



Notice of Meeting of

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - CLIMATE AND PLACE

Wednesday, 17 May 2023 at 10.00 am

Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY

To: The members of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place

Chair: Councillor Martin Dimery

Vice-chair: Councillor Adam Boyden

Councillor Alan Bradford

Councillor Edric Hobbs

Councillor Marcus Kravis

Councillor Matthew Martin

Councillor Connor Payne

Councillor Alex Wiltshire

Councillor Bente Height

Councillor Henry Hobhouse

Councillor Dave Mansell

Councillor Harry Munt

Councillor Tom Power

For further information about the meeting, including how to join the meeting virtually, please contact Democratic Services democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk.

All members of the public are welcome to attend our meetings and ask questions or make a statement **by giving advance notice** in writing or by e-mail to the Monitoring Officer at email: democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk by **5pm on Thursday, 11 May 2023**.

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A: Access to Information.

The meeting will be webcast and an audio recording made.

Issued by (the Proper Officer) on Tuesday, 9 May 2023

AGENDA

Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place - 10.00 am Wednesday, 17 May 2023

9 Urgent item of business (Pages 5 - 22)

Members are asked to approve the minutes of the final Somerset County Council Scrutiny for Policies, Environment and Scrutiny for Policies, Place meetings.

This page is intentionally left blank

Draft minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee held on 29th March 2023 at 10am in the Wyndham Room, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY.

Committee members present: Cllr Martin Dimery (Chair), Cllr Marcus Kravis, Cllr Alex Wiltshire, Cllr Steve Ashton, Cllr Harry Munt, Cllr Tom Power, Cllr Leigh Redman (sub) Cllr Norman Cavill (sub) Cllr Simon Coles (sub) Cllr Mike Stanton (sub), Cllr Sue Osborne (sub)

Non-committee members present: Cllr Sarah Dyke, Lead Member for Environment, Cllr Dave Mansell (virtual) Cllr Martin Lovell (virtual), Cllr Dixie Darch (virtual), Cllr Sarah Wakefield (virtual), Cllr Connor Payne.

Officers present:

Mickey Green	Managing Director, Somerset Waste Partnership
Jamie Jackson	Governance Manager Scrutiny, Somerset County Council SCC
Jacob Hall	Climate Change and Resilience Officer, Mendip District Council
Rosie Walker	External Affairs Southwest, The Woodland Trust
Mark Fortune	Programme Manager Climate Emergency, SCC
Jonathon Doyle	Strategic Manager ECI Climate and Flood Management, SCC
Stephanie Gold	Senior Democratic Services Officer, SCC
Lee Willment	Democratic Services Officer, SCC

Agenda item 1: Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Alan Bradford (Cllr Sue Osborne as sub), Cllr Jo Roundell-Greene (Cllr Mike Stanton as sub) and Cllr Barry Clarke (Cllr Norman Cavill as sub), Cllr Adam Boyden (virtual), Cllr Henry Hobhouse (Cllr Simon Coles as sub), Cllr Kathy Pearce (Cllr Leigh Redman as sub)

Agenda item 2: Declarations of interest

Cllr Harry Munt advised the committee of his employment with an Urban Forestry Consultancy company, but added that this had already been recorded in members' Register of Interests.

Agenda item 3: Minutes from the previous meeting

Members approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 28th February 2023

Agenda item 4: Public Question Time

There were no public questions received.

Agenda item 5: Somerset Tree Strategy

Cllr Sarah Dyke introduced The Somerset Tree Strategy and advised that it had been developed over the last 9 months with a huge range of key stakeholders and many passionate members of the public. Unfortunately, a bid for funding had been unsuccessful,

however all five Somerset Councils agreed to honour their Environmental commitments and fund the strategy. Cllr Dyke thanked the whole team for bringing together a brilliant piece of work and then introduced Jacob Hall, Climate Change and Resilience officer, Mendip District Council to the committee who talked members through the following key points.

