

SWT Full Council - 7 February 2023

Present: Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey (Chair)

Councillors Richard Lees, Ian Aldridge, Benet Allen, Lee Baker, Sue Buller, Simon Coles, Dixie Darch, Hugh Davies, Tom Deakin, Caroline Ellis, Habib Farbahi, Ed Firmin, Steve Griffiths, Roger Habgood, Andrew Hadley, Nicole Hawkins, Ross Henley, Marcia Hill, John Hunt, Sue Lees, Libby Lisgo, Mark Lithgow, Janet Lloyd, Andy Milne, Simon Nicholls, Derek Perry, Martin Peters, Andy Pritchard, Steven Pugsley, Mike Rigby, Francesca Smith, Federica Smith-Roberts, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Andrew Sully, Ray Tully, Sarah Wakefield, Brenda Weston, Loretta Whetlor and Gwil Wren

Officers: Paul Fitzgerald, Chris Hall, Andrew Pritchard, Marcus Prouse, Clare Rendell, Amy Tregellas, Kevin Williams, Graeme Thompson, Joe Wharton and Alison Blom-Cooper

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

80. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors M Barr, M Blaker, C Booth, N Cavill, A Govier, B Hall, J Hassall, D Johnson, D Mansell, C Morgan, C Palmer, N Thwaites and K Wheatley.

81. Minutes of the previous meeting of Full Council

(Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 6 December 2022 circulated with the agenda)

Resolved that the minutes of Full Council held on 6 December 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

82. 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 L Baker	All Items	SCC, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Cllr S Coles	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr C Ellis	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr H Farbahi	All Items	SCC & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoked 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 & Shadow Taunton Town	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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Lees	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & 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 S Nicholls	All Items	Comeytrove	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr D Perry	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr M Peters	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton	Personal	Spoke and Voted

		Town		
Cllr H Prior-Sankey	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	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 & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr F Smith-Roberts	All Items	SCC, Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	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 T Venner	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr S Wakefield	All Items	SCC	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr B Weston	All Items	Taunton Charter Trustee & Shadow Taunton Town	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr L Whetlor	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and Voted
Cllr G Wren	All Items	SCC & Clerk to Milverton PC	Personal	Spoke and Voted

Councillor N Hawkins further declared a personal interest on agenda item 14, Executive Councillor Reports.

83. **Public Participation**

Mr Martin Pakes spoke on the Coal Orchard Development:-

My questions related to Councillor Rigby's Report. They were:

1. What steps were taken to obtain the public's views on Council projects and were petitions considered to be important?
2. Under what circumstances would the Council proceed with appointing contractors before receiving planning consent?

Thank you

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation responded and advised Mr Pakes that he could submit his petition to the Executive meeting due to take place on 15 February 2023.

Mrs Angela Martyn submitted the following questions on the Blenheim Gardens Café:-

Question from Angela Martyn for Chris Hall/Cllr Rigby to be read out at the SWT Full Council meeting on 7 February 2023.

Please confirm if the proposed tenant would be required to operate the café within the current Blenheim Gardens Rules i.e.

- Open only when the Gardens were open
- No alcohol sale or consumption within the cafe' or gardens.
- No dogs (apart from assistance dogs) within the cafe' or gardens.

Assuming those rules applied, how would the Somerset Unitary Authority enforce them?

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation responded and advised of the terms of the lease and what would happen if those were not met by the end of March 2023.

Mr Robert Barnes raised concerns on the cleanliness of Taunton town and that the street cleaning machines that ID Verde used were broken. He also raised concerns on housing and homelessness.

The Leader of the Council responded and advised that she would be happy to meet with Mr Barnes and discuss the issues he had raised.

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

The Chair of Council made the following announcements:-

- The Chair reminded councillors of the Civic Service taking place on 26 March 2023.
- The Chair advised councillors that their Related Party Transaction forms were due to be submitted by 8 March 2023.

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

The Leader of the Council made no announcements.

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

No questions had been received.

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

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- The Leader of the Council advised of some changes to appointments within the Liberal Democrat Party.

