

SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 22 February 2023

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Tom Deakin, Ed Firmin, Roger Habgood, Steve Griffiths, Dawn Johnson, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Pritchard, Ray Tully and Vivienne Stock-Williams

Officers: Paul Fitzgerald, Kerry Prisco, Steve Hughes, Mark Leeman and Chris Hall, Mark Washington and Toni Gaskins from SLM (Everyone Active)

Also Present: Councillors Francesca Smith, Derek Perry, Chris Booth, Loretta Whetlor and Sarah Wakefield. Brenda Weston joined via zoom.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

73. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Simon Coles and Andy Milne.

74. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on the 25 January 2023, were approved as a true record.

Prop: Lithgow / Sec: Lloyd (Unanimous)

75. 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 T Deakin	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Johnson	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Lisgo	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	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

76. **Public Participation**

There were no questions or comments submitted for public participation.

77. **Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers**

The Community Scrutiny Committee unanimously accepted the Recommendation and Written Answer Tracker. There were no comments arising.

Prop: Habgood / Sec: Firmin (Unanimous)

78. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plans**

The Committee noted the last meetings of the Executive and Full Council. There were no comments arising.

Prop: Lloyd / Sec: Griffiths (Unanimous)

79. **Chair's Report**

The Chair, Cllr Libby Lisgo presented her annual report to the Committee. Cllr Dave Mansell thanked her for leading Community Scrutiny over the preceding 2 years, and commented that she had encouraged good scrutiny, had not stifled debate and was fair and inclusive.

Cllr Lisgo responded by saying she was aware that some members who would be travelling into the new Somerset Council, may wish to refer to previous minutes of the Committee, to follow up on outstanding issues. These would be accessible via the new Somerset Council website, or by contacting a member of the Governance team.

80. **Sports and Leisure Management (Everyone Active) Bi-Annual Report**

The Report was introduced by Executive Councillor Derek Perry, Portfolio Holder for Sports, Parks, Leisure and Phosphates, supported by Steve Hughes.

Cllr Perry stated that the biggest challenges that SLM faced was the legacy of COVID19, and now the inflationary issues caused by the Cost-of-Living crisis. Due to this SLM had instigated price increases across their sites, which they were at liberty to implement, This could not be vetoed in any way by the Executive and was an operational procedure. Also as part of the reorganisation, Councillors and SWT staff would no longer be able to make use of discounted fees during off-peak hours.

Steve Hughes stated that the reporting period was from April-September 2022, and he was aware that this seemed a long time ago. In the upcoming

presentation, SLM would be outlining their operations during that time and beyond to show how they were dealing with the current challenges.

Representatives from Everyone Active, Mark Washington and Toni Gaskins presented a series of slides highlighting recent work. These slides can be viewed [here](#).

In response to a question raised at their previous visit in July 2022,
Noted in the Minutes of the Community Scrutiny Meeting held on the 27 July 2022.

Is there any way to analyse users of the leisure facilities via postcode, to get a breakdown of the demographic? In particular in Priorswood concerning Wellsprings which was operating in a very deprived area. - The Chair agreed that this was an answer that could be provided at the next update.

Mark Washington was able to answer that 838 members of Wellsprings Leisure Centre lived within a 2mile radius of the site. This was approximately 50% of the total membership and this was equally split 50/50 between male and female users and covered a broad age range. Further information on the other leisure venues could be provided if required.

Councillors asked if this data could be made available and also a breakdown on usage. (Taken to [Written Answer Tracker](#).) It was also asked if information was forthcoming from the wider West Somerset area, bearing in mind it was unlikely that they would travel so far to use these facilities.

Questions and comments from the Committee included:-

- Good H&S stats especially with regard to RIDDOR and the lack of accidents caused by slips and trips in the water environments. Good management in place. 1.68 per 1,000 visitors is a good industry standard but work will be done to compare this to other operators and set a benchmark.
- H&S and the recording of near misses as well as accidents is one of the strongest aspects of service with SLM. There is a fantastic commitment to training, awareness and record keeping ensuring that the customers get the safest possible experience when using the facilities. There is a policy of sharing information across the Leisure Centres in real time so that staff are constantly updated on any challenges that might be encountered day-to-day. SLM foster a learning culture and it is important that all H&S information is recorded and monitored and the appropriate mitigations are put in place.
- There were some cleanliness issues in the previous reporting period to do with Wellington Sports Centre. These concerns are now being addressed within the existing budget, and a new general manager is keeping on top of ISA Cleaning who are still in place and completing their contract.
- Despite the challenges of competitors pricing strategies, Everyone Active continues to offer a service beyond that of the cheapest Gym operative. They have lost customers to PureGym in Taunton and this is reflected in the memberships, but PureGym do not have the range of leisure facilities that the SLM sites offer. (Pool. Fitness Classes, Spinning, Racquet sports

etc). The Wellington Leisure Centre is managing to retain its membership despite other operators nearby.