- Collaboration was the key to this strategy. There were over 750 responses received in the public consultation, and very wide engagement through the steering group.
- This strategy is very unique to Somerset.
- We are hopeful that there will be three officers coming into post to support this strategy in May.
- In response to a query, he had received from members before the meeting; the strategy is not just about trees, but rural and urban treescapes including hedgerows and mistletoe.
- More work needs to be done with Specialists on Tree Replacement Policies.

The committee were then introduced to Rosie Walker, External Affairs Officer from The Woodland Trust who outlined to members some of the national context surrounding this strategy such as -

- We are in a Natural and Biological Crisis
- Somersets canopy cover is 8%, but the national average is currently 13%.
- There is a long history of low planting rates in the UK.
- We need to work together with all key stakeholders and the public to reach the national average of 13% as a minimum, but aim for an even higher rate of 17%, and this strategy enables us to do this by breaking down the actions into manageable steps over the next 7 years.

The following comments and questions were received and discussed –

- Regarding Tree replacement policies vary across the county and district councils from 5 – 20 years. Can we harmonise these policies to 10 years, and that the correct species of trees are planted? The External Affairs Officer from the Woodland Trust advised that the team are currently working with Devon Council and other stakeholders on a model policy that we are very keen to push for at Somerset Council.
- Regarding engaging communities, how are we going to empower communities to start tree planting schemes locally.
- Regarding funding, are we looking at all potential funding streams? The Climate Change Resilience Officer advised that the detail of this will come through once the mandate for the tree strategy is accepted by Somerset Council. The Woodland Trust officer added that whilst there is tree planting funding available, this strategy involves a lot of work and so the people element of this strategy is key.
- This policy will need to be enforced by the Council's four Planning committees.
- Hedgerows and wildlife corridors are incredibly important.
- Somerset Council is a significant landowner, so it is so important that the Council leads by example i.e by starting community pilots as soon as possible.

- Regarding engaging communities, we should ensure that one of the actions of this strategy involves supporting Forrest School programmes in schools.
- Regarding Tree protection orders, it is concerning that there are many trees that are being felled due to pests and diseases.
- How are we going to be supporting landowners who are already buried under so much legislation when maintaining significant portions of land?
- Planting isn't always done properly. i.e. the wrong types of trees are being imported from overseas and bringing invasive pests and diseases and although trees are planted, they are not managed and maintained so many are lost.
- This Tree Strategy doesn't seem to give enough acknowledgement and support for all of the Tree planting projects being undertaken by community groups across Somerset. Particularly those projects that have faced complications and have been paused due to barriers around land ownership and planning legislation.
- Are we looking at Tree Asset Registers (i.e Highway tree assets) and Tree Health Plans as part of this strategy?
- Can we use a 'Call for Action' to launch this strategy and maximise engagement with as many people and groups as we possibly can.
- Regarding timescales, how are the measures and monitoring going to be done. The External Affairs Officer from The Woodland Trust advised that regarding performance monitoring, work was still being done on ownership of schemes.
- What is our policy on trees being felled by insurance companies? Can we use CAVAT to help value the trees' environmental value?
- We need to check that the Actions document captures all the actions fully (it appears that the SPD reference is incomplete in the Actions document)
- There are some grammatical errors in the document that will need correcting.
- Regarding tree canopy targets, this figure is net gain, which does take into account losses.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance and the Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee endorsed the adoption of the Somerset Tree Strategy as set out in recommendation 2.1 of the Scrutiny report with the following amendment.

AMENDMENT: bullet point 3 and scrutiny further recommends that Somerset Council Executive takes the appropriate action to develop and adopt a council wide policy to implement and guide everyone on the objectives of the strategy and reports back to this scrutiny committee within 6 months. - *All in favour*

Agenda item 6: Climate Emergency Declaration progress update

Cllr Sarah Dyke, Lead member for Climate Change and Environment introduced the item and provided members with the high-level context of the Climate Emergency Strategy. She welcomed Mark Fortune, Programme Manager Climate Emergency and Jon Doyle, Strategic Manager ECI Climate Change who talked members through a PowerPoint presentation detailing the progress of the Climate Emergency Strategy. The presentation contained detailed slides for the following -

- Climate Change – national context and drivers
- Climate and Ecological Emergency Declarations
- Towards a Climate Resilient Somerset
- Governance
- Current Progress
- National, Local and Corporate Challenges

The following comments and questions were received and discussed -

- Regarding Somerset's 40 miles of coastline, how can we incorporate this into the strategy? The Strategic Manager ECI advised that the statutory duties on this had been held by the District Councils, but that this does now need to be incorporated into our current thinking as a unitary authority.
- How can we ensure we are measuring and monitoring all of the impacts of the decarbonisation work that Somerset Council is doing to achieve net zero by 2030? The Programme manager, Climate Change explained that the strategy includes pathways to net zero which help us measure and monitor the progress of the strategy. He added that one of the key priorities for this Council is to rewrite the Transport Plan for Somerset, and this will have a huge impact on the carbon reduction rates in the Transport sector.
- What are the top priorities for achieving net zero by 2030, what is the timeline for a refreshed climate and ecological strategy, and how can members be involved with this, e.g. Scrutiny Task and Finish groups? The Programme Manager advised that the strategy does need to be rewritten and refreshed, and that work will begin on this very soon, adding that the biggest priorities and challenges for Somerset are the Transport Plan and Retrofitting.
- Non-committee member online: How are we engaging with parishes on retrofitting? The Climate Change and Resilience Officer explained that there are various funding opportunities available, particularly for those in fuel poverty, and also advised that two retrofit co-ordinators have been recruited.
- Regarding decarbonisation and travel infrastructure, walkways, cycle routes and bus routes are a huge issue both locally and nationally.
- What funding is available for businesses to accelerate retrofitting in the commercial sector?
- Are there any plans for use of windmills in Somerset, as there are none currently?
- Are we engaging and aligning the strategy with local projects such as the Frome Green & Healthy Futures lottery funded project? The Climate Change and Resilience Officer confirmed that Somerset Council will continue to engage with that specific project as well as other community led projects.
- Regarding planning legislation, as a unitary authority we need to lobby central government for better environmental and ecological legislation in national planning policy and framework.
- Is there a changing attitude and behaviour towards consumer generation of electricity that is sold back into the National Grid?

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance and concluded that around the room there is great deal of knowledge from all political persuasions, and that this is crucial to driving the environmental and ecological agenda forwards. The Scrutiny for Policies, Environment committee noted the update.

Agenda item 7: Any other items of business

There were no other items of business raised by the Chair.

[MEETING CLOSED 12:25PM]

This page is intentionally left blank

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES AND PLACE COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee held in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton, on Tuesday 7 March 2023 at 10.00am

Present: Cllr G Wren (Chair), Cllr D Johnson (Vice-chair), Cllr T Butt-Philip, Cllr T Deakin, Cllr A Dingwall, Cllr E Hobbs, Cllr D Mansell, Cllr H Prior-Sankey, Cllr A Soughton, Cllr W Read.

Committee Members attending online: Cllr M Barr.

Other Members present: Cllr R Wilkins

Absent: Cllr L Duddridge

The meeting started at 10.00am.

1. Apologies for absence – Item 1

Cllr M Barr (attending online), Cllr L Leyshon.

2. Declaration of Interest – Item 2

Cllr Prior-Sankey declared that a family member is training at SCIL (item 9 – Dillington House Update).

3. Minutes from the meetings held on 7 February 2023 – Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2023 and 7 March 2023 were proposed by Cllr Prior-Sankey, seconded by Cllr Read, agreed unanimously, and signed as an accurate record.

4. Public Question Time – Item 4

There were no public questions, statements or petitions received.

5. Budget Monitoring Report – Month 10 (January) – Item 5

The Chair invited Strategic Manager for Finance and Business Partnering - Christian Evans and Lead Executive Member Cllr Leyshon to present the report. The following was highlighted:

- Corporate overspend predicted to be £23.£1m, an improvement of £1.2m from the month 9 report position on net budget of £383.2m which represents a 6% overspend.
- Adult Services forecasting £11.9 overspend, no change from month 9.
- Children's Services forecasting £19.9m overspend, an improvement of £900,000 from the previous month. This is due to further analysis of contributions from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) underspend in fees and allowances in fostering and leaving care, as well as savings within the Children's budget in disability services.