Resolved that Full Council approved:-

- a) Political allocation as attached (Appendix A)

- b) Councillor appointments to Committees (Appendix B)

88. **Somerset West and Taunton Council amendments to Appointments to Outside Bodies**

Resolved that Full Council approved:

- a) Councillor Loretta Whetlor replaced Councillor Anthony Trollope-Bellew on the Joint Scrutiny Panel of the Somerset Waste Partnership
- b) Councillor Ross Henley replaced Councillor Chris Booth on the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board

89. **Connecting our Garden Communities - adoption**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Councillors were pleased with the report and were keen to see how the work unfolded.
- Concern was raised on some of the surfaces used for the routes and that they were dangerous for users. Councillors hoped that work was completed to rectify the rough paving in the town centre.
The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that they would note the point made on surfaces and agreed that some refurbishment was required to ensure routes were made safe for users.
- Concern was raised that there was no mention of the Taunton Town Council within the report.
The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that the elections for the Taunton Town Council were due to take place in May 2023 and that the new councillors could feed into the work once the council had been established.
- Councillors queried whether the cycleway within the Orchard Grove development would be funded from Section 106 money.
The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that the bus routes would be funded by the Bus Improvement Plan (BIP) by Somerset County Council.
- Councillors queried whether there were any prioritised routes and funding.
- Councillors were pleased to see that Active Travel had included many different users.
- Councillors welcomed the development.
- Councillors suggested that the routes were advertised to promote usage.
- Councillors were pleased to see the report come forward for adoption by Full Council.
- Councillors suggested the use of timed bus lanes or car share lanes for the Orchard Grove development.
- Concern was raised that the BIP funds were only being used within the Taunton area.
The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation advised that the funds needed to be used in a transformative way and if they had spread the funds across the whole county, very little impact would have been felt by users, so they had decided to focus the funds within Taunton.

- Councillors requested a map to be made available for the public to encourage usage of the new routes.
- Councillors thanked offices for all their hard work on the project.

Resolved that Full Council:-

2.1 Adopted the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan:

- a) as a material planning consideration in the preparation of masterplans, pre-application advice, assessing planning applications and any other development management purposes across Taunton Garden Town, and
- b) as corporate policy to inform future policy and project development and funding bids within Taunton Garden Town.

2.2 Agreed that the Director of Development and Place in consultation with the Economic Development, Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder be authorised to approve and make minor amendments prior to the final publication of the Connecting our Garden Communities Plan.

90. **Access to Information - Exclusion of the Press and Public - Agenda Item 12, Appendix A ONLY**

Resolved that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the next item of business (Agenda Item 12 - Appendix A 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).

91. **Commercial Property Investment Update**

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concern was raised that officers had not used the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) which could impact on future borrowing for the Unitary Council.
The Section 151 Officer explained that the property investment had impacted on PWLB borrowing and it would impact for the next couple of years.
- Concern was raised on the use of short-term borrowing.
- Councillors highlighted the risks mentioned within the auditor's report.
- Concern was raised on the asset values mentioned within the report.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources gave reassurance on the asset values and that due diligence had been taken in the investments.
- Councillors highlighted the items marked in red on the Red, Amber and Green (RAG) Report.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources advised that this was a performance report for the period April to September 2022, so the most recent report would give a more updated picture.
- Councillors mentioned that Somerset West and Taunton Council (SWT) had robust arrangements in place and queried how they would be transitioned into the New Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources advised that officers across all five councils had worked on joining up all the portfolios, debt and investments to ensure that the same level of robustness was carried forward into the New Council.

- Councillors mentioned that the SWT Commercial Investment Strategy (CIS) had proved stronger than some of the other councils and that some investments took time to yield any return.
- The Leader of the Council was pleased to second the report and was proud of what the CIS had achieved. It was a strong portfolio to take forward to the New Council.

Resolved that Full Council notes the Commercial Property Investment activity and performance for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022

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

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

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Concerns were raised on the Blenheim Gardens Café lease, which included planning compliance, public space protection orders and petitions.
The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Transportation advised that the works needed to be compliant and that the café would need to be open for business by end of March 2023 otherwise the tenant would be in breach of their lease.
- Councillors requested an update on the Dragon Project in Taunton.
The Portfolio Holder for Culture advised that it was a great public art project for the town centre and that they were excited for the unveiling event which was due to take place on 11 February 2023.
- Concern was raised on the overemphasis made that members of the public should be IT literate to access council services.
The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources advised that the council would always offer alternative ways of contacting the council to offer support to customers.
- Councillors queried what digital transformation had taken place.
The Leader of the Council would provide a written answer.

(The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm)