/Town/Parish Council);
- Recommending to the Leader of the Council that the councillor be removed from the Executive, or removed from particular Portfolio responsibilities;
- Instructing the Monitoring Officer to (or recommend to the City/Town/Parish) to arrange training for the councillor;
- Removing from all outside appointments to which he/she has been appointed or nominated by the authority (or recommend to the City/Town/Parish Council);
- Withdrawing facilities (or recommend to the City/Town/Parish Council) provided to the councillor by the Council, such as a computer, website and/or email and internet access;
- Restricting contact (or recommend to the City/Town/Parish Council) to named officers or requiring contact be through named officers;
- Excluding the councillor from the Council's offices or other premises (or recommend to the City/Town/Parish Council), with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending Council, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings;
- If relevant, recommend to council that the councillor be removed from their role as leader of the Council;

- If relevant, recommend to the secretary or appropriate official of a political group that the councillor be removed as group leader or other position of responsibility.
-

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILLORS COMPLAINT FORM

(Before completing this form please read the attached Guidance Notes)

A. Your details

1. Please provide us with your name and contact details. Anonymous complaints will only be considered [in exceptional circumstances if there is independent evidence to substantiate the complaint.](#)

Title:	
First name:	
Last name:	
Address:	
Daytime telephone:	
Evening telephone:	
Mobile telephone:	
Landline/ alternative telephone number:	
Email address:	

Your address and contact details will not usually be released unless necessary or to deal with your complaint.

The following people **may** see this form:

- Members of the [Constitution](#) Standards Committee
- Monitoring Officer of [Somerset](#) Council [or their deputy/legal team](#)
- The Council's Independent ~~or Reserve Independent~~ Persons

A copy or brief summary of your complaint will also be shared with the councillor(s) you are complaining against. If we release a copy of the complaint form and any attachments, we will ensure that your contact details (address, telephone number, e mail address) are removed. If

you have serious concerns about your name and/or details of your complaint being released, please complete **Section C** of this Form and also discuss your reasons or concerns with the Council's Monitoring Officer.

2. Please tell us which complainant type best describes you:

- Member of the public
- An elected or co-opted councillor of ~~an authority~~ a council in Somerset
- An independent member of the Standards Committee
- Member of Parliament
- Local authority monitoring officer
- Other council officer ~~or authority employee~~
- Other ()

B. Making your complaint

The sanctions available to a Standards Committee are governed by ~~law and were significantly reduced by~~ the Localism Act 2011. For a brief summary of sanctions available and other information about the process and time scales ~~for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints~~, please refer to the attached Guidance Note.

3. Please provide us with the name of the councillor(s) you believe have breached the Code of Conduct and the name of their ~~council~~ authority:

Title	First name	Last name	Council or authority name	Email address if known

4. Please explain in this section (or on separate sheets) what the councillor has done that you believe breaches the Code of Conduct. If you are complaining about more than one councillor you should clearly explain what each individual person has done (with dates / witnesses) that you believe breaches the Code of Conduct. As a result of the Localism Act 2011 local authorities were given the power to adopt their own form of code of conduct so the content particularly amongst town and parish councils may vary significantly. This means that you do need to know what is in the code of conduct for the relevant council/~~authority~~ and how it relates to the subject matter of your complaint. It is important that you provide all the information you wish

to have taken into account by the Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee when they decide whether to take any action on your complaint. For example:

- You should be specific, wherever possible, about exactly what you are alleging the councillor said or did. For instance, instead of writing that the councillor insulted you, you should state what it was they said.
- You should provide the dates of the alleged incidents wherever possible. If you cannot provide exact dates it is important to give a general timeframe.
- You should confirm whether there are any witnesses to the alleged conduct and provide their names and contact details if possible.
- You should provide any relevant background information or other relevant documentary evidence to support your allegation(s).

Please provide us with the details of your complaint. Continue on a separate sheet if there is not enough space on this form.

C. Confidentiality of complainant and the complaint details

Only complete this next section if you are requesting that your identity is kept confidential

5. In the interests of fairness and natural justice, we believe councillors who are complained about have a right to know who has made the complaint. We also believe they have a right to be provided with a summary or copy of the complaint. We are unlikely to withhold your identity or the details of your complaint unless you have justifiable grounds:-
- to believe you **or somebody closely connected to you** may be at risk of physical harm from the councillor(s) against whom you are submitting a written complaint (~~or by a person associated with the same~~); or
 - to believe your employment **or that of someone closely connected to you** may be jeopardised if your identity is disclosed; or
 - where there are medical risks (supported by medical evidence) associated with your identity being disclosed:

Please note that requests for confidentiality or requests for suppression of complaint details will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. **We will take into account whether the specifics of your complaint will disclose who has made the complaint even without confirming your identity.** The Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee will consider the request alongside the substance of your complaint. We will then contact you with the decision. If your request for confidentiality is not granted, we will allow you the option of withdrawing your complaint.

However, it is important to understand that in certain very exceptional circumstances where the matter complained about is very serious, we may proceed with an investigation or other action and disclose your name even if you have expressly asked us not to. We will contact you where this situation arises to discuss the matter first.

Please provide us with details of why you believe we should withhold your name and/or the details of your complaint:

(Continue on separate sheet(s), as necessary)

D. Remedy sought

Please indicate the remedy or remedies you are looking for or hoping to achieve by submitting this complaint. Please first read the guidance notes for details of the sanctions available to the Standards Committee.

(Continue on separate sheet(s), as necessary)

E. Additional information

6. Complaints must be submitted in writing. This includes ~~fax and~~ electronic submissions. Frivolous, trivial, vexatious and politically or personality motivated tit-for-tat complaints are likely to be rejected by the Monitoring Officer.
7. In line with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2000, we can make reasonable adjustments to assist you if you have a disability that prevents you from making your complaint in writing. We can also help if English is not your first language.
8. If you need any support in completing this form, please contact the Monitoring Officer as soon as possible:

Monitoring Officer
Somerset West and Taunton Council
Address

Tel:
E-mail:

Please sign and date this Complaint Form (an electronic signature will suffice) and return it to the Monitoring Officer by e mail or by post to at the above address.

Signed **Date**

Report Number: SWT 115/22

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Full Council – 6th September 2022

Oake Woolaway Housing Refurbishments

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Francesca Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Report Author: Chris Brown, Assistant Director Development & Regeneration, Ian Shoemark, Project Manager

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) owns a number of houses and bungalows in Oake Village of which 12 are Woolaway homes. Woolaway homes are classified as defective non-traditional homes and are the same archetype as those homes being demolished or refurbished in North Taunton.
- 1.2 Ten Woolaway homes will be refurbished using an all walls out and fabric first low carbon approach.
- 1.3 Alternative options to refurbishment have been considered but are not economic and contain risks including the costs of purchasing properties sold under the Right to Buy and the ability to intensify the scheme due to planning constraints.
- 1.4 The scheme will be funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) with a contribution from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 1. The properties will also be included in a SHDF Wave 2 bid. This scheme requires tenants to be decanted on a temporary basis.
- 1.5 The scheme has the support of the portfolio holder for Housing and the Executive and Council are being requested to formalise the supplementary budget.

2 Recommendations

Full Council resolves to:-

1. Approve the refurbishment and associated works for ten Woolaway homes at Oake which are currently classified as defective non-traditional dwellings.
2. Approve a Supplementary Budget as noted in Confidential Appendix C within the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme, which is planned to be funded primarily through capital borrowing plus available capital grants.

3. Approve the delegation of authority to the S151 Officer in consultation with the Director for Housing and Communities to determine the final optimum financing arrangements for expenditure incurred.

3 Risk Assessment

3.1 Below are the main risks relating to the proposal:

Risk	Score out of 25 based on probability x impact	Mitigation
Insufficient funds within the HRA approved budget	4 (2x2)	Council in February 2022 approved the HRA budget and capital programme for 2022/23 and a refresh of the HRA 30-Year Business Plan. Whilst this budget approval will increase the current capital budget, the outturn for 2021/22 reports a reduction in previous budget approvals of £11.847m based on 2021/22 underspends. Adding this approval would therefore not adversely affect the overall business plan capital expenditure assumptions. The grant contributions slightly reduced the business plan commitment for this specific investment.
Poor consultation may result in resistance and disconnection from tenants	10 (2x5)	Good communication with tenants, neighbours and the Parish Council will maximise the opportunity for tenant support for the scheme. Early communication is important and housing needs assessments are to be undertaken and decant opportunities are to be identified as close to the tenant's current home as possible.
Limited alternative accommodation for tenants during temporary decanting.	8 (2x4)	Officers have analysed the availability of alternative accommodation to support the decanting of tenants. We have created a route for the contractor which allows all tenants to be temporarily decanted within the estate. Consultation has identified that some households could benefit from a single move to a refurbished property on the estate to better meet their needs. There are currently five voids on the estate and three of these voids will be refurbished under the scheme with the other two being used for temporary decant and site welfare and then demolished in preparation for a new build proposal.
Tenants experience a substandard service as they wait to be decanted	8 (2x4)	Tenants will continue to benefit from the Council's comprehensive compliance, repairs, and maintenance service as they wait for works and whilst they are in temporary accommodation.
Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding (SHDF)	9 (4x2)	SHDF Wave 1 funding has been received to contribute £12k to each of the first four homes. SWT will bid for Wave 2 funding for the remaining six units. Successful bidders for Wave 2 will be informed in January 2023. Wave 1 funding is to be spent by 31 st January 2023. This creates a risk should the low carbon elements of the project not be complete.
Inability to secure a contractor to deliver works within budget	15 (3x5)	Officers have prepared the specification for works and the market will be engaged July 2022 with appointment in September.

Risk	Score out of 25 based on probability x impact	Mitigation
Commercial environment/ economic environment	15 (3x5)	There are several external factors which continue to create difficulties when delivering projects in a timely way. SWT and other landlords have experienced challenges in securing contractors and materials to deliver projects in the most timely and economic way. The service is proposing to go to market in July 2022.

4 Background and full details of the report

- 4.1 SWT owns several houses and bungalows in Oake Village of which 12 are Woolaway homes. Woolaway homes are classified as defective non-traditional homes and are the same architype as those homes being demolished or refurbished in North Taunton. A plan may be found at Appendix A.
- 4.2 Officers have carried out a feasibility study and gained support for its project initiation document from the Director of Housing and Communities at its Housing Programme Board and the Portfolio Holder for Housing. The most appropriate and economic option is for ten of the twelve Woolaway homes to be refurbished and two homes demolished in preparation for a small new build scheme. The feasibility study considered retaining and refurbishing all twelve non-traditional homes however the demolition of two homes has the potential to create four (4) new homes on the same site (appendix A, highlighted in red). The new build scheme will come forward to Members in a separate report at some point in the future.
- 4.3 The ten (10) Woolaway defective non-traditional homes will be refurbished using an 'all walls out' and 'fabric first' low carbon approach. Properties will be made structurally robust and provided with a minimum 60 year life.
- 4.4 The heat demand for these homes will reduce from circa 190 kWh/m²/yr to circa 39 kWh/m²/yr. Heat demand is used as a more appropriate measure than EPC bands to understand a property's carbon footprint and potential fuel usage. Heat demand is a key measure being proposed to help the Council's objective for its housing stock to be zero carbon. A retrofit home (existing home receiving low carbon works) with a heat demand of circa 50 kWh/m²/yr will create the opportunity of renewable heat and power to be more affordable to the tenant as they switch fuel from gas, over the next 20 years, to a system powered by renewable electricity and in so doing create a zero carbon home.
- 4.5 A recent development is that the service now believes these properties qualify for fuel switch under SHDF wave 2 new grant guidance. As a result the specification has been revised to introduce renewable heat and power in the form of Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) and photovoltaic panels (PV). These homes will be 2050 zero carbon ready and require no additional retrofit work.
- 4.6 Alternative options to refurbishment have been considered including do nothing, greater demolition with a number of more intensive new build options but these are not economic and contain risks including the costs of purchasing properties previously sold under the Right to Buy scheme and the limited ability to intensify the scheme due to spacial and planning constraints.

- 4.7 The costs of the scheme are accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and it is proposed to fund the costs through a combination of HRA capital resources (e.g. capital borrowing or capital reserves) and capital grant obtained through Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1 funding. The properties will also be included in a SHDF Wave 2 bid to try and secure additional external funding to support the project. This scheme requires tenants to be decanted on a temporary basis.
- 4.8 The scheme has been approved in principle by the Portfolio Holder for Housing. Formal approval for the scheme and Supplementary Budget is required from Full Council.
- 4.9 The properties are the most challenging properties in the district and the cost of resolving the structural problems of these homes is reflected in the substantial work and costs. The Housing service is working on opportunities for new funding such as SHDF Wave 2 and ECO4 to help fund a greater proportion of works going forward to some of our more challenging and expensive to retrofit properties.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 In 2019, the Council declared a climate emergency and committed to working towards achieving carbon neutrality and climate resilience by 2030.
- 5.2 These properties are defective due to their structure and most are in EPC band E or D. SWT must consider not only the investment in the structure to resolve the defects but investment to achieve 2030 and 2050 low and zero carbon standards.
- 5.3 These properties will be exemplar 'fabric first' homes and examples of what is possible.
- 5.4 The Council have a commitment to the provision of affordable homes. As new home developers have to resolve concerns relating to phosphates in order to obtain planning permission it is increasingly important that the existing affordable homes are retained wherever possible.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 The scheme is expensive due to the 'all walls out' approach in order to resolve structural concerns. The costs estimated costs of the scheme can be found in confidential appendix C. The cost estimates have been obtained by the Councils Employers agent Wellings with Council's direct costs and contingency included. It is recognised that the risk of cost increases is currently significant due to price inflation and stresses in the supply chain and labour markets. The cost estimates include contingencies but the procurement through competitive process will secure a fixed price design and build contract which will mitigate price risk. The delivery of the project will be managed through existing project management resources.
- 6.2 The estimates assume that the 10 units would be void for a period of 6 months each resulting in income loss of approximately £22k. Tenants are decanting on a temporary basis and would remain on a social rent and their secure tenancy will be continuous.
- 6.3 Members are therefore being asked to approve a supplementary capital budget as outlined in Appendix C to be added to the HRA Capital Programme to fund the delivery

of an exceptional and extensive refurbishment of 10 Woolaway defective non-traditional homes using an 'all walls out and fabric first' low carbon approach. This scheme is proposed to be delivered during 2022/23 and 2023/24.

- 6.4 The Council has successfully bid for and received SHDF Wave 1 funding which will contribute £12k to each of the first four homes; a total subsidy of £48k towards the scheme. A further bid will be submitted for Wave 2 funding for the remaining 6 units which we hope will provide further subsidy towards this scheme though this will not be confirmed until January 2023. The remainder of the scheme will likely be funded through borrowing whilst options to utilise HRA capital reserves will also be explored in order to optimise the financing arrangements and costs.
- 6.5 The HRA 30-year Business Plan is reviewed on a continuing basis as new information comes to light (e.g. new inflation and borrowing rates) and as new capital schemes are developed. Independent professional advice is also obtained to provide further assurance that new schemes are deliverable and contribute positively to the overall 30 year business plan. The affordability and viability of this scheme on the 30-year business plan has been reviewed and key metrics are being maintained. The impact of the supplementary budget are outlined in Confidential Appendix C.

Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications

- 6.6 A Section 24 Direction issued by the Secretary of State in May 2022 requires SWTC to obtain consent of Somerset County Council's (SCC) executive to enter capital contracts where the cost is, or terms allow costs to increase to, more than £1,000,000. As the costs of this scheme are projected above this amount then consent will be required to enter a contract if the scheme is approved.
- 6.7 As the scheme is not included in the approved capital budget that was approved in February 2022 a specific consent will be needed. SCC has delegated authority to the SCC Lead Member for Resources in conjunction with the SCC Section 151 Officer for all specific consents between £500,000 and £5,000,000.
- 6.8 In terms of ongoing implications, the works are expected to continue across this year and the first year of the new unitary. Continued management and oversight of the project will therefore continue beyond vesting day. The Council's housing stock and all of the ongoing assets, liabilities, costs and income, and rights and obligations will transfer to the unitary on 1 April. The new council will be required to maintain a Housing Revenue Account for this service, as SWTC does currently.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 No legal issues to report.

