

SWT Full Council - 6 December 2022

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Richard Lees, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Norman Cavill, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, John Hassall, Nicole Hawkins, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, Dawn Johnson, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Dave Mansell, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Danny Wedderkopp, Brenda Weston, Keith Wheatley and Loretta Whetlor

Officers: Chris Brown, Jo Comer, Elisa Day, Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, Andrew Pritchard, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas and Kevin Williams

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

69. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors I Aldridge, M Barr, M Blaker, C Booth, S Buller, A Govier, B Hall, J Hunt, M Kravis, A Milne, C Morgan, S Nicholls, C Palmer, A Pritchard, N Thwaites, T Venner and G Wren.

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

(Minutes of the meetings of Full Council held on 6 September 2022, 29 September 2022 and 25 October 2022 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council held on 6 September 2022, 29 September 2022 and 25 October 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

71. **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 L Baker	All Items	SCC, Cheddon Fitzpaine & 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	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Charter Trustee		
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 Hadley	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr R Henley	All Items	SCC & Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr Mrs Hill	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC	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 D Perry	All Items	SCC & Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	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 Sully	All Items	SCC	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 B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr K Wheatley	All Items	Wellington	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted

72. Public Participation

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

Sigurd Reimers submitted the following statement:-

Last year this Council was rated by Climate Emergency UK (CEUK) as having the highest overall score of all local authorities on its plans for dealing with the climate emergency.

This year local Councils would be rated on how well they were progressing with implementing those plans, and CEUK would have issued their draft methodology for assessing progress on 29th November.

This Council's overall score was very impressive last year. However, in one of the nine dimensions examined by CEUK - diversity and social exclusion – the score was only just over 50%. This was concerning, given that the Council area was listed in 57th place out of 151 Council areas on Indicators of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for barriers to housing and local services by its citizens.

This Council's declaration of a climate emergency in 2019 stressed the importance of Councils providing or promoting measures for mitigation of, and adaptation to, the effects of climate change.

I should like to know how far Somerset West and Taunton Council had put its plans into operation, and particularly within the diversity and social exclusion dimension, given that our most vulnerable citizens would be those who would be (or already were) bearing the brunt of the effects of climate change.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change gave the following response:-

Sigurd was right to point to Indicators of Multiple Deprivation in his question about how we were addressing the issue of Equalities within our Climate emergency strategy. Those issues provided significant social challenges to Somerset as a whole, and not just in how the county supported citizens in the fact of climate change.

For example, according to the 2011 census, 23% of dwellings in Somerset had an EPC rating below 'E', well above the national average of 9%. In West Somerset, the proportion was above 30%.

Those in Somerset who did have central heating were less likely than the average home in England to have gas heating, with a greater dependency on oil. In West Somerset, only 45% of homes had gas central heating, while 22% had oil heating (2011 census), more than five times the national average.

In 2010, the population of Somerset aged 65 was 21%. ONS projections suggested that by 2040 one third of the population in Somerset would be 65 or over.

The average salary within Somerset was 18% less than the UK average, which obviously made retrofitting property and adapting to rising costs difficult.

Meeting the targets of carbon neutrality and climate resilience would require major societal shifts and changes to be made from all sectors of society.

However, protecting the most vulnerable from unreasonable burdens and impacts was important to achieving a just transition to a low carbon economy. This CNCR plan recognised the need for a just transition and that influenced a number of actions in the final action plan including: 84 (Workforce development strategy), 87

(West Somerset Opportunity Area), 162 (affordable flood insurance), 186 (Fuel Poverty), 273 (Access to healthy and climate friendly food) etc.

The Plan outlined who climate change would harm the most. There was an Equalities Impact Assessment for the CNCR plan, which specifically referenced the vulnerability to climate change of those on low incomes and rural isolation. On the ground, the Council had begun to tackle some of the issues raised in the question.

A Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery Plan for the Council's 5700 social houses was approved at Executive last week. The strategy and delivery approach would support customers experiencing or at risk of experiencing fuel poverty in the medium and long term by a fabric first approach aimed at reducing heat demand (fuel usage) by c60%-70%.

With regards to private sector rental accommodation, the Council carried out a stock modelling exercise last year to provide intelligence on the private sector housing stock across our district. The modelling identified the presence of 1,262 dwellings at risk of excess cold, with an estimated 1,693 properties, (equating to 10% in the private rented stock) falling into F & G EPC ratings. We were using the modelling data to prioritise our inspection programme to support the most vulnerable tenants.