- The GP Exercise Referral Scheme membership has been increasing substantially and this has mainly been taken up at Blackbrook and Wellington. Wellsprings has successfully held its membership figures.
- It was asked if prices could be reduced at SWT Leisure Centres to accommodate those members who only wanted to use the gym facilities and be more competitive against PureGym. The response was that it was a risky pricing strategy to adopt, and that PureGym had an aggressive opening offer to encourage take-up of their facilities. After 6 months the membership pricing would be increased, and as such SLM were seeing some of these customers returning to use their facilities. PureGym also aim their product at a completely different demographic to the SLM Leisure centres.
- The GP referrals at present are coming from Musgrove into Wellsprings and are channelled through a specialist leisure assistant.
- A comment was made as to whether the refurbishment of the tennis courts at Vivary Park would adversely affect the memberships at other leisure centres. If the consultation allows for users to approve the pricing policy and money can be drawn down from the Tennis Association to enhance these courts, then it is envisaged that this will be a positive outcome for tennis in Taunton. It will enable more users to access the sport and from there feed into other opportunities.
- GP Referral – Currently 6 referrals have been made at £30 per person. This is to cover an initial 4-week period and introduce them to the facilities. SLM is currently looking at ways this offer could be extended and enhanced to increase users and take-up. This is an area of the business they are looking to expand.
- Cllr Mansell extended thanks for the assistance to Wivey Pool and the community training that was being provided free of charge to the resident lifeguards. This would enable the lifeguards to maintain their level of training through the closed winter months.
- The work towards de-carbonisation of the Leisure Centres was welcomed through recycling and other embedded initiatives. It was suggested that maybe discounts could be awarded to customers who provided their own hot drinking container rather than using a paper cup which was currently costed at 18p. Mark Washington agreed to follow this up, as it was not being offered at present, and would be a quick and easy discount to implement.
- Mark Washington clarified that although a main part of the report focussed on membership take-up this was not the entire business. A key make up of users centred around the “pay to play” aspect which encouraged participation in sport. He agreed to feed this into his next report at a future meeting.
- It was also agreed that going forwards the user data would be presented in a better way, to highlight trends and seasonal changes, and allow for more meaningful analysis.
- SLM do contact their users to get customer feedback, usually via email address. The main reason for people ceasing to use facilities is due to moving away from the area. SLM do undertake “leaver surveys” when they

are notified that someone is ceasing to use their business and this focusses on the level of service offered, safety and cleanliness.

- Corporate memberships are available, where SLM have been invited to attend via the employer. These include blood pressure checks and discussions on what facilities are available to employees. They also hope to expand this into general outreach programmes.
- Questions were asked around the marketing strategies employed, especially around the older age demographic. PureGym's average age user is between 18-26 in general and are young, fit mobile people. The facilities used centre around the free weights and pumping iron and this is the demographic that PureGym concentrate their marketing on. The Chair also offered some user feedback around Blackbrook Leisure Centre, which Mark Washington agreed to take away and address. SLM do use a variety of communications to market their offers, which cover a broad range of targeted user groups. This is everything from the traditional methods such as posters and advertising, to social media engagement and simple word of mouth.
- Somerset Moves is a steering group that has just been set up and is tasked to get users in remote locations to facilities and investigate how this can be achieved. Reports on this will be fed back at future meetings.

The Committee noted the update and the Chair thanked Mark and Toni for attending the meeting.

81. **Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring as at Qtr 3 (31 December 2022)**

Executive Cllr Francesca Smith, PFH for Housing introduced the Housing Revenue Account Financial Monitoring Report for Qtr 3.

There is a forecasted underspend of £91K which has been achieved mainly by an increase in investment income, as a direct result of reduction in spend on the capital programme and increasing interest rates. These have offset the main financial pressures including depreciation charges, the rising cost of bringing void properties up to a decent standard prior to reletting, the recent pay award and inflation increasing material costs.