8 Climate and Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 In 2019, the Council declared a climate emergency and committed to working towards achieving carbon neutrality and climate resilience by 2030.

- 8.2 These properties are defective due to their structure and most are in EPC band E or D. SWT must consider not only the investment in the structure to resolve the defects but investment to achieve 2030 and 2050 low and zero carbon standards.
- 8.3 These properties will be exemplar 'fabric first' homes and examples of what is possible.

9 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 9.1 The existing tenants and community will be retained. Temporary decanting will be provided within the scheme boundaries wherever possible. Tenants needs have been assessed and all customers have completed a Housing Needs Assessment. Tenants do not lose their home and the expectation is that tenants will return to their refurbished home. However, the Council's Decant Policy additional relocation choices during their short decant window. This could include a one move to a refurbished home within the scheme.

10 Social Value Implications

- 10.1 The procurement process will consider the benefit contractors can contribute in terms of social value in particular local labour, use of local contractors and supply chain.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 11.1 Very low carbon homes which are well insulated, have good levels of airtightness and use ventilation systems are considered healthy homes. The properties at Oake do not currently possess low carbon qualities and the construction techniques continue to encourage cold bridging which is a significant contributory factor for damp and mould in homes. The new specification will make the properties healthier homes, well insulated with improved ventilation.
- 11.2 One three bedroom home will be converted into a four bedroom home. The conversion will be beneficial for the District as large family accommodation is in high demand.

12 Asset Management Implications

- 12.1 The scheme will improve the Council's residential portfolio and the properties will be provided an expected lifecycle to that expected of other council homes.

13 Consultation Implications (if any)

- 13.1 Consultation has begun with the tenants, neighbours, and Oake Parish Council. There has been support and very little concern raised from tenants. Housing needs assessments have been carried out which identify opportunities for households to manage their housing needs better through the decant process and opportunities identified for moves within the scheme.
- 13.2 Communication with tenants and all other parties remain critical and will continue as the proposals are progressed.
- 13.3 Tenants are updated on developments through letters, phone calls, periodic estate visits and presentations at open Parish Council meetings.

14 Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s) (if any)

- 14.1 This paper was not considered by community scrutiny due to the urgency of the decision and timetabling challenges.
- 14.2 A discussion with the Chair of Community Scrutiny took place and the Chair was happy with the paper progressing to Executive and Full Council.

Democratic Path:

- Executive – 20th July 2022
- Full Council – 6th September 2022

Reporting Frequency: Once Only

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Map of Oake Acres highlighting the homes for refurbishment
Appendix B	Images of the type of works required on the woolaway homes
Appendix C	CONFIDENTIAL Finance Commentary

Contact Officers

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Appendix A

Oake Acres, Oake

The plan shows 10 SWT woolaway holes in blue circles to be refurbished and 2 homes to be used for welfare and decant during the project and then demolished in readiness for the council to propose a new scheme.



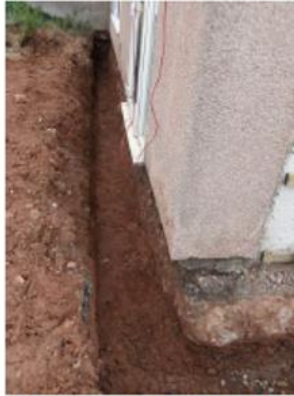
Appendix B

Images from an 'all walls out' woolaway refurbishment. This is a comprehensive renewal of the building and home.

b: "Walls Out" Refurbishment
of PRC Woolaway houses
Illustrations of the construction method

Job No: 080231 Photosheet No: Page 1 of 3

Date : Dec 2021



P1 – Excavation for foundation extension



P2 – New drainage



P3 – New drainage



P4 – Dowel bars into existing foundations



P5 – Staircase running parallel to the front wall (see also P9).



P6 – First floor propping with vertical support to roof rafter:



P7 – Ground floor propping (prior to erection of security screening)



P8 – Ground floor propping (prior to erection of security screening)



P9 – Propping on stairs (security screen at ground floor, first floor to be erected)



P10 – Demolition



P11 – Demolition



P12 – External Walls

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Agenda Item 12

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Agenda Item 13

Document is Restricted

Report Number: SWT 118/22

Council – 6 September 2022

Motion to Declare a Learning Disability Emergency

Author: Cllr Mark Blaker (Wiveliscombe and District)

Proposed by: Cllr Mark Blaker

Seconded by: Cllr Loretta Whetlor

Introduction

Since 2017 LeDeR (an NHS backed service-improvement programme for people with a learning disability and autistic people) has published an annual report “Learning from Lives and Deaths People with a Learning Disability and Autistic People”

The 2021 LeDeR Report shows few improvements in social, health and life expectancy outcomes and significant areas of stagnation and regression. Figures relating to the Covid pandemic are particularly bleak.

Notable indices from LeDeR and other sources include:

- On average, males with a learning disability die 22 years younger than males in the general population, and females 26 years younger than females in the general population. (LeDeR Annual Report 2021)
- Over 50% of people with a learning disability are likely to be in poverty when they die. (LeDeR Annual Report 2021)
- In 2020-21, just 5.1% of adults with learning disabilities aged 18-64 and known to Councils with Adult Social Services responsibilities were in paid employment (British Association of Supported Employment).
- 9 out of 10 people with learning disabilities have been a victim of hate crime and/or harassment (Mencap)
- Covid death rates among people with learning disabilities were between four and six times higher than the general population. The death rate for people aged 18 to 34 with learning disabilities was 30 times higher than the rate in the same age group without disabilities. (Public Health England)
- 6 out of 10 people with learning disabilities die before they are 65, compared to 1 in 10 among the general population. (LeDeR)
- 49% of deaths were rated as "avoidable" for people with a learning disability. This compares to 22% for the general population. (LeDeR)

In short, if you are born with a learning disability in England today there is a probability you will live without opportunity, in fear, in poverty, and die young.

Additionally:

- Somerset West and Taunton Council has been awarded Government funding to deliver two new Changing Places toilets. SWT has been allocated £96,360 from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities towards facilities proposed for Taunton and Minehead. While both Discovery (in Minehead) and The Albermarle Centre (in Taunton) have Changing Place Toilets nearing completion, both of which will have some level of public access, there remains a need for good, accessible facilities at the heart of both towns.

Recommendations

This council resolves:

1. To agree that reduced life outcomes for any section of the population are unacceptable and every member of our community has the right to a fulfilling, safe life.
2. To adopt the Communication Bill of Rights (Appendix 1) , with a written briefing to all staff and members, and copied to senior managers of all contractors providing public-facing services on behalf of Somerset West and Taunton Council.
3. To publicise this resolution via a press release from Somerset West and Taunton Council which will highlight key figures from the 2021 LeDeR report (<https://leder.nhs.uk/resources/annual-reports>) and promote the value of the Communication Bill of Rights.
4. To commit to delivering a completed, functioning Changing Place Toilet in Taunton by the end of March 2023, with bi-monthly progress updates to members throughout development until then.
5. That the Leader of the Council will write to both Somerset West and Taunton area MPs, along with the Leaders of the other three District Councils and the Leader of Somerset County Council asking them to note the concerning data highlighted by the LeDeR 2021 Report and to raise awareness of the Communication Bill of Rights.

Background

- The LeDeR 2021 Report can be found here: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/leder>
- The Communication Bill of Rights was initiated by Scope Australia and has since been adopted by organisations around the world. It recognises the interconnectivity between social and health outcomes, and particularly the link between improved communication and improved life opportunities.
- Changing Places are designed to be completely accessible and provide sufficient space and equipment for people who are not able to use the toilet independently. They must be an extra facility in addition to accessible toilets for independent use. They will include a toilet, changing bench, hoist, wash basin, grab rails, non-slip floor and sufficient space for a wheelchair and people supporting the

wheelchair user. Until 2022 the entire SWT area only had one compliant Changing Place Toilet, in the Iron Duke pub in Wellington.

Appendix 1: The Communication Bill of Rights

All people with a disability of any extent or severity have a basic right to affect, through communication, the conditions of their existence. Beyond this general right, a number of specific communication rights should be ensured in all daily interactions and interventions involving persons who have severe disabilities. To participate fully in communication interactions, each person has these fundamental communication rights:

1. The right to interact socially, maintain social closeness, and build relationships
2. The right to request desired objects, actions, events, and people
3. The right to refuse or reject undesired objects, actions, events, or choices
4. The right to express personal preferences and feelings
5. The right to make choices from meaningful alternatives
6. The right to make comments and share opinions
7. The right to ask for and give information, including information about changes in routine and environment
8. The right to be informed about people and events in one's life
9. The right to access interventions and supports that improve communication
10. The right to have communication acts acknowledged and responded to even when the desired outcome cannot be realized
11. The right to have access to functioning AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) and other AT (assistive technology) services and devices at all times
12. The right to access environmental contexts, interactions, and opportunities that promote participation as full communication partners with other people, including peers
13. The right to be treated with dignity and addressed with respect and courtesy
14. The right to be addressed directly and not be spoken for or talked about in the third person while present
15. The right to have clear, meaningful, and culturally and linguistically appropriate communications

Council – 6 September 2022

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

1 Emergency Services Day Flag Raising

On Friday 2 September I was pleased to attend the flag raising ceremony at Deane House, Taunton. The flag was also flown at West Somerset House and will remain for the week leading up to Emergency Services Day which is traditionally commemorated on 9 September.

2. SWT declared 'Cost of Living Emergency'

At its Full Council meeting on 5 July 2022, Somerset West and Taunton Council declared a districtwide emergency in response to rising living costs currently suffered by residents.

A motion declaring a cost of living emergency and subsequent action to address energy bills, universal credit and fuel duty was considered and passed by Councillors at that meeting.

During the meeting, the Council resolved to administer a £50,000 support fund to be ready by the end of the summer for residents most affected by food and energy price increases. Work to set up the support fund is already in progress and will be distributed by Citizens Advice.

It was also agreed that I should write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, requesting that VAT be cut to 17.5 per cent for 12 months to alleviate inflation, which, rose to a 40-year high of 9% on 18 May. It was also agreed that I would request that both the £20 Universal Credit supplement and pensions "triple-lock" (whereby pensions rise in value, either by average earnings, inflation or 2.5 per cent a year – whichever is higher), should also be reinstated.

As the pensions "triple lock" has been suspended for 2022/23, Somerset West and Taunton's pensioners will see a below inflation increase, which for some, is their only source of income. Additionally, the much relied upon £20 Universal Credit uplift scheme ended in October last year, further impacting low income families. The motion to consider a "cost of living emergency" was proposed by SWT's Executive Member for Communities, Councillor Chris Booth.

On 1 April 2022, Ofgem increased the energy price cap by 54% and with further rises expected in October, the average energy bill will increase annually by £693 for standard tariffs and by £708 for pre-paid meters (Ofgem, 2022). What is more, over a quarter of the UK's electricity is from renewable sources which have been largely unaffected by rising energy prices, however, energy bills are led by natural gas prices.

Further financial strain has been placed on the travelling public from the escalating cost of fuel. As of 16 June, the average cost per litre was 187.01p for petrol and 193.30p for diesel, with a nationwide rise of over £2 expected by the end of the summer. Filling a 55-litre fuel tank in a typical family car now costs on average £102.86 for petrol and £106.32 for diesel, which is disproportionately affecting rural residents who, in the year to March 2020, paid on average £114 a week in transport costs – almost £40 more than those in urban areas.

To cut household bills ahead of the next energy price hike, the motion also called for swift Government action to uncouple gas from electricity prices, and that I should write to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, calling for fuel duty reductions in rural areas to be extended to include Somerset.

2.1 LGR

Vesting day gets closer with every day that passes; as you will have picked up from Somerset County Council's papers and from press coverage, the new authority faces a challenging financial start. As Somerset West and Taunton Council we are playing our part in helping the budget setting process. We want to make sure we leave a legacy we can be proud of and set the conditions for the new authority to succeed.

We have embarked on a process to regularise the irregular, to give certainty where we can to our staff. We want our people to transfer to the new authority knowing exactly where they stand, specifically the terms of service on which they will TUPE transfer to the new authority. When it comes to committed and uncommitted reserves, we have worked hard to ensure we free up as much money as we can, and we have reviewed the capital programme. In the next few weeks, we will form the 'Close Down' team who will make sure we close Somerset West and Taunton in good order.

In early October Duncan Sharkey will start as Chief Executive for Somerset County Council. As you would expect, we have reached out and invited Duncan to meet the team and get a feel for the significant volume of work that will transition from us to the new authority.

Council – 6th September 2022

Portfolio Holder Report of Councillor Derek Perry – Sports, Parks, Leisure and Phosphates

Parks and Open Spaces

Britain in Bloom and Green Flag Awards

The Taunton, Minehead and Wellington judging for Southwest in Bloom took place in August and this went well, we are awaiting results which will be announced in September.

The Green Flag results were announced in August. I am very happy to report SWT have been awarded all the Green Flags applied for. These were: French Weir; Victoria Park; Vivary Park and Blenheim Gardens. We were re-awarded a Heritage award for Wellington Park, one of only two in the Southwest. Somerset West and Taunton also received 2 x Community Green Flags for Comeytrove Park, Taunton and Swains Lane Nature Reserve, Wellington.

Play Areas

The installation of new Play Equipment for Walkers Gate Wellington has been planned for September.

Leisure

Leisure Centres (Everyone Active)

SLM provided their bi-annual report to Scrutiny on 27th July. In general terms the outlook was a bright one with memberships and swimming lesson numbers higher than pre-covid levels and a growing events programme at Wellsprings. The golf course usage has continued to perform strongly with the course 'holding up' reasonably well to the high temperatures and lack of rainfall.

The latest traveller incursion at Blackbrook was extremely disruptive but the site has now been cleaned up and resecured.

The biggest issues for SLM are the availability of qualified staff (as lifeguard and swim teacher courses were cancelled during covid lockdowns) and the ever-increasing cost of utilities which will have a significant financial impact on the operator this year. SLM are doing all they can to mitigate costs and overachieve on income to reduce the effect where possible.

Taunton Pool will close to the public for 10 days at the end of August to enable essential pool maintenance work to take place.

A new Building Management System (BMS) will shortly be installed at Wellington Sports Centre to enable better control of the poolside and background temperatures. This is to enable the ageing plant at the site to continue to operate whilst we continue to explore the decarbonisation project at Wellington.

Leisure Projects

Tennis Court Refurbishment – discussions continue to be held with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) to agree a funding package to upgrade the tennis courts at Vivary Park and Cheddon Road. This may be aligned to the reinstatement of 'mini tennis' facilities at Cheddon Road on the 3rd court.

Taunton Green Pavilion – costs are being finalised for the refurbishment of the Taunton Green sports pavilion before deciding on the most appropriate way forward for a building that has fallen into a state of disrepair.

Norton Fitzwarren Playing Field – the work to create a new playing field, tennis courts, car parking area and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Norton Fitzwarren has been covered in the Cllr Sully report but as a reminder this will be created using S106 funding and be delivered (pending planning permission) in late autumn 2022 or spring 2023.

Phosphates

Strategic Solution for Phosphates

As Members are aware, on 5 October 2021, Full Council approved an Interim Strategy of mitigation measures. A Planning Phosphates Sub-Committee has been set up to oversee this programme. This Sub Committee has considered a number of officer reports on various matters and updates on the interim programme.

A briefing and engagement event with the development industry and key stakeholders took place on the 5 July 2022. Officers also gave a presentation on how SWT has been affected by the requirement for nutrient neutral development to Members of the Royal Town Planning Institute on the 7 July 2022.

On the 21 July 2022 the Phosphate Planning Sub Committee considered and approved a programme of interim measures which created phosphate (P) Credits through

- Utilising Council Assets e.g. retrofitting water saving measures on Council owned properties;
- Land Use Measures (e.g. wetland, woodlands) and working with a private developer (fallowing land).

In total the interim phosphate mitigation projects should generate a minimum phosphate offset of 65.3kg/year and will unlock between 150 and 780 homes within the River Tone sub catchment. In order to progress this work officers will be writing to affected applicants in the priority categories (as agreed by the Phosphate Planning Sub Committee in February to register expressions of interest for P credits in order to gauge interest.

The Sub Committee also considered a report setting out advice on the use of Package Treatment Plants (PTP's) and Septic Tanks as phosphate mitigation which has been produced in conjunction with the other Somerset authorities, Natural England and the Environment Agency. This will be published on our website together with the report agreed by the Sub Committee which sets out how this will be applied in SWT. The next Phosphate Planning Sub Committee is due to meet on 13 October 2022.

There were a number of recent government announcements. The Ministerial Statement on 20 July 2022 announced:

- that there would be a new legal duty on water companies in England to upgrade wastewater treatment works by 2030 in nutrient neutrality areas to the highest achievable technological levels
- DLUHC will revise planning guidance to reflect that sites affected by nutrient pollution forming part of housing land supply calculations are capable of being considered deliverable
- Habitat Regulations Assessment provisions apply to any consent, permission, or other authorisation and may include post permission approvals, reserved matters and discharge of conditions

In addition a Defra Nutrient Mitigation Scheme was announced on 20 July 2022. There are no details but it is understood that funding will be made available to support mitigation scheme delivery and more details including bidding guidance will be available in the Autumn. These statements can be found on the Council's website at:

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning/phosphates-on-the-somerset-levels-and-moors/>

Further work is being undertaken with the other Somerset authorities to update the phosphate calculator and develop a catchment action plan as required by the recent Government funding of £100,000 given to support the work in the Somerset Levels and Moors. SWT is acting as the lead authority. A countywide workshop is being planned.

Cllr. Perry

Council – 6th September 2022

Portfolio Holders Report for Internal Operations – Cllr Benet Allen

1 INTRODUCTION FROM

1.1 I am pleased to present a report which shows council operations continuing, and even improving, in the face of pressure from many directions. Administration of government grants such as the fuel rebate on council tax, external factors such as the cost of living crisis, and overall pressures such as the huge increase in fuel prices have made life more difficult for the council.

Our staff have risen to the challenge.

2 CORPORATE SERVICES

Please find below the relevant updates relating to each of the Corporate Teams providing the main support functions to the council.

2.1 HR TEAM UPDATE

2.1.1 Recruitment

During the last quarter, SWT's budget was for 637.42 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. The actual average for the period was 562.17 FTE with 75.24 FTE vacancies. Of those vacancies many are covered by agency or contract staff in anticipation of LGR.

Month	Starters	Leavers	Turnover
April	4	7	1.16%
May	10	9	1.49%
June	4	4	0.66%

2.1.2 Sickness Absence

The level of reported sickness absence during the quarter was 3.24% compared to 3.89% in the previous quarter:

Personal and work-related stress continues to account for the largest amount of absence, making up 15.21% of all sickness (a 30% reduction from the previous quarter) closely followed by Covid at 13.95%.

Following sessions with MIND, Wellness action plans have been rolled out and we have re-engaged MIND for further support.

2.1.3 Service Development - People, Projects & Key Achievements

- A new Job matching process has been implemented to resolve legacy JE queries and a market factor review is under way.

- A new DBS process has been implemented and embedded as BAU
- IR35 status determinations are up to date and the process agreed for future appointments
- An updated OH process has been agreed and implemented
- A new recruitment approval process and induction process has been agreed
- All relevant policies and guidance have been reviewed

2.1.4 **Priorities for 2022/3**

- Participating in the People work steam
- Delivering Recruitment within the constraints related to LGR
- Providing consistent high-quality service and advice
- Addressing all anomalies prior to LGR
- Supporting revisions to work practices for key employment groups at the Depot
- Enabling and Empowering Managers to effectively manage their team's performance
- Supporting Wellbeing

2.2 **ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING UPDATE**

2.2.1 **Current Focus**

- Training requests are being processed on a weekly basis to speed up applications and we have introduced an Assistant Director Panel to support decision-making, the apprenticeship levy is being utilised wherever possible and we are promoting any low-cost or free training that we are aware of through our partner organisations
- The Leadership Development Programme is progressing well, the Second round is now booked, and attendees have been sent their invites. A brief evaluation of round 1 is available.
- Interview training for all recruiting managers has been designed and will be delivered in late June. We are already fully booked and will have to organise further sessions. Update - Delivery almost complete, high attendance and good feedback.

2.2.2 **New Projects**

- In the Corporate Area we are trialling some a new template for managing performance to increase the focus on wellbeing and development. Initial feedback is positive. We are now planning to take this new template to SMT for a wider organisational roll-out.
- We are working on agreed plans and messaging for the autumn to support our people and the organisation to navigate through increases in COVID cases and the cost-of-living crisis.
- We are designing a series of in-house training packages to support our employees to be in the best possible position for LRG.
- All members of the team are involved in various People LGR workstreams. Key areas of focus coming up are the Dynamic Working Strategy, cultural workshops and culture navigators, LMS system, and manager and employee change support.

2.2.3 **Key Achievements**

- Significantly improved data report for learning and development. Now closer working with Health & Safety Team to continue to improve this data and ensure it is utilised effectively.

- Significant improvement in percentage completion of mandatory corporate e-learning modules.

2.3 ICT TEAM UPDATE

2.3.1 Infrastructure Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

All corporate devices will need to be upgraded to Windows 11, checks are currently being taken to identify any compatibility issues with corporate systems.

A review of current printing arrangements is being undertaken to ensure they are still appropriate and provide value for money (on-going).

2.3.2 Service Desk Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

Introduction of a new starters/leavers process.

2.3.3 Applications Team - People, Projects & Key Achievements

Projects

- Open Housing project – Successfully gone live.
- Data cleanse on image storage system
- LGR workstreams

3.0 GOVERNANCE TEAM UPDATE

3.1 Work continues to balance the pressures of staff retention (against LGR and SCC opportunities), continued commitment to supporting the committee cycle, LGR workstreams and working towards the implementation phase of the CGR project. The team are also working on member safety initiatives alongside the Health and Safety team.

4 CHANGE & DIGITAL TEAM UPDATE

Current projects and achievements

4.1 Academy Replacement Project

4.2 A new Housing Management solution has been successfully implemented, replacing Academy. Seamlessly supporting the business across different Directorates with training and migration over to the new system.

4.2.1 Bringing Open Housing, Open Contractor and Open Assets all under one platform

4.2.2 Supporting improvement to service delivery, improving processes and introducing new ways of working.

4.2.3 Further modules to be implementation over the coming months include a Tenant Portal, SMS and new TotalMobile modules.

4.2 Assure Health & Safety System

4.2.1 SWT has procured a new Health & Safety system and the project is to deliver 3 modules - Incident, Risk and Contractor - started mid-July with a target end date of Christmas 2022. Relevant managers have been invited to a system demo and project update on 19th August.

5.0 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TEAM UPDATE

5.1 Information Management Polices training to be rolled out to members in September 2022.

- 5.2 Paper Records Project – resource has been recruited and working well alongside SCC to futureproof the work.
- 5.3 Retention and Disposal Schedule – will be expanded to encompass all lines of business systems, currently SharePoint and Paper.
- 5.4 Work continuing under LGR Information Governance sub workstream and LGR Records Management sub workstream.

6.0 BUSINESS ANALYST TEAM UPDATE

- 6.1 Throughout the last 3 months the Business Analysis team have taken the lead and supported the delivery of the following solutions:
 - 6.1.1 Power Platform’ – case study pack for 4 pilots + presentation for the Project Board
 - 6.1.2 Additional reporting fields in 4 highest volume processes to collect data about reasons our customers choose to not self-serve online
 - 6.1.3 Full review of PDFs on SWT website identifying and prioritising the highest volume forms ready to create Firmstep
 - 6.1.4 Implemented SharePoint Business-to-Business Site Request process and form
 - 6.1.5 Negotiated PTX contract band uplift
 - 6.1.6 Full review and re-design of Road Sweeping process with Idverde
 - 6.1.7 Upgraded the Change of Address or Circumstances Firmstep form to incorporate new functionality
 - 6.1.8 Implemented a new Click & Collect process for Nursery, Garden plant sales

7.0 HEALTH & SAFETY TEAM UPDATE

- 7.1 Risk Assessment work for all areas is nearing completion with the review of all RA and additions to be completed by August 31st.
- 7.2 Risk Assessment work for all areas is nearing completion with the review of all RA and additions to be completed by August 31st.
- 7.3 The Assure H&S system project has kicked off with the first module aimed at improving the ease with which we can report incidents, accidents and hazards due to be deliver in September.
- 7.4 We continue to work with SWAP to inform the H&S internal audit and eagerly await the results which we expect to reflect the vast amount of work that has gone into the H&S improvement Programme.

8.0 BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE TEAM UPDATE

- 8.1 Recent achievements:
 - 8.1.1 Extensive suite of reports developed to enable data from the new Housing system to be extracted and analysed.
 - 8.1.2 Outturn performance report taken to Executive and Scrutiny, and Q1 performance report written.
 - 8.1.3 Business Intelligence strategy for new Somerset Council written and agreed by workstream board.
 - 8.1.4 End of year reporting and statutory returns completed.
- 8.2 Priorities for coming period:
 - 8.2.1 Continue to support LGR process, especially regarding the work to produce a single gazetteer and address record (Local Land and Property Gazetteer) for the whole of Somerset.

- 8.2.2 Continue to provide spatial data and Geographical Information Systems support for the Taunton Community Governance Review.
- 8.2.3 Alongside the day-to-day work of each team, we also have one major programme sitting within the team which I also wish to update on:

9.0 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME UPDATE

- 9.1 The current projects within the programme are:
 - 9.1.1 Revenues Enforcement Project - this continues to deliver well above the initial forecast.
 - 9.1.2 Excellence Framework Project – over 30 Teams are now engaging with the tool and an increasing number of support materials are being made available via the intranet site. Individual team support is provided on demand with the goal of moving all those engaged teams from Forming to Good through this year. A review meeting was held to establish which teams were showing excellence and to build on sharing the materials and capabilities of these teams.
 - 9.1.3 Change and Improvement Capabilities Project: A team of Excellence Champions are developing their expertise by working organisation-wide on varying improvement opportunities.
 - 9.1.4 Customer Experience Improvement Project – we have identified several areas to address including, website improvements, self-service pathways, “how to” videos, enhanced data collection and member casework opportunities. Delivery of the earliest products is due through August.

10. FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT

- 10.1 The service continues to blend the ‘backward look’ review of last financial year with the annual audit of the accounts underway, ‘in-year’ ongoing management of resources to ensure financial performance and health is maintained, and ‘forward look’ aspects of forecasting the anticipated position at the end of this financial year plus the preparation of budget information and options for 2023/24 – the latter of course being the first year of the new unitary council for Somerset.
- 10.2 Our auditors are currently on track with their review and are due to report with their Opinion for the accounts and their Auditor’s Annual Report to the Audit and Governance Committee on 27 September.
- 10.3 Clearly significant current issues revolve around the economy, soaring inflation and rising interest rates. These have real impacts on households and businesses in our district, which can drive up demand on our local services. Equally these factors add to our own cost pressures. Early estimates for the year are reflected in our Quarter 1 budget monitoring reports as presented to Scrutiny and Executive committees in September, where overspends are forecast in both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account. Our management team and services will focus on measures to remain within budget by year end, and we are financially resilient to withstand such pressures in the short term due to our reserves. The position for the HRA is more challenging with rising costs of inflation potentially exacerbated by increased depreciation costs, requiring careful and more targeted management to control expenditure within affordable limits. Progress will continue to be reported through budget monitoring reports on a quarterly basis.

- 10.4 Our procurement and finance staff are delivering a significant amount of work through the workstreams preparing for unitary, which is vitally important as we prepare for vesting day and beyond.

11. CUSTOMER

- 11.1 All of the services within Customer continue to be heavily engaged with the preparation to transition to the new Somerset Council and are working within all of the six Local Government Review workstreams.

- 11.2 In addition, we continue to focus on maintaining 'business as usual' service delivery including, since the last Full Council update, the following:

11.2.1 The completion of the Council Tax Fuel Rebates grants process scheme.

11.2.2 Ongoing 'thank you' payments to Ukrainian refugee hosts, which we are also administering on behalf of Mendip District Council.

11.2.3 We have continued to experience high volumes of calls throughout the summer, which result, in part, from large numbers of enquiries about Fuel Rebates and garden waste renewals. Additional resourcing in being brought into the Customer Services team to help maintain service delivery and call volumes, whilst still high, have started to reduce.

11.2.4 We will shortly be recommencing recovery activity in respect of the current years Council Tax, which had to be suspended to allow us to run the Fuel Rebate processes within the Council Tax system.

11.2.5 We have now reverted to 30-day payments terms for suppliers. This was suspended during the Covid crisis to allow us to pay suppliers more quickly.

11.2.6 The Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) scheme has now gone live for Business Rate payers and we are in the process of applying £2.9m to business rate payers who were not able to access other grant funding during the Covid crisis.

11.2.7 Members of our Income Team have been heavily involved in the project to launch the new Open Housing system, which has now successfully gone live.

Council – 6th September 2022

Executive Portfolio Holder for Community Report - Cllr Chris Booth

Somerset West Lottery

Latest round launched on 5th September with a closing date for applications on 7th October. The fund will have three firsts this year: this will be the first year that it will be accessed via the SWTC-Firmstep system whereby applicants will apply via an online form; there is a new process and guidance for applications, and it is also the first time it will be managed in-house, giving us control of who we fund, enabling us to properly promote it and with no external fees to pay.

Community Funds

The SWTC Partnership grants process will open for 2023/24 (on 1st September). This involves assessment of previous six months performance, governance and finance-checking, and assessment of 2023/24 partnership grant applications. This will also be the first time in six years that the Partnership grants are managed entirely in-house so again no external fees to pay.

Cost of Living Event - Cost Of Living Crisis event at the Creative innovation Centre in Taunton on 14th September

Date
Wednesday 14th
September

Location
Creative Innovation
Centre, Memorial Hall,
Paul St, Taunton TA1 3PF

Time
10am - 2pm

**Are you worried
About the Cost of
Living Crisis?**
Join us to find out what support is
available

Organisations Attending:

Citizen Advice,	Mr Fixy and the Repair Café,
Christians Against Poverty,	Somerset Independence Plus,
DWP,	Libraries,
Credit Union, SPARK,	The Centre for Sustainable
Navigate,	Energy
Somerset Waste,	and more.

Local Counselling

Christine Gale has also been working with Minehead Eye and Wellington Counselling to bring together in-page 127

Community Counselling”. Rhonda Lovell of Wellington Counselling is collating evidence of

need and has established various locations for consultations throughout West Somerset. The service in West Somerset would broadly align to the Wellington model and Spark Somerset have agreed to work with Rhonda to secure funding for the project.

Local Pantries

We now have two strong Local Pantries operating in Somerset West and Taunton area. Rowbarton, which opened in March 2021, and in Minehead, which opened in May this year. Between them they support 68 households who benefit from the weekly fee of £3.50 for foods worth between £15 - £25. As the food is surplus food bought or collected from a variety of sources no one knows what will be available each week nor its value, but fresh fruit and vegetables feature highly, especially at this bountiful time of year. As well as supporting households the Local Pantries are diverting food from going to waste and between them they have distributed the equivalent of 27,000 meals and saved over 4.5 Tonnes of CO2.

The Local Pantry in Wellington, to be known as the Best Before Food Store (BBFS), will open on Tuesday 20 September. Paula Appleby, who is setting it up has invested her time in putting down good foundations and working with wraparound support partners, so it will launch with additional features.

On the horizon are two exciting developments, a potential partnership for East Taunton (not yet suitable for the report as it is very early days and may not come off) – and the shortlisting of Rowbarton Local Pantry in the BBC Radio Somerset Make a Difference Awards. They have been nominated in the environment category and will find out how they have done at the awards ceremony at the County Cricket Ground in September.

Community Employment Hubs

The Employment Hubs are a free employment support service covering Taunton, West Somerset and Wellington.