We had secured funding from EDF to support the work and were investigating how we could use the modelling data to offer grants to landlords to improve energy efficiency. This was in line with our countywide Climate Emergency Strategy commitment to ensure all Private landlords' properties to be at least EPC C standard by 2030.

Working with partners, the Council had also delivered grant funded retrofit measures across the district via Local authority Delivery Scheme (LADS) and Home Upgrade Grant Scheme (HUGS), using funding from BEIS.

Given the rural nature of large parts of the district, residents were very reliant on the car. Rural isolation was an issue already, and that would only be exacerbated by climate change. Fuel prices would already be impacting how much people would be driving, and there would be a difficult period of transition whilst society waited for the infrastructure to develop and the price of EVs to reduce to an affordable level. But both those things would come, and SWT continued to support the rollout of EVs, installing EVCPs in Dulverton and Porlock, and was working with SCC ahead of the new unitary organisation to explore options to provide better EVCP provision in rural areas via the government LEVI fund. Clearly public transport and good active travel links needed to be better to support this also. The County Council had been successful in achieving funding from Government for its Bus Service Improvement Plan. That had led to bus fares into Taunton being fixed at a £1 for the next two years. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans were now in place for Taunton, with one in progress for Wellington, and a commitment from the Council to provide the match funding for a LCWIP for Minehead, subject to local agreement.

Our open spaces were never more important than during the pandemic for people to exercise, socialise and take time outside, and that had remained. SWT continued to invest in its green spaces, securing 7 Green Flag Awards this year. The Green Flag Awards included specific criteria on community involvement, equal access for all and climate adaptation. Our open spaces also played a key part in commitments within the Council's Ecological Emergency Vision and Action Plan to ensure good quality access to nature for all.

The question was of course huge and wide, and climate change was only part of what needed to be an integrated approach to dealing with the issues of deprivation and social isolation. But within those challenges there were opportunities to deliver genuine co-benefits for the most vulnerable members of society, such as reducing heating bills and improving health via warmer homes, better active travel and taking advantage of a new green economy. However, those changes required significant resource input from central government. Councils could only do so much, and we would continue to lobby as Somerset West and Taunton, and as the new unitary authority from next year. Finally, we were fully aware that social inequality, both nationally and globally, was a key factor in addressing climate change.

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

Full Council observed a minute's silence on behalf of the late Councillor Anthony Trollope-Bellew, councillor of Somerset West and Taunton Council and former Leader of West Somerset Council, Beryl Lippiatt, former councillor of Taunton Deane Borough Council and Len Dyke, former councillor of Taunton Deane Borough Council.

The Chair of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Chair advised Council of the resignation of Councillor Danny Wedderkopp.
- The Chair reminded councillors to submit their nominations for the Chair's Awards.
- The Chair advised Council of two upcoming events that they may wish to attend:-
 - Carol Service at St James Church on Thursday 8 December at 6.15pm
 - Carols around the Bandstand on Monday 12 December at 6.30pm

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

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:-

- The Leader highlighted the resignation of Councillor Danny Wedderkopp and thanked him for all of his hard work over the years and wished him well in his future endeavours.
- The Leader gave thanks to all of the officers and their hard work involved in the opening of the Riverside at the Coal Orchard.

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

No questions were received in relation to Procedure Rule 13.

76. **Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Leader advised councillors of the amended recommendations:- Full Council to agree subject to the Community Governance Review coming into effect and having considered all representations made, the polling districts and polling places for the existing Taunton Deane and Bridgwater and West Somerset constituencies as set out in the attached appendix be approved.
- Councillors raised concerns on a couple of the locations selected for polling stations.
The Elections Specialist explained the process of how locations were selected. She further advised that the next review would have a longer consultation period and that she was always happy to accept feedback on the locations used.
- Councillors suggested that the use of postal votes could be promoted for those that might find it difficult to attend their polling station.
- Councillors highlighted that good use of communications would be required to advise voters on the amendments being brought in by the Elections Act 2022.
- Councillors thanked the officers for all their hard work on the review.

Resolved that Full Council agreed subject to the Community Governance Review coming into effect and having considered all representations made, the polling districts and polling places for the existing Taunton Deane and Bridgwater and West Somerset constituencies as set out in the attached appendix be approved.