- Economy, Communities and Infrastructure forecast £800,000 underspend, an improvement of £100,000 which also includes additional expenditure on corporate costs shows a £3.4m variance due to increase in investment income following interest rate increases.
- Corporate contingency shows a 33.3m favourable position after taking the National Pay Aware into consideration and the reduction in National Insurance from November 2022.
- There will be no month 11 report due to the greater focus that usual on closing Somerset County Council accounts and amalgamating the district finances.
- Questions were invited.
 - A Councillor asked if the current favourable position was in part due to delayed actions which could have an adverse impact on next year's budget. The Officer explained that there were no planned carry forwards unless these are grant or reserve funded, as there would usually be at this time of year.
 - A Councillor said that it would be expected that the significant savings identified by analysis by Newton would be considered by the Children's and Family Scrutiny Committee.
 - The Chair reminded the Committee of the fine balance of next year's budget and the encouraging news that the deficit has been reduced to ensure the best possible start for next year's budget.
 - The Officer was thanked for his attendance at Scrutiny in recent months and the clarity of reporting.
 - A Councillor online re-iterated that the overspend was in excess of £20m and raised concerns about next year's Children's Services budget and the use of reserves. They highlighted no mention in the report of how the £23.1 will be settled and asked what the reserves position is expected to be in 2025-26 if reserves are continually used to balance the budget. The Chair stated that £20m had been allocated from reserves to address overspend. The DSG will be addressed as part of the MTFP process for 2025-26 with a clear picture of the final outturn in June/July which would be provided to Members.
 - The re-iterated the Committee's thanks to Officer and finance colleagues. It was confirmed that the new Scrutiny Resource would monitor progress.
 - The Officer thanked the Committee for their scrutiny and through questioning.

The Committee noted the recommendation to the Executive Committee to:

- **Note the forecast overspend for 2022/23 of £23.1m (section 12).**

6. Forward Work Programme – Item 10

The Chair informed the Committee that as this is the final meeting of this Committee, the Forward Work Plan to be considered is that of the Executive Committee and also invited Members to suggest other areas where scrutiny

should still take place by the new Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee and Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee which would be forwarded to the appropriate Chairs. The following items were suggested:

- 20mph restriction policies for villages and parishes to address speeding;
- Continued risk of Dillington House closure and unknown costs;
- Highways small improvement scheme for minor works including role of LCNs;
- Gravity Enterprise Zone in Sedgemoor;
- Adoption of green spaces including management post-development where residents do not engage or management companies are effective and links to the Environment Act.
- Somerset Economic Future (see discussion from agenda item 8).
- Asset Disposal Update (see discussion from agenda item 6).
- Dillington House Exit Costs (see discussion from agenda item 7).

7. Somerset Economic Future – Economic Scenario Planning for Somerset – Item 8

The Chair invited Paul Hickson, Strategic Commissioning Manager – Economy and Planning and David Marlow from Third Life Economics.

- The Officer thanked committee for opportunity to present and reminded the committee that the strategy is an economic foundations project to inform policy thinking. The strategy was jointly commissioned by Somerset County Council and all four District Council to provide sound evidence for economic planning set in the context of the transition to the new Somerset Council. Valuable feedback was received from the last visit to this Scrutiny Committee. It was also stated that it is important to have independent objective expertise and input which has been provided by Third Life Economics. David Marlow and Mike Spicer from Third Life Economics were introduced.
- Working with the five authorities since Spring 2022 and have now produced a final report. Discovery sessions with groups of stakeholders in different locations and on different themes and specific bilateral meetings to allow the new council to formulate economic and related strategies and plans going forward. Final report contains four distinct scenarios.
 - No significant change;
 - Health and wellbeing focus incorporating opportunities for young people and healthy ageing;
 - Economic vitality and dynamism focus to attract and retain high-quality workforce in clusters of high-level economic activity; and
 - Clean, green, decarbonisation and nature recovery focus placing Somerset at the forefront of green energy development.