They can help residents with:

- Guidance on opportunities for learning, training and work
- Confidence building to return to work
- Help with job applications, covering letters, CVs and interview skills
- Funding to access employment and learning opportunities (e.g. transport, PPE and books)
- Referral for further support including IT, Citizens Advice, apprenticeship advice, Citizens Advice and positive mental health
- Links to volunteer work
- Identify any other barriers that stop you from progressing
- Regular one to one support for as long as you need it

The next set of hubs are at:

- Minehead Eye Youth Hub, TA4 5BJ. 1:30pm to 2:30pm (every Thursday weekly)

- Priorswood Community Centre, Taunton, TA2 7JW 10am to 12pm (4th Tuesday of the month)
- Halcon Link Centre, Taunton, TA1 2DD 12:30pm to 2:30pm (4th Thursday of the month)
- @ The hub, Alcombe Minehead (next to fire station) TA24 6DJ 10am to 12pm (2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month)
- Stogursey Hub at the Stogursey Youth Hub TA5 1PR, (next to the Victory Hall) on a Tuesday once a month, please use employment support email below to book an appointment
- Taunton United Reform Church, TA1 3PF 10am to 12pm (1st Tuesday of the month)
- Wellington Baptist Church, TA21 8NS 10am to 12pm (1st Wednesday of the month)
- Williton, Parish Council, TA4 4PY 10am to 12pm (3rd Tuesday of the month)

Somerset Recovery Fund: Opportunity Boost Scheme project

To qualify you must be a resident in Somerset and over 16. Not be entitled to any other financial assistance for job seeking activities via your local Job Centre, and if you are working you should have a pre-covid salary of less than £25,000. This is currently being administered by West Somerset Citizens Advice to benefit West Somerset residents.

Outside Bodies

West Somerset Opportunity Area

The WSOA Board is now finishing up having been extended anyway because of Covid and the inability to use the money during over the lockdowns and discuss legacy work to ensure the progress made in West Somerset since 2017 does not go to waste such as now reaching the national average in early learning goals. With a lot of this now in place, legacy work is also helped by Somerset's inclusion in 12 of the Government's Education Investment Areas will have a key focus on improving standards in English and Maths at Key Stage 2 and 4.

A&S Police and Crime Panel

Improved crime recording processes, within Avon and Somerset Police, have driven the increases in recorded crime for domestic abuse and stalking and harassment. Project Bluestone is going to be critical in ensuring a better response to male violence against women and girls.. By 31st March 2022 there were 57.2 (full time equivalent) officers in the Bluestone teams; against an authorised establishment of 100

Avon and Somerset VRU 2021/22 – working in partnership to tackle serious violence 923 young people at risk of serious violence discussed at multi-agency VRU meetings 851 young people at-risk or involved in violence have received targeted interventions 3469 young people receiving universal intervention through schools programmes 3269 contacts made with young

people through detached outreach 727 professionals have received training on trauma-informed practice, as well as 78 attending further training for managers/supervisors. The PCC has successfully secured VRU funding for the next three years, from 2022/23, at an increased level: £2.04 million; £1.53 million; and £1.51 million.

Unlike most overall crime, recorded hate crime increased during the pandemic. Hate crime has continued to increase at a national level as well as locally. In 2021/22 the number of recorded hate crimes in Avon and Somerset has increased by 26% to over 4,500 crime. The increases in crime are thought to be caused by a combination of more offending, more reporting to the police and better recording practices.

In July 2021 a new Avon and Somerset Police Rural Affairs Delivery Plan was launched. The overarching aim of this is for rural communities to have more trust and confidence in the police and some of the key actions are below. Improve training and internal communications about rural affairs. Improve collection and analysis of rural crime data. Co-ordination of force resources to tackle rural crime. Increased collaboration across the South West forces with a focus on disrupting Organised Crime Groups. Better crime prevention by upskilling the workforce and working with partner organisations and community groups like Farm Watch.

Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board

SEND assessment by her Her Majesty's Chief Inspector:

27% of the Somerset populations is under 25 and that one in six of those young people will have some kind of disability or special educational need. They reported the following:

1. The lack of focus on the experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families when formulating strategies to improve the area
2. The lack of leadership capacity across area services
3. Weak partnership working between services across education, health and care
4. Poor joint commissioning arrangements that limit leaders' ability to meet area needs, improve outcomes, and achieve cost efficiencies
5. The ineffective assessment pathway for autistic spectrum conditions
6. Too many children and young people not accessing education because of the disproportionate use of exclusion and poor inclusive practices across the area
7. Poor assessment and meeting of need caused by inconsistent practice leading to poor outcomes for children and young people with SEND
8. Poor timeliness of the assessment, writing and publication of education, health and care plans
9. The wide variances in the quality of education, health and care plans caused by weaknesses in joint working

Somerset Moves - encouraging more physical education, led by SASP in conjunction with SCC and NHS:

Over a 1/3 of adults (36%) across Somerset do not meet physical activity guidelines

- 45% of people with a disability in Somerset are inactive
- 30% of people with a long term condition are inactive

1 in 3 children leaving primary school overweight or very overweight

Covid exacerbated this but measures are suggested:

- Embedding physical activity across all aspects of school life
- Working with our state funded schools to enable all children and young people to have a great experience, to build their confidence, competence and enjoyment through activity.
- Putting children and young people first. Listening, understanding and working with children and young people and their families when we seek to create or improve activities and opportunities.
- Improving community provision in areas where fewer young people are active Making it easier for children to be active within the neighbourhoods where they live.
- Enhancing support to those receiving free school meals or at risk Assisting more children and their families to have equal opportunities to be active.
- Enriching and expanding holiday activity opportunities Exploring funding models with partners to expand the holiday activity provision across Somerset.
- Targeting teenagers who show the greatest drop off in activity levels Making the activity offer relevant and attractive for teenagers in their schools and communities.
- Working with Early Years education providers Supporting children and their families to have the best possible active start in life

Council – 6th September 2022

Climate Change Portfolio Holder Report – Cllr Dixie Darch

Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan

The Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan was supported unanimously at Full Council on July 5, 2022. This has been the culmination of work since November 2021 incorporating Member involvement from both SWT and Sedgemoor District Councils, as part of our Climate Change partnership. It gives a clear route forward for tackling the ecological emergency and it is hoped it will be adapted for use across wider Somerset when the unitary council comes into being.

The vision and action plan are currently being produced for public issue and once complete will be available to download from our website.

Water

We are using the Climate Change newsletter to promote tips on saving water during the dry period.

The free to use water refill station is now up and running in Wellington, situated outside the Post Office sorting office. This complements the refill stations already in use in Taunton and Minehead. These are a collaborative initiative with Wessex Water. The refill stations are designed to reduce the use of disposable plastic water bottles, an estimated 7.7 billion of which are used every year in the UK, a large proportion ending up in waterways.

Wessex water also provided water refill points at the Taunton Pride festival, preventing the use of the significant number of single use plastic bottles. They will also be attending the Somerset County show in September.

Somerset Business Climate Summit

The Somerset Business Climate Summit to be held on 21 September at Queens College between 10am and 1pm will be an opportunity for businesses to showcase best practice and raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges of moving towards a low carbon economy. The summit is a collaboration between all five Somerset councils.

Recycling on the Go poster competition winner

14 year old Evelyn Stead from Court fields School in Wellington was the winner of the SWT Recycling on the Go poster competition. The competition was designed to raise awareness of the 130 new litter bins throughout the district which enable plastic bottles and aluminium and tin cans to be deposited separately. Evelyn received a cheque for £500 towards her school, along with her poster, mounted and framed, the image of which is now being used in SWT communications promoting the *Recycling on the Go* campaign.

Upgraded cycle storage at Deane House

Upgraded cycle storage at Deane House has now been completed. This is part of a scheme to promote active travel and reduce car use with internal staff and across the district. This complements the cycle to work scheme and includes a number of council pool bikes which staff can use where meetings are held in locations which are not walkable. The old storage unit has been relocated to our Westpark Depot in Wellington to store sandbags.

E scooter trial

In June this year the Dept. for Transport announced the extension of the e scooter trial until May 2024. The previous end date for the trial was November 2022.

The Taunton trial is approaching its two-year anniversary and the scheme has matured well and is proving to be very stable. Based on this it is our intention to extend this part of the trial to the new end date.

The Minehead trial has been operating for just over a year and is very different to Taunton. Minehead is a coastal town with different demographic. It's also home to Butlins, and at the height of the of the summer season the town's population is significantly increased by an influx of tourists into the area on a weekly basis. There are also out of season events scheduled throughout the year which bring additional visitors into the town.

These means the trial in Minehead has not had the opportunity to mature and stabilise in the same way as Taunton. Due to large numbers of new users every week.

We have been asked to engage with the public on their views and will launch a public survey specifically for Minehead at the end of August.

Taunton Flood Alleviation Scheme consultation on Firepool Lock and Obridge

Two short term projects – the Firepool Lock to Obridge scheme and another to improve flood defences along the left bank of the River Tone between the Town Bridge and Frieze Hill - are going through the designs, consent and permissions phase. These projects will bring flood alleviation to the Firepool regeneration site and North Town area. The plan is to raise Firepool lock gates and the area around them and create defences between the River Tone and the Bridgwater to Taunton Canal, from Firepool to the A358 Obridge viaduct. They are part of the wider Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements scheme which was approved by SWT in February 2020.

The River Tone Left Bank Defences scheme involves a collaborative agreement between SWT and the Environment Agency, with Binnies appointed as contractors for the detailed design, consents, and permissions work. Ecological surveys, land and visual impact assessment and topographical surveys have since been completed, with a planning application due to be submitted during Quarter 2 of this financial year. Approval will enable construction to commence to the original timetable of 23/24.

The Firepool Lock Gate scheme is managed by SWT, with support from the Environment Agency and J Price Consulting. The contract for detailed design, consents and permissions was let to WSP in August 2021. They completed preliminary studies (ecology, heritage, landscape, etc.) during spring 2022 to support the scheme, and outline design work started in April 2022. All project milestones have been met to date, and granting of planning permission is timetabled for Quarter 3 of 2022. This would see commencement of construction in 2023, in line with the initial schedule. The public consultation has run from 11 July to 7 August and officers are now reviewing all responses.

Electric Vehicle Charging Points – SWT Car Parks

We have now completed the installation of all our electric vehicle charge points with Swain Street in Watchet now live.

We have installed a total of 16 double sockets 22kw charge points across 9 car park locations, all of which are registered on ZapMap.

Free Tree Give Away 2022/23

SWT is once again offering Parish and Town Councils across, and community groups across the district free trees as part of its commitment to work towards carbon neutrality and climate resilience by 2030.

The scheme opened on 01 August, and you are invited to place your request ready for National Tree Planting Week.

[Free trees \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

Local Governance Review and county-wide projects

Staff from all five councils meet regularly as part of the relevant LGR workstream to bring individual Climate Action Plans together into one county-wide revised strategy as we move towards Unitary. The Climate Emergency Implementation Board has officer and member representation from all five councils and met on 28 July to review progress of projects. The agenda included updates on the LGR Climate Change subgroup, the Climate Emergency league table as well as a presentation on the Transport workstream.

Cllr Dixie Darch, Executive Member for Climate Change

Council – 6th September 2022

Cllr Caroline Ellis - Portfolio Holder for Culture

Cultural Development Team – Quarterly Update

Introduction: The Cultural Development Team was created in November 2021 with the key objective to deliver the SWT Cultural Strategy as adopted by full Council on 7 September 2021. Since November, the team has gone from strength to strength and is already making a real difference to the communities in our District in respect of the arts and culture offering and support provided.

News and Updates:

The team are pleased to present the first Cultural Impact Assessment which covers the period from October 2021 – March 2022 and shows how far the team and strategy have come in the first 6 months and how we are raising the profile of Arts and Culture in our communities: [Cultural Strategy Impact Report \(September 2021 – March 2022\) - YouTube](#)

- **Cultural Forum Open Day – 29 September 2022** – All councillors are invited to join the Cultural Development Team at our first Cultural Forum Open Day on Thursday 29 September in Deane House from 9.30am - 3pm.

Join the team, arts and culture providers and stakeholders for an engaging day and lunch to commemorate the District's Cultural Strategy and help us future gaze on a range of subjects and themes. You'll get the chance to hear about things that have been happening in the District, get updates on projects, hear from local experts, and share your thoughts on things that matter to you. A light lunch will be provided where there will be the opportunity to network and view the new Arts Hub at Flook House.

There will also be a series of round table discussions available to join in the afternoon.

The workshop themes are as follows:

- Somerset Wide Cultural Strategy/Local Government Re-Organisation Workshop
- Creative People/Youth Workshop
- Events Workshop
- Heritage Workshop
- Public Art Workshop
- Firepool Workshop

Full agenda to follow at the beginning of September.

More details can be found here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/swt-cultural-forum-open-day-tickets-398906288447>

- **SWT funded Arts Hub brings new life to Flook House** - Thanks to a Cultural Development Grant of £10,000 awarded to Creative Innovation Centre CIC (CICCIC) towards start-up costs, refurbishments, and minor renovations to modernise the rooms, the future of Flook House is looking much brighter. We are proud to have revived the 17th Century Manor House by repurposing it as a new Arts Hub for cultural and creative activities. Flook House now provides office and studio space for creative organisations and practitioners, as well as a conference-ready meeting room for community-based programmes, workshops, and vocational learning.

As the building's primary tenant and driving force behind the Arts Hub, CICCIC is managing the project in collaboration with GoCreate Taunton and Somerset Youth Theatre, as well as multiple artists and designers.

Activities will also go beyond general provision. Liz Hutchins, director of GoCreate, said: “In the near future we have art workshops for Ukrainian families; rehearsal space for a singing group and youth theatre; health and wellbeing workshops; art classes; and the list keeps growing.

- **Events** – the Cultural Development team works closely with the SWT Events Co-ordinator and Town Centre Resilience and Transformation Officer to ensure the SWT events calendar links in with Cultural Strategy. We have recently created and rolled out an “Events Recce” Programme for venues and providers and more information can be found on our Culture pages on the SWT website: [Cultural Forum and News \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)
- **Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) Programme** – the SWT Strategic Lead for Culture is now engaged with the ‘Culture and Universal Community Services’ workstream of the county-wide LGR programme. Consultants’ “5th Sector” have been appointed as the consultants who will be implementing the Somerset Wide Cultural Strategy and there is an opportunity to meet them at the SABCA Conference on 11 October 2022 (more information can be found here: <https://www.somersetculture.org.uk/events/the-future-of-arts-culture-in-somerset-conference-tues-11th-oct-2022/>)

Press release: [Specialists appointed to take Somerset arts and culture strategy forward \(newsomersetcouncil.org.uk\)](http://www.newsomersetcouncil.org.uk)

- **Public Art Updates:**

Various Public Art Projects to be completed over the next 6 months:

- Working with Arts Taunton to commission a piece of Public Art in Castle Green, Taunton
- Installation of the High Street, Taunton Public Artwork (Somerset Dragon Sculpture)
- Working with Cotford St Luke Parish Council to ensure £32,968 S106 funding is spent on a piece of Public Art in the community by March 2023
- Staplegrove Bridge – working with Taunton School to create a mural/piece of Public Art on the Railway Bridge



Above: Dragon Sculpture due for Taunton High Street

- **Heritage Update:**

- We are currently working to ensure that the Agriculture Sculpture located at Bedford House is protected and relocated – in talks with new leaseholders.
- Working with the Heritage at Risk team with regards to Tone Works and the potential for Cultural use in the future



Right: “Agriculture Statue” at Bedford House



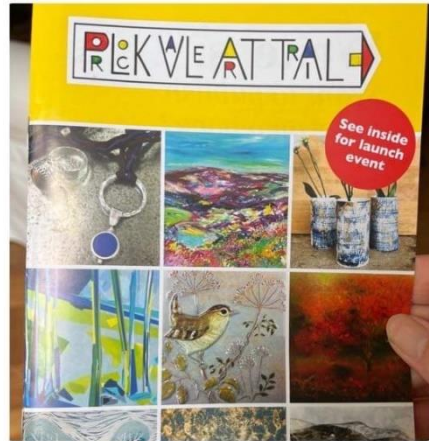
Left: Cultural Team and Cllr Ellis on a visit to Tonedale Mill