Questions and comments from the Committee included: -

- An update on the current position regarding the North Taunton Woolaway Project (NTWP). The next phase of the contract is out for tender, and interested parties are being invited to price for the work, following the previous contractor stating they would no longer be delivering projects in the Southwest. Tenants have been written to and are being kept up to date. The PFH wants to deliver on this as soon as possible, but the process is being hampered by the rising costs of materials, the reluctance of contractors to price for the work and the demolition being held up until the end of the bird-nesting season.

The delays in completing the phases and going back out to tender will have a budgetary impact on the Council. There is a delay in the cost of borrowing due to waiting on the tender, as interest rates increase and inflation will increase the cost of materials further down the line. There will also be delays in rental income because the properties are not ready for letting. The budget for the next financial year and the MTFP is being adjusted to account for these factors.

- SWT do not currently do 6-monthly inspections of their council housing, to ensure they are maintained to a reasonable standard, although this is something that regularly occurs in the private sector. The PFH stated that inspections usually occurred prior to the tenant vacating when sufficient notice had been given, but this was not always the case. Some properties were left in extremely poor condition and this was costly to put right before re-letting. It would be prudent to instigate this with new tenants going forward, as it would be a good way of spotting issues before they had a chance to escalate.

Chris Hall clarified that although property inspections were not routine, operatives from the compliance safety teams would be undertaking annual checks and any concerns would be reported back as a matter of course. This has been picked up by the Tenants Strategic Board who are hoping to widen the remit to those houses who do not have compliance inspections, and can be booked in for at least an annual check.

- Recruitment – there are national issues on recruitment which are hampering SWT's ability to recruit and retain key staff. It is also difficult to compete with the private sector in terms of salary when this is determined at a national level. SWT is doing all it can to ensure that vacancies are filled, by promoting the extra benefits that come for working for a public sector organisation (such as pension, health schemes etc). If core staff vacancies cannot be recruited then the new unitary will look to employ from agencies or from other parts of the council in Somerset and share key skills.

The Chair acknowledged that the work of scrutinising housing in a wider sense would be absolutely critical in the new council and would fall under Chris Hall's Communities Directorate. She also wished staff well for the future.

The Committee unanimously noted the report recommendations.

82. **Health and Wellbeing Board Update**

Executive Cllr Chris Booth, representative on the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board introduced the update.

Mark Leeman, Strategy Specialist presented a series of slides, which can be viewed [here](#).

Questions and comments from the committee included the following: -

- How will Local Community Networks (LCNs) fit in with this complex picture? At the present time this is unknown, but it will emerge as engagement grows between the various organisations. Building community resilience is key in delivering on the strategies especially around homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Where do the Police fit into the Integrated Care Service (ICS)? Avon and Somerset Police Superintendent Dickon Turner is a representative on various parts of the Health and Wellbeing Board, as are the DWP, Probation and other statutory services. It is very much a partnership approach.
- Comment was made that there seems to be a concentrated focus on governance and a top-down approach, rather than looking at the end user, and bottom-up delivery. There should be more emphasis on the individual needs rather than getting lost in the bureaucracy. Mark Leeman said that this was the nature of his presentation and there was some very good work taking place with Housing First which was happening at ground level, and directly connecting in with communities.
- It was recognised that the implementation of the ICS alongside the unitary council coming into being, was a very exciting and interesting time for health care in Somerset, despite the complexity of the issues.
- It was agreed that the best way forward was to get partners around a table to discuss the complex cases and come up with an integrated package to look after people. This rarely happened at present but was the best way to tackle the issues. Co-locating teams and working alongside each other would get the best use of resource and sharing information and resource. The fact that housing would now sit alongside the other former SCC functions, would allow the basic health needs to be addressed, first and foremost. This would in essence address some of the fundamental issues that arise around safety, security and homelessness.
- There are various funding streams and pots of money that can be tapped into from housing budgets and the NHS but the scale of the problem is vast. The partnership working will enable a consistent plan to come forward and galvanise action. Although crisis management will always be there, there needs to be a more preventative and collaborative approach towards commissioning in the long term. The Better Futures Plan is one method of investment to work alongside and support vulnerable people to prevent recurring homelessness. By putting a plan in place to support them in their accommodation, there is more likelihood that they will sustain their tenancy.

The Chair finished by saying that this was an essential project that absolutely had to be delivered to enable a better future for the most vulnerable in our communities. She thanked Mark Leeman for attending and providing the update.

(The Meeting ended at 8.54 pm)