77. **Treasury Management Outturn Report 2021/22**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Some councillors still had doubts on the Investment Strategy and that there should be ethical guidance in place.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources thanked them for the comments, however, the Strategy had been approved in 2019.
- Councillors thanked officers for their hard work on ensuring the Council was in a good place ready for vesting day.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- 2.1 Noted the Treasury Management activity for the 2021/22 financial year and compliance with the Prudential Indicators.
- 2.2 Endorsed the recommendation made by the Executive Committee on 20 July 2022 for Full Council to approve a reduction of £35m to the Approved Borrowing Limits in the Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23 reflecting a reduction in capital financing requirement for expenditure no longer required (as referred to in paragraphs 6.33 and 6.34 of this report).

78. **Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery Plan**

During the discussion, the following points were made:-

- Councillors were pleased to support the Strategy.
- Councillors who had been on the Working Group advised that tenant engagement had been very good throughout the process.
- Concern was raised on the rural areas of the district, as residents could only use oil and that there was no other alternative option.
- Concern was raised on fuel poverty and that it did not show in the same way in the rural areas of the district.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change echoed her comments made during public question time and suggested that it might need a holistic approach.

Resolved that Full Council:-

- Approved the Low Carbon Retrofit Strategy and Delivery Plan. The delivery of the strategy would need to be managed within the annual budget setting process, including the Medium-Term Financial Plan and 30-Year Business Plan, to ensure the overall affordability of the schemes being proposed each year.
- The Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Director of Homes and Communities to progress the steps identified in the delivery plan and to promote the approach with Somerset County Council colleagues.

79. **To consider reports from Executive Councillors**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised on the use of the e-scooters at night due to the lack of visibility. Councillors queried whether they could request that users wore high-vis clothing at night.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change agreed with the comments and advised that the lights could not be moved on the e-scooters due to logistics and that the company did encourage users to wear helmets and high-vis clothing.

- Councillors queried the closure of Shop Mobility.
The Leader of the Council advised that the reason for the closure was a dramatic drop in number of people using the service. Since the Covid Pandemic, numbers had reduced by about 90%. It was thought that wider availability and lower costs of mobility scooters had also impacted use to the extent that a very small number of core users were using the service with numbers averaging less than 10 per week between January and August 2022. As a result, the service was running at a considerable loss. The Council had supported the Shopmobility scheme for more than 10 years, with Compass taking over the service for the last 7 years. We would like to place on record our thanks to them for providing this service during that time. Compass had advised the Council that an exceptionally low number of individuals were affected by this closure (5 or less). We would be happy to help signpost any individuals that were affected by the closure to other support available.
- Councillors queried what was happening with the installation of EV charging points in the rural areas of West Somerset.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change advised that officers had wanted to install some EV charging points in Dunster and Blue Anchor, but sadly the funds had not been available. She further advised that as part of the CNCR work, funds had now been allocated to install charging points in Dunster.

- Councillors were pleased to see the work on phosphates moving forward.
- Councillors requested that the phosphates survey results be distributed and asked how the credits would be allocated.

The Portfolio Holder for Parks, Sports, Leisure and Phosphates was happy to circulate the survey responses and advised that the Phosphates Sub-Committee was working on how the credits would be allocated.

- Councillors thanked officers for all their hard work in getting the parks ready for Britain in Bloom.
- Councillors queried whether applicants would need to re-submit their applications due to the amendments made to the phosphates calculator. *The Portfolio Holder for Parks, Sports, Leisure and Phosphates advised that they were not sure as they were still in negotiations with Natural England.*

- Concern was raised on the abolition of youth services within the North Taunton area.

The Leader of the Council agreed and advised that the Unitary Council and the proposed Taunton Town Council would need to work on this in the future.

- Councillors were pleased to see reduced bus fares being introduced in the area.
- Concern was raised on the logistics of supplying broadband in the area. *The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Economic Development agreed and advised that sadly there were too many companies trying to use the lines which caused issues. He was aware that Somerset County Council had tried to engage with the companies to try and rectify the situation.*
- Councillors queried how much land was being put aside for the phosphates work and asked for clarification on the calculations for homes per Kg.
- Concern was raised on staff sickness and councillors queried how officers were feeling heading into the Unitary Council.

The Leader of the Council agreed that staff were in a state of flux and that the HR Teams were geared up to assist officers through the process. She further thanked all staff for their hard work over the last four years.

Somerset West and Taunton had a very resilient work force who had gone through many different changes and challenges and were still working hard to provide a high level of service to the residents of the district.

- Councillors thanked the officers and Portfolio Holders for their reports.

(The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm)