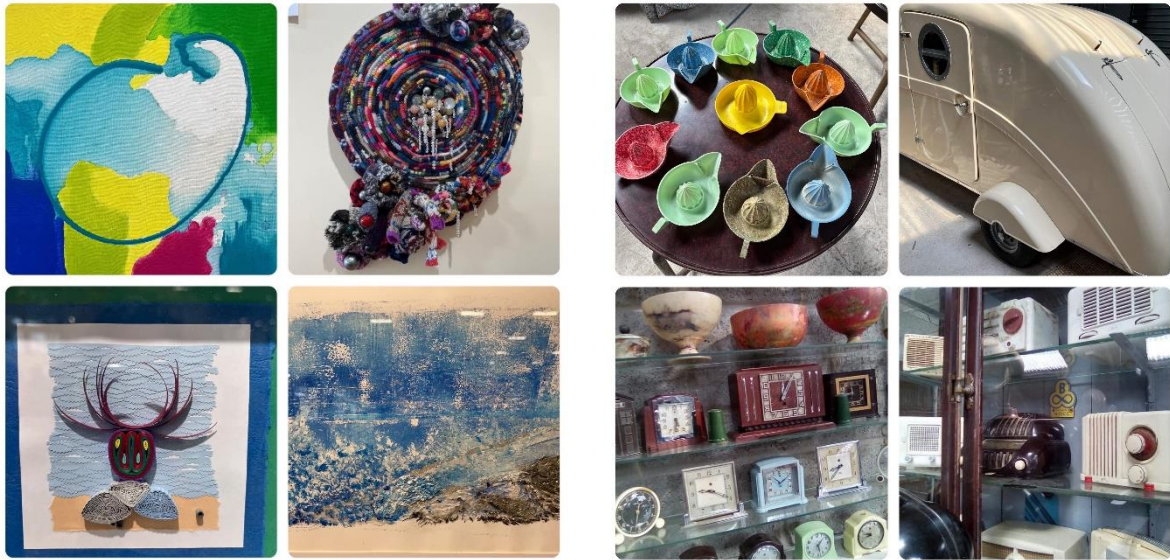
Cultural Liaison and Events attended by the Portfolio Holder – Cllr Caroline Ellis

Art highlights

SWT was delighted to support this year’s Porlock Vale Art Trail organised by the amazing Deb Stanyon and colleagues. The Trail is partly a permanent feature as many artists and artisans are based in the town and surrounding villages but since last summer there is a weekend of open studios and special events towards the end of June where you can meet and chat to many wonderful artists. This year I had the pleasure of meeting Jenny Barron, Veronica Wilburn and Melody Hawtin (ahhh her studio!!) among others, drooling over Sarah Fox Bespoke Jewellery’s amazing Courtenay Collection and catching up with community artist Terry Gable who was running a workshop in St Dubricius Church in support of the spire project.

GoCreate Taunton’s annual members showcase took place at Somerset Libraries Taunton in July - nine wonderful local artists were exhibiting with a great range of work from gorgeous abstracts, quilled paper creations, textile wonders and beautiful prints.





It was a pleasure to meet Evelyn from Court Fields School in Wellington Park in July with Cllr Dixie Darch and Mayor of Wellington, Cllr Mark Lithgow. Evelyn designed the winning entry in our 'Recycling On-The-Go' poster competition, helping to promote our new public litter and recycling bins.

A popular theme for recent exhibitions has been to explore art and sustainability in the face of the climate emergency and declining biodiversity. Hestercombe Gallery's intriguing and beguiling 'A Rose is a Rose is a Rose' is where you can see work by five brilliant artists - Brendan Barry, Feral Practice, John Newling, Sophy Rickett and Marjolaine Ryley (with gorgeous bonus Bronwen Coe art in the café!). This could only have been conceived and made at Hestercombe. One room has been turned into a camera obscura, another has beautiful art made out of soil, another has a rooks nest and badger sett Very cleverly put together. This runs till October 23rd.



Latterly, I took in the Pennie Elfick exhibition curated by Close Ltd at Taunton Brewhouse. Pennie is an acclaimed local artist in whose abstract compositions (arrangements of horizontal & vertical bands in a range of muted colours using acrylic & oil paints) you can lose yourself; they invite contemplation and are beautiful to boot.

Our Cultural Heritage

Patrick Cook and Imogen Smith from the Bakelite Museum were kind enough to take me to see their amazing Bakelite collection, currently in storage at a barn on the Levels while a new permanent location can be found for it (when on show previously at Orchard Mill in Williton it was an internationally-known attraction) Bakelite 'the material of a thousand uses' was invented in 1907, the precursor to modern plastics. Patrick and Imogen have one of the most comprehensive collections of vintage plastics anywhere in the world and aspirations to link it to education and innovation on eco alternatives. The intrepid pair have been holding open days so others can come and sample the delights of Bakelite. It is the most wonderful collection and - for us oldies, also a massive nostalgia trip. Amongst the Bakelite classics and other design classics of the era, there are also a range of Patrick's awesome creations including the most lush camping car.

Public Art highlights

With umpteen new public art projects currently on the go it is great sometimes to relish and appreciate what we already have. Local schools often blaze a trail in art commissioning and involving pupils and the school community in public art projects. On a recent visit to meet Gareth Jones, Head of Parkfield Primary School in Taunton it was great to take in all the amazing murals created by the children working with local artists and meet Dilwyn created for the school in 2017 by Matt Crabbe who is creating the Taunton High Street Dragon.



Music, Theatre and Event highlights



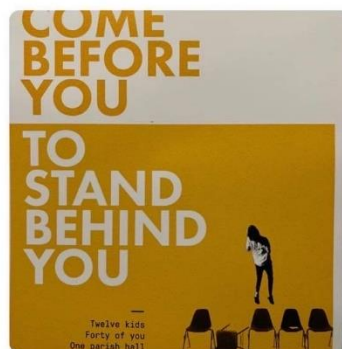
MUSIC: Sound of the Streets blasted into town in early July for an amazing new three day street music festival. The brainchild of the legendary Tim Hill, the festival showcased an exciting mix of international as well as local street music bands and encompassed a range of education and workshop activities designed to inspire and skill up the next generation of street musicians. The vibe on Castle Green and elsewhere was amazing with the event attracting a great mix of people of all ages who readily succumbed to the amazing music. The event rang alongside an extended Taunton Independent Market - combos like this seem to work really well. Highlights for me included La Tromba who travelled all the way from Chile, London-based company Kinetika Bloco with their 'unique British carnival sound' and high energy and seeing youngsters who Tim and team have been working with over the past few months perform.

EVENTS – TAUNTON LIVE AND PRIDE:

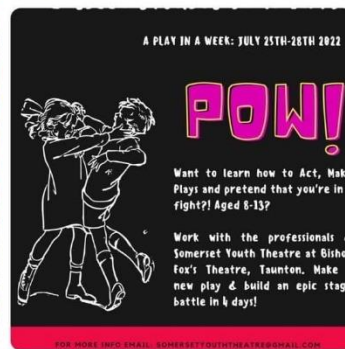
Taunton's historic first Pride Parade took place on 16th July. Deputy Mayor, Brenda, Cllr Weston and me were delighted to take part in the raising of the Pride flag at Deane House prior to the weekend's festivities. The Parade, from Goodlands Gardens to Vivary was bursting with joy and rainbow wonders - we bore a gorgeous giant flag through the streets dancing along with street bands as we went with a wonderful reception from crowds who had gathered to watch. Taunton Live and Pride Festival itself was fabulous - coordinated by the indefatigable Jenny and Liz of Go Create. We were treated to a huge community celebration of arts and inclusivity. There were two stages with live music all day hosted by the fabulous Queens Arina Fox & Virina Flower, artist's quarter where local artists helped us make amazing prints, abstract art and sculptures, well-being zone, commitment ceremonies and a wide range of awareness stalls, food, and bars. We enjoyed brilliant theatre shows by Bluebird Theatre and Farm Yard Circus as well.



THEATRE: Porlock-based Stacked Wonky are doing some of the most exciting creative work with young people anywhere - it was a great privilege to see Team Wonky in action at Holford Village Hall as part of Take Art's touring programme. Twelve young people have created a completely unique, largely improvised performance piece that defies categorisation - astonishing in its authenticity and verve and brilliantly unsettling as well as entertaining. Determined to engineer a performance at Deane House or indeed County Hall. Fellow Cllrs brace yourselves!



Somerset Youth Theatre very kindly invited me to watch the performance put together at the end of their awesome 'Stage Combat and Silly Stories - play in a week' project for 8-13 year olds at Bishop Fox's School's theatre (funded through the Happy Healthy Holidays programme I believe). Absolutely brilliant! A completely original play created by the kids supported by professional actors complete with incredibly convincing stage fighting. Every child shone. SYT are starting regular sessions in Taunton at Flook House Arts Hub.



The SPACE Somerset (our district's centre for Level 3 performing arts qualifications) simply put on the best musicals and this summer's cracking production of 9 to 5 the Musical at Tacchi Morris was no exception. Performers received well earned standing ovations - some real stars in the making I reckon.

Taunton Brewhouse's summer programme was really outstanding this year - highlights included Shakespeare's Globe on Tour production of Julius Caesar (first performed in 1599, could have been written yesterday) and the HandleBards' (so called because they travel on bikes and do Shakespeare) production of Twelfth Night in Castle Gardens. Four genius HandleBards actors had the audience in Castle Gardens enraptured - oh my they did the bard proud, utterly hilarious, supremely anarchic, and brilliant.

Community- based Chameleon Theatre company's Jungle Book production at Sheppey's this year was huge fun - we are truly blessed with myriad talented thespian groups, long may that continue!

Finally, just a note to say a massive bravo to the organisers of this season's other amazing festivals full of creativity and fabulous entertainment- Somerset Armed Forces Day, Taunton Flower Show and Watchet Carnival Weekend.

Council – 6th September 2022

Portfolio Holder Report of Councillor Mike Rigby – Economic Development, Planning and Transportation

Planning

Taunton Garden Town Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Future Stewardship Arrangements

Arup were commissioned in October 2021 to support the production of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan for Taunton Garden Town. The work is now in the final stages with a draft report having recently been received. Work on taking forward stewardship proposals (a key principle to realise the Council's vision for the Garden Town) has also been progressing. The consultants have baselined existing arrangements and reviewed the potential opportunities for putting in place arrangements for the long-term management and maintenance of community assets (including public open space, allotments, play facilities, community halls) across the garden town sites. Workshops with key stakeholders including the parish councils and Taunton Charter Trustees) are currently being set up to take place in September to test proposals including the objectives and principles for future arrangements. Work to scope the requirements for an online infrastructure engagement platform against existing commercially available products has also taken place. The next stage will be to interview potential suppliers to further understand how our requirements could be met via existing products.

Taunton Garden Town – Governance Arrangements

Proposals are being developed to ensure a governance structure for the Garden Town is in place going forward to ensure collaborative working and effective decision-making among public and private sector partners and stakeholders. Following consultation with key stakeholders a report is due to be considered at a future meeting of the Executive (likely in November).

Connecting our Garden Communities – Active Travel Infrastructure for Taunton Garden Town

Consultation on the draft Connecting our Garden Communities plan was launched on 29 July and runs until 30 September 2022. For more information and to respond to the consultation visit the consultation portal at <https://tauntongardentown.commonplace.is/>. The consultation has received attention in the local press and a significant number of responses already. Associated engagement activities are planned with relevant parish councils, Somerset Youth Parliament, local businesses and with students and staff at Richard Huish College in September. Following consultation, the intention is for the plan to progress towards approval as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications this autumn, and to influence the next iteration of the Taunton Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

Mobility hubs – Taunton Garden Town

A brief is being prepared with County colleagues to consider how the Council can support the development of mobility hubs at key locations to facilitate active and sustainable travel across the Garden Town. This will look at a network approach, typical components together with potential

financial and delivery models. This complements work taking place on the Taunton bus station site and is intended to consider opportunities on a range of sites including the allocated Park and Ride sites at strategic sites in Taunton Garden Town.

RTPI Awards 2022 Commendation for Climate Positive Planning Guidance

I am pleased to announce that the Council's Climate Positive Planning Guidance was recently commended as part of the RTPI awards for Best Plan (Excellence in Plan Making Practice) category in recognition of its role as a flexible tool through which the Council's declaration of Climate and Ecological Emergencies have been integrated into planning policy. It provides detailed guidance on how planning applications are expected to demonstrate climate friendly construction methods and design by way of interpretation of adopted planning policies, national guidance, and legislation. It also forms a key action within the Carbon Neutrality and Climate Resilience (CNCR) Action Plan.

Neighbourhood Planning

SWT has received the Independent Examiners report on the West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine (WM&CF) Revised Neighbourhood Plan. The next steps are for SWT to consider the examiners recommendations and determine whether the plan meets the basic conditions and agree a decision statement. The plan will then go to a referendum with a provisional date of 22 September 2022 agreed with the elections team. Assuming that it is supported by more than 50% of those voting, it will then go to Full Council to be 'Made' and will then form part of the statutory development plan for the purpose of assessing planning proposals in the area. The Parish Councils of West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine have revised a number of policies in the Plan with the aim of: increasing the climate and ecological robustness, conforming with Taunton Garden Town Vision, supporting the Declarations of Climate and Ecological Emergency, and updating Local Green Space designations.

Town Centres Health Check

To provide evidence for plan making, the Council has commissioned work to undertake Town Centre Health Checks for Taunton, Wellington, Minehead, Williton and Watchet; a review of the Retail Area Boundary Reviews for these towns; and consideration as to whether an Article 4 Direction should be made in order to protect town centre uses.

Stantec were appointed to undertake this work. The Town Centre Health Check has been completed and published on our website. The Retail Boundary Review report has been completed and will form part of the evidence base to support a future Somerset Local Plan. Recommendations on the need for Article 4 Directions is due shortly and will help determine the next steps.

Wellington Station

Following the announcement of £5 million worth of funding from DfT's Restoring Your Railway Fund in October 2021, Network Rail is now leading on the project to deliver the station. The funding will be administered by Network Rail as part of the Restoring Your Railway, Rail Network Enhancements budget, and will enable the project to advance significantly through the next stage of project development and design.

The promoters, Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) and Mid Devon District Council (MDDC), continue to work with Network Rail, GWR and other stakeholders through the Working Group, Steering Group and Senior Stakeholder Forum. A programme for delivery of the station is currently being prepared in collaboration with Network Rail and is anticipated by the summer.

Firepool

The LPA and Developer teams continue to meet regularly with regards to the development of a new Masterplan and Design Guidance for Firepool to resolve key issues and move things forward with a view to consultation and adoption by the LPA as a material consideration in the assessment and determination of planning applications for the site. A series of workshops have been undertaken with key stakeholders to help support refinement of the Draft Masterplan which will be reported to members in due course ahead of public consultation. Planning applications for Block 3, and for the Trenchard Way access and levels and drainage across the site have now been approved.

Transportation

A358 Taunton to Southfields Dualling Scheme National Highways Consultation

The formal public consultation exercise and the subsequent non-statutory consultation exercise for the proposal to improve and dual the A358 between the Southfields Roundabout in Ilminster and junction 25 of the M5 motorway, have now ended. National Highways will now consider whether any further changes to the proposals are required as a result.

Council officers together with colleagues at Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council are continuing to negotiate with National Highways and are involved in various workstreams. The next important milestone in the project will be the joint production of a 'Statement of Common Ground' between all of the affected Councils (Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council). The three local authorities are currently working on this collaboratively.

It is now expected that National Highways will be in a position to formally submit their application for a Development Consent Order in Autumn (2022).

Development Management Update

Performance

Workloads remain high due to the volume of applications, pre-application enquiries and managing the applications held in abeyance due to the advice from Natural England and the need to provide phosphate mitigation. There are ongoing vacancies and absences due to personal circumstances, resignations and some long-term sickness and reduced hours across the team. Performance is also affected by delays in receiving responses from consultees in particular from the Somerset Ecology Service despite a new service level agreement.

Recruitment

Unfortunately, no applications were received to the recent advertisement for the vacant Senior Planner and Team Leader roles and we have therefore recruited agency staff. One agency worker started on 4 May 2022 to fill the Senior Planner role and the Team Leader role was filled on an agency basis on 1 June 2022. The Conservation Officer has resigned and this post has been advertised.

The Service Manager resigned and left the Council in early August. This role was advertised nationally but there were no applicants. There is currently an Interim Service Manager working three days per week.

Major and Special Projects

Future High Street Fund (FHSF) Cycling and Walking Schemes

The active travel element of this grant allocation creates cycling improvement schemes that focus on delivering an enhanced cycle route between Taunton Railway Station, through the Firepool and

Coal Orchard developments to Vivary Park with additional cycle parking. Due to rising costs as seen across the whole construction industry, the total cost to deliver all schemes was forecast £1.4m the FHSF grant funding. This, coupled with the potential impact of bus service improvements along East St and beyond, resulted in the decision to remove the Market House Roundabout from scope *at this time* until additional funding can be secured, and the impact of parallel activity assessed.

Schemes currently being progressed through design stages include a new bridge over the River Tone, a cycle and pedestrian-priority parallel crossing at St James St, and a new crossing from High St to Vivary Park. Cycle parking 'hubs' are also being implemented, with a range of both secure and sheltered cycle parking with public cycle repair stands and pumps.

The pace of delivery remains a key consideration, with all FHSF spend required by March 2024 but the programme is progressing to schedule.

Consultation with SCC, RNIB and local cycling groups has been undertaken with further consultation to take place in the coming months.

Feasibility Work - Cycling Schemes

SWT are continuing to work towards feasibility studies with local cycling groups and other stakeholders on cycling infrastructure projects in the District.

- Wellington to Taunton

Collaborative links have been established with key stakeholder groups, including TACC, Citizens UK, Somerset County Council, Wellington Town Council and other community groups. A dedicated committee working on the route has been meeting since March 2021. Feasibility work to assess the south side of the A38 between the Comeytrowe and Chelston roundabouts shows a significant lack of highway boundary available to accommodate the route. Estimations show delivery of the central 4.5km section is likely to require multi-millions for construction, land purchase or lease agreements for multiple land parcels, in addition to funding for legal agreements. Officers continue to explore feasibility and seek any funding opportunities that are available.

Heritage at Risk

Tonedale Mill

The S48 Repairs notices have been served and discussions continue with the owners on their response to the notices and the emergency works required on site. In January 2022 SWT also issued a S54 Urgent Works Notice for urgent repairs to Block H at Tonedale Mill. This notice was not complied with and SWT have completed the works and handed the site back to the owners. A S55 which seeks the recovery of the funds in default has now been issued. Officers continue to work with the owners to try and secure the other buildings throughout the site.

Toneworks

Phase 2 works are now on site for the next phase of targeted repairs using grant funding from Historic England, this is due for completion by the end of 2022.

Sandhill Park

SWT continues to work with the new owners of Sandhill Park towards the necessary urgent works and long-term plans for the building's future. Emergency works have been deemed to have started by the owner and the Emergency works package is underway.

Regen Programme

Coal Orchard

Since the last update, SWT continue to push the project forward, with 30+ sub-contractors, the majority of whom were engaged in the project previously to provide continuity of delivery and knowledge of the works.

Following lengthy negotiations with the Environment Agency, the license to work in the river was secured in June, allowing the works to the river steps and retaining walls to recommence. These key activities are pivotal in finishing remainder of the public realm, but also contain key utility supplies so accurate coordination is essential.

Some of the key routes through the site have opened, with very positive feedback received from local businesses and residents.

All 40 apartments are now sold or let.

We are dealing with a number of live enquiries for the commercial space, and will shortly be re-launching promotion of the units.

Bus Station

NHS Vaccination Centre move from Firepool to Tower St (old bus station site)

The NHS continued to provide vaccinations from the Firepool site until the end of March, before moving across town to the old bus station site at Tower St. The central building had a light touch refurbishment at speed by the NHS before the spring booster jabs started successfully in April.

SWT continue to work with Somerset County Council on proposals for the long term future of the site. The Department for Transport has confirmed the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) grant funding, allowing initial discussions about the longer term use of the site and its wider uses (see Mobility Hubs update above) to move forward with more certainty.

Integration of the Changing Places facility into any new proposals for bus station use will be a priority.

Firepool

GWR Building/Cycle Path

The GWR Building continues to be used as a site office by the Innovation Centre contractor Wilmott Dixon. The temporary cycle path will remain open until the end of September when it will close due to overlapping construction works.

Digital Innovation Centre

SWT are continuing to work in collaboration with SCC on delivery of a 2400m² Digital Innovation centre on the Firepool site, with construction activity now in progress. Civil and decontamination works started in October 2021, with a delivery programme of circa 18 months.

Infrastructure, Utilities and Flood work

Planning permission has been granted for the Infrastructure work but start on site has been delayed as the contractor has experienced delays on a preceding job that has prevented mobilisation at Firepool. The team continue to explore all options to ensure this work gets to site as soon as possible.

Phase 1 of flood defence design work at Firepool Lock is due to be completed in Q1 2022, in collaboration with the Environment Agency and Canals and Rivers Trust. A public consultation for this work will take place in July / August, with over approx. 50 responses received. These are being collated and the feedback analysed, before any further design work will be undertaken.

Block 3 (north of Canal Road)

Planning permission has also been granted for the block north of Canal Road. Delivery of this element of the site will be coordinated with the works to the Innovation Centre opposite to ensure the two projects do not conflict or compete for space or access.

Boulevard & Public Realm

A separate planning application for the boulevard and public realm works leading down to the river from Canal Road has been submitted.

Master Planning

The Councils' development team continue to work closely with the Local Planning Authority to develop a revised masterplan for the whole site (see update above).

Heritage Assets

Wellington Green Space & Fox's Field

The acquisition of the Green Space in Wellington is scheduled for a Full Council decision in July 2022. It is intended to hand the site over (alongside Fox's Field) to Wellington Town Council for long-term lease and management working closely with the community.

Hinkley Point C

The latest Summer 2022 workforce survey confirmed that there were 7,875 workers on site in June 2022 (these are the number of workers that are on site for 5 days or more each month). Up from 6,656 since December 2021. This rate of increase is as expected and according to plans for the workforce uplift from the original 5,600 workers at peak to 8,500 by early 2023.

36% of the workforce is home based, whilst the rest (about 5,040 workers) have had to secure accommodation in the local area. Of these workers 68% of the non-home based workers are based in Sedgemoor and 24% in Somerset West and Taunton. Although numbers have gone up in Sedgemoor the overall percentage has dropped by 5%. This time significant rises have been seen in Taunton and Stogursey and surrounding villages. This does suggest that Bridgwater has reached capacity and new workers are looking further afield for accommodation. There has also been a rise in workers living in the private rented sector.

Work continues with EDF to put in place agreed measures to mitigate the impacts on the private rented sector. This includes 900 bed spaces in four expanded caravan sites that are currently being used by workers. These are reliant on full planning application processes. The additional bed spaces will be ready for occupation in the first few months of 2023.

The Supplementary S106 agreement has now been signed by all parties, which will release an additional £390k funds for Housing teams to deliver initiatives that create new bed spaces and support the most vulnerable people. Since 2014 HPC Housing funds have created over 800 bed spaces and supported nearly 1,200 people. The agreement also releases additional funds to support some staff roles from April 2023 in economic development, planning and housing related activity.

After more than 46 years, Hinkley Point B has this summer stopped generating electricity. This has seen a gradual decline of business rates, but this was expected and has been planned for in budgets.

Economic Development

Town Centre Resilience and Transformation

Town Centre Resilience and Events

Taunton Wellington and Minehead received 25K to support the on-going high street recovery efforts.

A giant deckchair has been erected on Castle Green and will stay there until the end of summer. (September/October).

Town Centre Activity (All)

Working with HUQ who use Mobility data products to access footfall metrics, visitor travel, place engagement, demographic data retail success and benchmark places with direct equivalence. Working with District Town BIDS and Council's to produce a high street vitality dashboard to show intelligence but allows us to evidence the impact of events and other town centre activity.

High Street Task Force are working SWT to help identify ways to unlock the potential of the High Street through training, workshops and sharing best practice case studies.

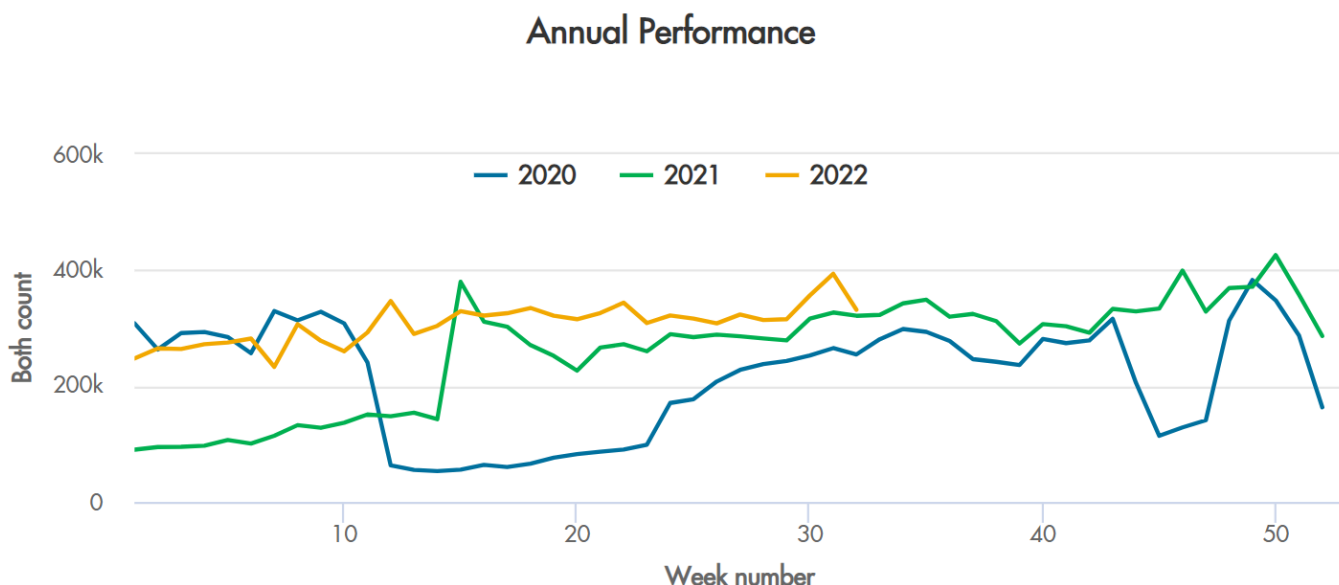
Town Centre Activity (Taunton)

Work is complete on the electrical supplies in High Street and Fore Street, SWT Electricians are safety checking the units and once passed, they will be in use. EOI's are being called from street traders to occupy the top end of the High Street.

The heritage statement is ready for submitting, but final tweaks are needed to the proposed elevation drawings.

Digital promotion has been used to support the town centre activities this year through Facebook via boosting posts. Reach exceeding 120k views.

Footfall:



Events

Jubilee Picnic in the park was attended by over 3,000 people and was a great success for the town and brought the community together. Front page of County Gazette and positive feedback from stakeholders, different internal departments and members of the public.

Forthcoming events for some of SWT's parks and open spaces in 2022 include:

- Live in Somerset music concerts in Vivary Park on 27 and 28 August
- Minehead Bay Festival on Minehead Esplanade and seafront on 3 September
- Wellington Film Festival in Wellington Park on 2 October
- Moonlit Meadow Run through Longrun Meadow and French Weir Park in Taunton on 29 October

Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth

The county wide Visitor Economy Support Programme (VESP) to aid the recovery of the visitor economy strand 1 & 2 activity final reports are now completed. The VESP strands are funded by the Joint Councils' Business Rates Retention Grants (BRR). Strand 3 is for marketing and positive messaging for the visitor economy that is about to be commissioned. Strand 4 has launched an innovation grant scheme aimed at innovation within the visitor economy which is supporting recovery and growth within the sector. Entry to the grant programme has now closed.

The Hinkley Tourism Action Partnership (HTAP) continues to support the Visitor economy with various initiatives as part of their phase 4 action plan. The HTAP digital online business support workshops for 2022 held x 6 'BOOST' Tourism Toolkit webinars up to April 2022 which supported a further 40 businesses. The number of businesses supported was lower than anticipated. However, the supplier has agreed to deliver further toolkit workshops in the autumn within contract.

The HTAP Tourism Innovation Grant Scheme (supporting SMEs) awarded 14 grants to a diverse range of projects across Sedgemoor and the West Somerset area to boost and widen the tourism offer.

The recently commissioned 12-month Somerset visitor survey first quarter survey results have been collated.

Annual SLA's have been put in place for each of the Destination Management Organisations Visit Somerset and Visit Exmoor.

The HTAP partnership has developed a proposal that will see four themes of work for the use of the remaining HTAP funds available, for Cluster networks & business support, Packaging of activities and itineraries, Publicity and Events. The HTAP partners are currently assessing tender submissions where projects are expected to start in September.

The England Coast Path project supported by HTAP has now launched 20 Storywalks.

<https://englandcoastpath.storywalks.info/> –

1. The new Minehead People and Place Partnership meets bi-monthly at present, delivery of the new economic plan for Minehead called Minehead Plan – Inspiring People and Place is underway.

Four year agreements have been finalised with Minehead, Watchet and Porlock Tourist Information Centres (TIC's) to cover 2022/23, 2023/4, 2024/5 and 2025/6 for the use of the remaining Hinkley funding allocations for the Centres. The TIC's have to deliver against an annually reviewed action plan of outputs for the funding received.

Sector support: Food and drink

A [Spotlight on Somerset Food and Drink - Growth Hub \(heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk\)](https://heartofswgrowthhub.co.uk) event was held on 5 July 2022 and was successful with a soft launch of the sector support package given to the audience.

A Guide to support businesses with their recruitment and retention of staff has been published on the website and it is hoped that this will be a useful tool for businesses struggling with staffing issues. <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/media/3426/recruitment-and-retention-of-staff-guidance.pdf>

The team are also part of a LEP wide task and finish group looking for solutions.

Additional Restrictions Grant Funds

The discretionary funds awarded to the Council by Government for this scheme to support businesses during Covid has been fully utilised.

Since November 2020, the scheme has provided financial support totalling £6,066,639 in 4,267 separate grant payments to over 1,560 businesses. These are businesses which either would not have qualified for the Government's mandatory schemes, or did not qualify at the time that a particular round of the ARG scheme was made available.

Inward Investment

The LEP has begun its 18 month programme of Somerset wide inward investment activity which includes the appointment of a design agency to develop the Somerset wide inward investment proposition which will incorporate the Switch website. The team will continue to be involved in ensuring that all aspects of our activity aligns to the wider Somerset programme as well as development in readiness for vesting day 2023.

Innovation District

A meeting of the Innovation Leadership Group was held in July and will continue to meet on a quarterly basis. The next meeting will be in October. Future issues to be discussed include:

- the next steps on the outcome of the Shared Prosperity Fund submission
 - a review and feedback on the ILG's involvement in the Innovation Exchange conference
 - an update on the organisation appointed to deliver the first phase of the innovation support service
- During July, a workshop facilitated by the Connected Places Catapult was held with officers from the County and District Councils; the Local Authorities all agreed that the model of a distributed innovation district (hub and spoke) was favoured.

Somerset Innovation Exchange 2022

Good progress has been in preparation for the event on 27 September 2022 The collaborative event will showcase innovation in Somerset. Themes include the future of transport and mobility, the legacy of nuclear and future energy, digital health innovation, and Agri tech. More information is available on the website [Somerset Innovation Exchange – Showcasing innovation in Somerset](http://www.somersetinnovationexchange.co.uk)
www.somersetinnovationexchange.co.uk
<http://www.somersetinnovationexchange.co.uk/>

Shared Prosperity Fund

The economic development team has supported the final submission of the prospectus to Government submitted on 1 August for review and feedback by Government in September/October.

This covered three key themes of community, business support and skills. Key themes for our economic development team were town centre regeneration, innovation and skills development.

Somerset Future Economic Scenarios Project

The first stage of the project to review Somerset wide economic priorities has been completed. The next stage is to consider themes to support the development of a Somerset wide economic development strategy including:

- A business as usual base case
- A quality of life driven health and wellbeing scenario A vitality and dynamism scenario A clean green nature recovery scenario

Community Employment Hubs

The DWP funded project reaches its conclusion at the end of December 2022. As at 10/8/2022 the following headline outcomes have been achieved:

- 591 people have engaged with the service + 97% *versus DWP target*
- 125 gained employment including apprenticeships + 56% *versus DWP target*
- Engaged with over 100 businesses + 50% *versus DWP target*
- Engaged with over 30 support agencies – *no target*
- 285 improved their ability to secure work by engaging in training, skills enhancement, work experience, more active job seeking, education or volunteering +26% *versus DWP target* (as listed below)

40 referred to start up their own business

44 referred onto partners support organisations

40 supported towards volunteering

80 moved on to training (Government and other)

40 undertaken new experience

40 attended workshops

A proposal is currently being drawn up with DWP to sustain the Employment Hub model for a further 12 months

Events delivered by the Community Employment Hubs in previous 3 month period		
Date	Event	Attendance numbers
10 May 2022	NHS careers job opportunity virtual event	6
31 May 2022	SWT Housing Support officers recruitment event (organised and attended by Housing team)	5
29 June 2022	Recruitment/jobs fair	162
14 July 2022	Support organisations and disability confident employers' event for all	15
14 July 2022	Educational Business Partnership sponsorship awards evening	
20 July 2022	Support event for Ukraine RE: jobs fair and support towards work at Minehead Job Centre	45
27 July 2022	Support event for Ukraine RE: jobs fair and support towards work at Taunton Job Centre	187
9 August 2022	HPC recruitment/drop in event at Alcombe Community Hub Minehead	6
Planned events		
23 August 2022	HPC recruitment/drop in event at Alcombe Community Hub Minehead	

September - Date TBC	Cost of Living Crisis support event date in September at Taunton. . Partnership event with the DWP. Exhibitors to include DWP, Centre for Sustainable Energy, Somerset Independence Plus, Wessex Water, Food Banks/Pantries	
28 September 2022	Big Jobs Fair. Somerset County Cricket Ground	

Hub venues;

- Minehead Eye Youth Hub, TA4 5BJ. 1:30pm to 2:30pm (every Thursday weekly)
- Priorswood Community Centre, Taunton, TA2 7JW 10am to 12pm (4th Tuesday of the month)
- Halcon Link Centre, Taunton, TA1 2DD 12:30pm to 2:30pm (4th Thursday of the month)
- @ The hub, Alcombe Minehead (next to fire station) TA24 6DJ 10am to 12pm (2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month)
- Stogursey Hub at the Stogursey Youth Hub TA5 1PR, (next to the Victory Hall) on a Tuesday once a month, please use employment support email below to book an appointment
- Taunton United Reform Church, TA1 3PF 10am to 12pm (1st Tuesday of the month)
- Wellington Baptist Church, TA21 8NS 10am to 12pm (1st Wednesday of the month)
- Williton, Parish Council, TA4 4PY 10am to 12pm (3rd Tuesday of the month)

Volunteer Update

23 volunteers recruited

10 volunteers fully trained

13 volunteers complete training by October 2022

Volunteer handbook now in print and electronic [Community Employment Hub Volunteer Handbook.pdf](#)

We have been working in partnership with CHARIS (the refugee resettlement charity) supporting Ukrainian guests access employment and training opportunities. To increase the value of this ongoing relationship, the Community Employment Hubs will deliver employment and skills training to CHARIS volunteers and Employment Hub volunteers will receive training on working with people who have experienced trauma. Plans are underway to provide a CEH service at the Ukrainian Welcome Hubs in Taunton and Watchet.

External Operations & Assets

West Somerset Railway: Disposal of car park and toilets, off Station Road Bishops Lydeard

The sale of the gravel car park and WC block adjacent to the West Somerset Railway Station at Bishops Lydeard is progressing smoothly with solicitors appointed on both sides.

A sales figure of £50,000 has been agreed. The only users of this car park are those who park to use the railway and it is sensible that the control of this asset, and the WC block alongside, is transferred.

Lease of the Monkton Heathfield Country Park to Parish Councils

This long running project has now been concluded and the lease has been signed and the transfer is now official.

Sale of Unit 3 Blackdown Business Park, Wellington

We received an acceptable offer of £230,000 from the occupying tenant of Unit 3 to purchase the unit.

The building requires expenditure for repairs and decarbonisation and this would remain a Council expense if we didn't accept the proposal.

It is considered that the offer is a fair one and helps us to support a local business. The asset is marked for disposal in the Commercial Investment Strategy.

The sale was discussed at the Commercial Investment Panel in June and the Board in July and once the SCC S24 Officer has approved the sale it will proceed. It is expected that the decision will be ratified in August 2022.

Lease of Blenheim Gardens Café, Minehead

The tenant recently proposed an ambitious scheme for the café involving extensions as well as refurbishment to the existing building. Our view was that this would be difficult to progress for several reasons and we asked them to revert to a refurbishment option.

Following correspondence in early August the tenant has committed to undertaking internal refurbishment rather than full scale redevelopment. The main reason is to accelerate opening. We are monitoring closely with monthly visits and if sufficient progress has not been made by 31/12/22 then we will seek a surrender of the lease.

This has become a frustrating project but we are determined that a café will be opened in the park in time for spring.

Minor Works

The painting of the Esplanade railings at Watchet began is complete and will be followed by the repainting of the Watchet Lighthouse at the end of the West Pier. This work will begin in late August 2022.

The required underpinning works to the bandstand in Vivary Park have been postponed for the summer season and will commence in once the 'band season' is completed.

Electrical compliance works on the East Quay at Watchet is complete. The works were to ensure a compliant supply to the boatyard and Marina Impounding gate. Further works have been ordered to bring the electrical system to the pontoons up to a compliant standard.

Former Mount Street Nursery

Following the supported application by Taunton Deane Cricket Club for some additional land for parking and ongoing Rough Sleeping activity in the area, a further review of the former Mount Street Nursery remainder land is underway.

The site has been empty since closure of the former nursery in the mid 2000's and is considered to be unsuitable for building development due to planning restrictions (traffic on Mount Street) and flood issues.

The site is bounded by the Taunton Deane Cricket Club ground (owned by SWT and leased to the club), Vivary Park golf course, a retirement living development and Ash Priors Road at the 'rear' of Vivary Park. It is largely overgrown and has developed ecological considerations including the possibility of badger setts.

The draft solution for ongoing management is to:

1. Progress the supported long lease to TDCC for a new parking area in the north west corner of the site.

2. Undertake a formal ecological survey to assess options for the remainder of the site which may be a possible area for additional tree planting

3.

A further site familiarisation visit is taking place in August to assess the potential for the proposed uses.

Commercial Services

Car Park Improvement Projects

We have completed the install of 25 new parking terminals within the West Somerset Area of the district, which have allowed customers to pay for parking sessions using contactless card payments as well as cash. The old machines were old and prone to breakdowns. The new machines also give much better information on usage to bases future decisions on.

The team have commissioned the below improvement works;

- Blue Anchor - Patching potholes
- Springfield Road, Wellington - Patching potholes
- Duke Street, Taunton – Patching work to entrance
- Fons George, Taunton – Resurface main area
- Swain Street, Watchet – Relining
- North Road, Minehead – Relining
- Anchor Street, watchet – Relining
- South Street, Wellington – Relining
- Whirligig, Taunton – Relining
- Quay West, Minehead – Relining
- Parson Street, Porlock – Relining
- OMS Level 5 & 5a – Relining
- Swain Street, Watchet – Loading Bay lining
- Deane House Staff car park – Relining
- Williton Central – dropped kerb installation at pay station

Crescent Car Park Improvement Project

Our design team are drafting the final designs for approval prior to tender of the work to be completed in 22/23. The redesigned car park will include 19 EV charging points, an improved layout, introduction of trees and a cycle hub. Contractors have been appointed to refurbish the boundary wall on the south side of the car park, works commenced 27/07/2022.

Council – 6th September 2022

This report is the responsibility of Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing – Cllr Francesca Smith.

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

The report is to update Members on work being undertaken and progress made by the Housing Directorate since the last Full Council meeting.

2. Recommendations

Full Council is asked to note this report and are invited to ask questions.

3. Background and Full details of the Report

Housing Development and Regeneration Team Housing Development and Regeneration Team

HRA New Homes, Housing Strategy and Housing Enabling

- North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP) Phase A is progressing with the first couple of completions due and visits are being arranged for members of the Tenants Strategic Group, Tenants Low Carbon Retrofit Working Group, and members in September. These will be the first 2050 zero carbon compliant new build council homes. Equans/Engie continue to work well on site and the contract for demolition and new build of phase B and Ci is being drawn up. Unfortunately, inflation is creating problems throughout the economy and building homes is affected as significantly as any other sector. We recognise that the increase cost of building homes is no longer a risk but a reality. The housing service will continue to review its capital programmes with finance colleagues to manage inflationary pressures as best as possible. The procurement of a contractor to deliver refurbishment to 27 Council woolaway homes at NTWP [phase E will conclude shortly.
- The 54 home zero-carbon development at Seaward Way, Minehead, commenced in January. The zero-carbon exemplar scheme will shortly commence piling works. Discussions on the schemes Electric Vehicle Charging Points and technology to monitor carbon efficiency are well advanced.

- The service had six planning applications for the zero-carbon affordable housing awaiting presentation to planning committee. The service is progressing one and withdrawing one application. Four applications will remain in the planning pipeline until agreed phosphate mitigation approaches are confirmed.
- The service is progressing at pace a low carbon retrofit strategy and delivery plan. A new tenants' low carbon retrofit group has met and is influencing the strategy and delivery plan. The strategy will be presented at a Members Briefing in September and progress to Full Council in December 2022. SWT has been awarded SHDF (Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund) Wave 1 and is bidding for Wave 2 funds. In addition, a significant Energy company obligation fund has been reserved by a large energy provider for a neighbourhood based ECO4 programme.
- New affordable housing in the district has seen a higher-than-average number of properties completed this financial year. The pipeline of new units is currently at its strongest in the west of the district, which is unaffected by the phosphate mitigation planning requirements. Future supply in the district is at risk due to the inability of private and social housing developers to progress developments without a phosphate mitigation strategy. As time passes this will place greater demand on existing supply and homefinder.
- The Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy and delivery plan was approved by Full Council in October and Officers are supporting the delivery of new homeless bedspaces through several partners and direct council supply. The council has been awarded £750k through the government Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme to accelerate the new provision Round three and a further £80k in Round 4.
- We continue to deliver the Hinkley Point C Housing Programme, working with partners to drive forward 11 key areas of work. This programme is providing new bed space in the district and support to vulnerable customers affected by the change in the housing market because of the uplift of workforce at HPC. The service has submitted a request to EDF for a further wave of funding (£390k) to continue many projects up to December 2023 and discussions continue by the council in relation to additional funding as significant housing demand pressure continues to create problems for the housing market.

Housing Property Team

Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs

- Emergency and non-emergency responsive repairs are being undertaken.
- Emergency jobs are being delivered within our defined timescale (24 hours from logging).
- The backlog of non-emergency responsive repairs has now been eliminated, following the use of external contractors. MD Group are providing ongoing

support to a small proportion of repairs where required to cover internal staff resource shortfalls.

- Undertaking void repairs to meet our Lettable Standard remains a challenge, although performance continues to improve in this area. Again, we are working with MD Group to support on undertaking some of our Major Voids (those with two or more key elements required).
- We are undertaking a recruitment process for a Maintenance Manager, following the previous postholder leaving SWT.

Property Safety Compliance

- All property safety compliance checks and works continue to be undertaken. These include gas safety checks (LGSR's), water risk assessments and remedial works, electrical inspections (EICR's), asbestos surveys and re-inspections, fire risk assessment and remedial works, fire safety checks, and lift and stair-lift checks and remedial works.
- An accelerated programme, using further additional contractors, to undertake outstanding electrical inspections (EICR's) and associated remedial works continues.
- Weekly compliance and additional review meetings are being held to carefully monitor and manage all these safety critical areas.

Capital Programmes

- Several capital work programmes are on-site, including kitchen and bathroom replacements and fire safety works (replacement fire doors and emergency lighting). Progress on these programmes is slower than desired however, and we are working with the relevant contractors to seek improvements on output.
- Procurement activities also continue, including review of required capital programme works needed to meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS), as well as our Retrofit aspiration.
- A new Interim Capital Programme Manager has been recruited.

Asset Management

- Post 'go-live' work on the Open Assets module of our Capita software system is now underway, following the Open Housing implementation.
- Programmes of Stock Condition Surveys continue to take place.
- Capital work future programme planning is being undertaken, including for both DHS requirements, and retrofit aspirations.

Housing and Communities Team

Supported Housing (extra care and sheltered)

- The officer team is now almost back to capacity, although there are the usual absences for summer leave, so a more normal service has returned to tenants.
- The team continue to complete; sign ups; enrol tenants with Deane Helpline; fit lifelines; annual reviews; aids and adaptations assessments; manage 'ending well' when a tenant dies.
- A temporary member of staff has started, for a 3-month period, to enable the team to catch up on the overdue annual reviews.
- The team are now completing the bi-monthly estates and block checks within their patches, following up with tenants, as needed.

- The team continue to work hard to promptly respond to general customer enquiries, reported via Firmstep.
- The DHL daily rota continues to be staffed Responding to Deane Helpline issues where the tenants have not responded to their usual monitoring call out.

- Some new furniture is being purchased for the meeting halls at Creedwell Orchard and Heathfield.
- Staff are facing some challenges when a tenant dies and there are no next of kin available to end the tenancy, and where tenant (with no next of kin) no longer has the capacity to live independently, and is moved into Nursing care, by Adult Social Care. The challenges are re: how the tenancy is ended, as this can happen in different ways, which can take a varied amount of time to complete.
- A successful skip day and community BBQ was held at Creedwell Orchard in partnership with local PCSO's, to enable people to get rid of unwanted belongings.
- We have supported some tenants living in upper floor flats to move to ground floor flats and bungalows, as their needs have changed, and they have no longer been able to manage the stairs safely, or easily exit if there was a fire emergency.
- We have been working with the RSI Team, to support Housing First clients to move into sheltered housing and co-working to ensure that this can be successful for these tenants. There have been some challenges regarding

this, in terms of individuals not being able to access care in their homes, due to the lack of available carers.

Lettings

- The team have successfully launched their new lettings module within the Open Housing system;
- Work is ongoing to support some existing council tenants to permanently decant from their homes at Wordsworth Drive and within the North Taunton Regeneration Project area;
- The team's Home Moves Plus project officer's latest report shows:
- To date 51 households have successfully downsized to properties more suitable for their needs. This has resulted in 1 x 5 bed house, 4 x 4 bed houses, 26 x 3 bed properties and 20 x 2 bed properties becoming available for letting to applicants who are registered with the Council's Homefinder Somerset Scheme;
- The team records tenant satisfaction on a monthly basis. For the month of July tenant satisfaction for both the lettings process (100%) and the standard of property (80%) continues to be high.

Income

- Recruitment to 2 full time vacant posts within the team is underway. Michaela Mullen is the team manager leading on this task;
- Increased focus is being given to training users on our new IT housing management system following. The system holds all our tenant rent account details and is run by the officers who manage tenant rent accounts.
- Officers within the team are having a lot more in-depth contact and conversations with tenants about paying their rent, especially where there is financial hardship. The team are working hard to maintain and sustain tenancies, rather than terminate them and eviction is used as a last resort.

Tenancy/Estates & ASB

- The teams are continuing to remain stable and settled.

- Skip days are now ongoing and although we experienced initial problems with the skip provider which have now been resolved. Our communities are utilising and making effective use of the skips.
- Complaints and general enquiries (Firmstep) are being managed well. We are noticing that the number of low-level neighbour nuisance is on the rise. This is both time consuming and complex as the team are dealing with allegations and counter allegations; and work to ensure that the tenants' expectations in what we can do are managed correctly.
- Youth gang culture is still ongoing and having an impact on our estates. We continue to work with partners to try to tackle these issues. We will also ensure that all families involved where they are tenants have been visited and that words of advice/warnings are given; where necessary Acceptable Behaviour Contracts are agreed and signed by both parents and youths where needed.

Housing Options

- The Housing Options service continues to be busy with an average of 120 approaches from customers who need housing advice or at risk of losing their accommodation each month. The main cause of homelessness in the district remains family evictions.
- The team's renewed focus on early intervention and prevention continues. In Q1 of 2022-23 an average of 65% of all prevention cases were closed with a positive outcome
- There is increasing pressure on the service as a result of Homes for Ukraine scheme placements breaking down. On average, the team are dealing with one enquiry a day from Ukrainian households or their sponsors who wish to end the sponsored placement. The impact of the scheme is a risk for the Council in respect of capacity to respond and the likely costs that will be incurred when emergency accommodation needs to be provided
- All vacant posts in the Housing Options team are currently being advertised in efforts to shore up the team structure going into LGR next year

Temporary accommodation

- The recent focus on improving pathways into and out of temporary accommodation continues. This has included the implementation of a fortnightly task and targeting meeting across relevant teams to ensure that there are actions in place to facilitate timely move on.
- New procedures are currently being embedded within the team with a clear focus on reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation

however it is recognised that it will take some time before the impact of these changes can be evidenced.

- The impact of Homes for Ukraine scheme placements breaking down is being closely monitored in relation to temporary accommodation with average costs for a family placement averaging £1000 a week at present; these costs are heavily influenced by a lack of affordable accommodation due to the current holiday season and the ongoing impact of Hinckley
- A business case has been submitted to repurpose a vacant position within the structure to add much needed resource to the temporary accommodation team.

Rough Sleeping Initiative

- At the end of Q1 2022 there were 37 customers engaged with the *Rough Sleeping Pathway*. Of these, 6 customers were in *Stage 1* (initial intervention and assessment), 21 customers are in *Stage 2* (intensive support) and 10 customers are in *Stage 3* (community-based living with floating support).
- Three customers with a history of entrenched rough sleeping and complex needs are now living in their *Housing First* homes. These are the first *Housing First* properties delivered by the Council as part of the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) funding. Renovations on a further property has been started and this will be adapted to accommodate a customer with mobility needs
- All vacant posts in the RSI team are currently out to advert; recruitment for these posts was delayed as a result of late funding confirmation by DLUHC
- The Canonsgrove decant continues to progress well with 15 residents remaining. Move on plans for all remaining residents are currently being finalised.

Home Finder

- Work continues to enhance and streamline the processes in place for receiving and assessing Homefinder applications with a focus on ensuring that customers are aware of the supporting documentation required and can upload this directly to their application
- The impact of this work has been positive with 63 applications having been made live in July.
- In Q1 of 2022-23 just under 900 new applications were made to Homefinder Somerset in the Somerset West and Taunton district.
- The team continue to support customers to bid on appropriate properties, this work continues to provide positive outcomes and is closely linked to ensuring that customers move on efficiently from temporary accommodation.

Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)

- Since the 1st April 2022, the Adaptations element of the service has received 249 requests for service, mainly Disabled Facilities Grants, preliminary Means Tests, and requests for feasibilities. There are 124 cases waiting on the waiting list for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), down 25 since the 19th July 2022 because of cases being allocated to Officers. Of the 124, 41 are in the Somerset West and Taunton area. In terms of tenure;
 - 18 are tenants in the Council's own stock
 - 7 owner occupier and privately renting with
 - 16 tenants who are Registered Providers
- The backlog was because of the addition of South Somerset District Council purchasing the services of Somerset Independence Plus (SIP) in April of this year. All clients on the waiting list have been sent a letter informing them that we have received the referrals from their Occupational Therapist and an approximate date when they will receive a call from the Technical Team to visit them and begin the application process. It is estimated that the waiting list will below 70 by the end of October given current staff resources. The oldest case for the Council currently waiting dates to May 2022.
- Other highlights for the adaptations service;
 - The team have approved 40 DFG's since the 1st April 2022
 - Completed 40 DFG's since the 1st April 2022
 - Closed 105 enquiries 42 of which are in the Somerset West and Taunton area
- The Independent Living Team have completed 750 home safety checks in response to requests from Public Health for the Ukrainian Resettlement programme. SIP recently received £100,000 from Public Health to employ two additional Independent Living Officers to manage home safety checks for the future Afghan and Syrian resettlement programme as well as to maintain the current demand from the Ukrainian crises and to enable the service to manage its core work i.e., hoarding, home maintenance and Trusted Assessor. The team have begun threading hoarding clients into the workstream now that they are on top of the home safety inspections. They have a backlog of 35 clients waiting for initial contact, down from 50 a month ago.
- The business plan for the energy arm of the SIP business is being finalised. The service will provide a complete retrofitting service for clients who are both vulnerable and able to pay. Funding will be utilised from the Warm Homes Fund, LADS 1B and the Sustainable Warmth which amounts to circa £6.7 million for the insulation and heating measures. A key foundation of the business plan is to reintroduce area renewal, an approach will see blocks of terraces and an area identified through various datasets as key areas of deprivation and property type. A whole house approach will be taken to retrofit with a successful tendered contractor undertaking the work. This way of working reduces material and labour costs verses pepper potting i.e., individuals applying anywhere in the Council area. Frome has been identified as the initial pilot. LADS 2 delivered by e-on has seen 92 households in Somerset West and Taunton benefit from insulation and solar PV.

- 27th September sees the launch of the new Independent Living Centre in Mendip. Designed on the principles of the pioneering model in Wellington. The centre will formally be opened by Cllr Bill Revans. There will also be a TEC / Sensory lounge within the building allowing practitioners and the public the opportunity to try technology that can help people make daily living easier. There will also be a soft relaunch of the Wellington site later in the year following a refresh of the facilities to include new thinking.
- SIP is working with Public Health, the Centre for Sustainable Energy, and the Village Agents to put in place our Winter Plan. The aim of the plan is to assist the vulnerable, elderly and fuel poor households to cope with soaring fuel bills as a result of the war in Ukraine and the price cap, plus the impending cold weather. The Winter Plan will be in place from the 1st September. The plan will include distribution of the Household Support Fund, case worker support from SIP to assist with income maximisation and how to use heating controls, training with agencies in the field and promotion of the CSE energy advice line and expansion of the staff numbers in the CSE to cope with the increased calls. This is in addition to the ongoing retrofit activity by SIP and the roll out across Somerset of ECOFLEX 4 by our Retrofit Project Officer.

Housing Performance Team

- We continue to support the work of the Tenants' Strategic Group and Tenants' Action Group. On the 23rd August 2022 we will hold our second joint tenant meeting with Homes in Sedgemoor, specifically to engage tenants on LGR.
- The damp and mould group for tenants continues to meet and has agreed a set of actions including changes to our website information.
- A new Low Carbon Working group for tenants has their first meeting in July and a further meeting in August.
- The tenants' summer newsletter has been posted to Tenants.
- We are collectively working with Homes in Sedgemoor on local government reorganisation workstreams.
- The policy review work with the HQN (Housing Quality Network) continues and TSG members will receive revised policy documents for comment.
- We have completed the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code self-assessment and reported those results to Tenants' Strategic Group in the July meeting. A copy of the self-assessment will also be available on the website shortly.
- Our headline Tenant Satisfaction Survey results (completed in May 2022) have been received. Consistent with the current trend in the social housing sector we have seen a downward trend in overall satisfaction. A full report will be presented to Tenants' Strategic Group in the September's meeting.
 - Overall satisfaction 76%
 - Satisfaction of being treated fairly and with respect 82%
 - Satisfaction with the neighbourhood as a place to live 80%
 - Satisfaction that the home is well maintained and safe 79%
 - Satisfaction with knowing how to complain 79%
 - Satisfaction with being kept Informed 78%

- Satisfaction that landlord listens and acts 62%
- Satisfaction with complaint handling 61%
- Satisfaction with grounds maintenance 57%
- satisfaction with communal areas 55%

Councillor Fran Smith

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Council – 6th September 2022

Report of Councillor Andy Sully – Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services

It gives me great pleasure to present my report to Full Council on the varied activities of the Environmental Services Portfolio.

Refuse and Recycling (Somerset Waste Partnership)

- Collection Service

SWP have continued working hard with their contractor, SUEZ, in order to reduce repeated collection failures. There were several collection issues through August, with recycling rounds un-deployed. This has been attributed to shortages of drivers caused by high annual leave, sickness, Covid-19, resignations, suspensions and poor Agency supply. Current forecast is for this situation to improve in the coming days / weeks.

The Transfer Station at Walford Cross, Taunton is complete, except for a permanent power supply and is operated via a generator. Work commenced at the Williton Depot on 10/08/22. This means that all Williton based recycling vehicles have now commenced tipping at Walford Cross while the works are completed.

Street Scene and Fleet

- Litter Bin Replacement Programme

The roll out of the new bin infrastructure with recycling compartments has continued. Our contractor has installed another 30 of the new bins around the SWT area. There has been a slight delay from the contractor, and they have advised that they intend to install all the remaining bins by the end of August.

- Fleet

The first batch of 22 electrical vehicles for the Councils fleet following the 2 vehicles taken on the fleet for testing last year are due for delivery in October 2022. These are vehicles which are due for replacement this year and the additional cost of EVs compared to fossil fuel vehicles was funded through the savings made from the new fleet contract which started in 2021.

- Environmental Improvement Team

The new team which started in 2022 have been working on the following since the last update:

Watering

The Watering programme commenced at the end of May. Watering was being carried out in Wellington and Taunton Town Centres and Vivary and Wellington Parks . As the prolonged hot spell continued, it was increasingly difficult to keep pots, tubs and flower beds moist. Due to the water shortage a

decision was made in to remove the hanging baskets a week earlier than planned.

Street Washing

A programme of works will start in September to replicate that done in 2021 in the town centres.

- Litter enforcement trial

The one-year trial has continued, and the first quarter outcomes are shown below. The model has so far been cost neutral and is delivering lots of added extra benefits such as the education work set out.

Somerset West and Taunton – Quarter 1 (1st April – 30th June 2022)

- 502 Fixed Penalty Notices issued since the start of the trial
- 498 Cigarette butts and 4 pieces of litter
- The officers have completed 96 patrols
- Average FPN v Working day is 6.1
- Average payment rate is 60%

FPN Break down by Area:

- 60 FPNs issued in Minehead
- 412 FPNs issued in Taunton
- 2 FPNs issued in Watchet
- 27 FPNs issued in Wellington
- 1 FPNs issued in Wiveliscombe

Education:

- The team are working with the following Businesses and Organisations to change Behaviour as part of the litter strategy
- Working with McDonald's Taunton, Hankridge and Minehead to improve behaviour around littering and also add in extra bins.
- The team have meet with Operations team of Taunton First Bus. They are communicating to staff on how not to litter. They are looking at Stubby Pouches for staff and commuters and posters for Buses
- The Team meet with the manager of Minehead Butlins. The Manager confirmed they would be advertising in the welcome pack not to litter. Also, they will be putting up posters on how not to litter.
- The are working with Arc (Lindley House) with Taunton and surrounding areas

Parks and Open Spaces

- Scheduled works

The Grounds Maintenance Team have been working hard to keep up with the cutting rounds in the early summer period. They have started to undertake pruning and other works whilst the grass cutting demand has slowed up.

- Nursery

The Nursery has just taken delivery of the winter plug plants and production has started. The Autumn order's for internal and external customers include 54,000 plants all grown in peat free compost

Environment and Coastal

- **Blue Anchor**

The 13,500 tonnes of granite to provide the rock armour protection for Blue Anchor is on order and we await delivery in September 2022. The rock is being transported from the Glensanda Quarry on the Scottish west coast. It will largely be in the 3 to 6 ton range and will be placed against the cliffs at Blue Anchor to prevent further erosion.

Work is taking place to refine the designs for the upper slope which must take place only after the rock is placed. This will take place in late autumn 2022 or spring 2023.

- **North Hill Stabilisation**

The designs for this project are expected to be completed within the next 4 weeks and will be shared as soon as available

- **Norton Fitzwarren Playing Fields**

The work to establish a new playing field has been frustrating. We have a design and contractor but the last-minute requirement for an ecology report delayed our planning submission and then we had to undertake newt and reptile surveys – it was found in both cases that there was a low possibility of Great Crested Newts using the site and few reptiles present.

It is expected that this will proceed to planning committee in September with work to start as soon as possible thereafter.

I would like to give my personal thanks to all the officers in the various teams that make the portfolio who are delivering exceptional services.

Cllr. Sully

Council – 6th September 2022

Report - Cllr Sarah Wakefield Executive member for LGR and CGR

A. Community Governance Review (CGR) - the setting up of Taunton Town Council as a Parish Council.

1. Since my election to the Executive in May I have attended a number of Parish Council meetings with Cllrs Perry and Rigby to witness the explanation of the proposed draft boundaries and the response of the various PC members. I also attended the Working Group meeting on 16 August. I have also had meetings with our Chief Executive and with Lead Officers and with SWT's governance lawyer and officers in the project team.

2. The consultation on the 2nd Stage of the Community Governance Review for Taunton closed on the 26th July 2022. I would like to thank all those who responded and took part in events throughout the six week period. Since the closure of Stage 2 Officers on the project team have been busy collating and analysing the 501 responses which are more than double the 229 who responded in Stage 1. These responses in their entirety (as well as the analysis) have all been encapsulated and presented to members of the Community Governance Review Working Group in the first instance during August.

3. The responses and the Working Group's final recommendations will form part of the Extraordinary Full Council Report and recommendations which will be forthcoming in late September for final decision at both SWT Full Council on 29 September and SCC Full Council on 5 October. Both councils, in accordance with the applicable transitional regulations, are required formally to approve any re-organisation order setting up the new parish council which is proposed to become Taunton Town Council. Work on the governance provisions for the new council has started and this will continue through the next few months including preparing for elections to the new council in May 2023.

B. Local Government Reorganisation - LGR

1. The Unitary programme is currently focussed most keenly on delivery of Tranche 1 of the programme plan (the first of three tranches - the second and third tranches will deliver parts of the programme after vesting day). Tranche 1 effectively includes everything that is required to transfer district services into the continuing authority (which will become Somerset Council) by vesting day - 1 April 2023. All of our council service teams are involved in detailed planning and work within the programme to ensure the safe transfer of our services and staff and the safe and legal shutdown of SWT on 31 March 2023.

2. Another key programme activity is setting the budget for Somerset Council for 2023/24 and our staff are working with all five Councils and colleagues on reviewing all budgets and options for the estimated budget gap (which is currently widening further under inflation pressures).

3. Business as usual for the SWT remains broadly on track through delivery of the corporate plan, however inevitably there are pressures on resourcing through this period. These pressures are being closely monitored by senior officers on a month by month basis.

4. All Member Briefings for all Councillors across Somerset have been set up by the LGR programme team to occur on a monthly basis and I would encourage all councillors to attend these to understand in more the depth the activities that the programme is undertaking and to ask any questions or raise any issues they may have.

5. I have also participated in the first meeting of the LGR Implementation Board held on 29 July (as a substitute for Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts) and I attended the first meeting of the newly re-constituted LGR Joint Scrutiny Committee held on 19 August. I have had detailed briefings too from our legal officers on the implications and effects of the Section 24 financial restrictions for the county and all district councils in the lead up to unitary. Councillors will have noted that the required Full Council approval has been agreed at all 5 councils to give effect to the Section 24 restrictions. In essence these restrictions mean that district councils may not make financial commitments of certain sizes or lengths (contracts or disposals) and which might fetter the activity of the unitary council going forwards without the consent of Somerset County Council either by its officers (with delegated authority) or the SCC Leader and S.151 officer or by the full council if necessary.

It is clear that everyone involved in working on these difficult and complex projects and unitary workstreams is fully committed to ensuring their success and to the very best outcomes for our residents across our district and Somerset as a whole. It is only fair to say that the detail and sheer volume of work required to achieve these objectives and also to maintain business as usual at SWT is testing at the least and frankly almost overwhelming at worst for our hard-working and dedicated staff. The LGR programme director Alyn Jones has warned that this pressure can only get worse as we approach vesting day and the next few months will be a testing time indeed for everyone. I would like to express my thanks to all our SWT officers who are involved for their dedication and commitment.

Cllr S Wakefield