- Somerset identified as a unique county with complex geography where economic trends and people flow across areas. Half of county's population live in urban locations so the county must be considered equally rural and urban. Somerset's position in the middle to lower-ranking performance growth, productivity, wages, skills etc was explained which is expected to continue with high consideration of government policies and funding opportunities
- Future benchmarking against international parameters was discussed.
- The combined Somerset authorities were commended for considering this forward approach at this tumultuous time of LGR.

Questions were invited.

- Chair stated that the emphasis on the natural environment was disappointing with protected landscapes under-represented in the strategy. The Chair continued to say that demographics was a significant issue for Somerset and questioned the finding that they do not feel safe. It was also stated that connectivity needs to be addressed with many non-remote areas still experiencing issues as well the requirement for any economic development to be environmentally sustainable.
- A Councillor welcomed ownership of the document to help shape future plans. The Officer re-iterated that the strategy should be viewed as a building block for future development vision.
- A Councillor stated that the challenge was how to enact the strategy into action for maximum impact. The report author stated that devolution deals start with such strategies and the strategy would allow Somerset to consider this option working with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) which place the county at the forefront of post-pandemic recovery.
- A Councillor stated that the many small businesses in Somerset, including sole traders, were not referenced in the strategy and could contribute to the goal of dynamic enterprise. The Councillor continued to reference the other council strategies such as transport, local plans, climate and emergency strategies, and how this strategy needs to link with these. The report author stated that small businesses were consulted and included in bilateral meetings.
- The 15-minute city/town model was discussed and the non-exclusivity of that with the Gravity model.
- The impact of change to rural payments in the agricultural sector was discussed.
- A Councillor acknowledged the strategy's identification of what attracts people to Somerset but questioned the report's clarity on what retains people within the county and what would allow Somerset to thrive to enable this and maximise opportunities to inspire young people via

career and employment choices. The Officer stated that the next stage of the strategy would be to influence vision and the other council policies.

- A Councillor said they felt that although the strategy appears aspirational, it lacked a steer to allow Members to fully embrace it as a useful tool. The author said that the intention was to create a foundation document rather than a strategy to allow Members to determine goals, priorities and outcomes.
- The Chair suggested that Somerset Economic Futures is added to a future scrutiny committee work plan.
- The Chair also suggested that public engagement and levelling-up funding would be key factors in this process.
-

The Scrutiny Committee commented on the Somerset Economic Futures report ahead of its adoption as a resource to inform future strategy development by the new Somerset Council.

The Committee took a short break and resumed at 11.55am.

8. Active Travel Update – Item 8

The Chair invited Mike O’Dowd-Jones - Strategic Manager Highways & Transport and Matthew Prince - Service Manager Transport Policy to give a verbal update and share a presentation.

The following points were highlighted:

- Active Travel is a term that encompasses commuting, education and leisure which also supports economy and health and wellbeing. Active Travel is broadening from a predominantly urban issue to a pan-Somerset issue addressing walking, cycling, horse-riding and push-scooters with a decision on whether to include e-scooters still to be taken. There is now a wider remit for inclusion broader than the average fit neuro-typical adult to include those who are less mobile and those marginalised from traditional walking or cycling. Links are being strengthened with sports and other activities as well as with health and wellbeing providers. Active Travel also encompasses infrastructure delivery.
- Survey from 2020 showed 66% of people generally supported Active Travel when asked if they supported re-allocation of road space to active travel .
- Two funding streams are available: Capital funding from central government via Active Travel England primarily delivering schemes already identified and ready to be implemented which has increased significantly in recent years with £1m for projects in Yeovil, Taunton and Mendip. A further bid recently submitted for capital and revenue

projects with a strong likelihood of between £1.8m and £3.8m which will be known by the end of April.

- Revenue funding is offered via Capability Ambition Fund with £190,000 received for Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plans (LCWIP) for a number of plans to meet requirements.
- Infrastructure design work is being completed to enable bids for capital funds, policy work on 20mph zones and quiet lanes, and work to encourage behavioural changes and engagement in Active Travel.
- Somerset is within the top half of local authorities in the country.
- Funding is available for capital projects for LCWIPs already published which includes Taunton, Bridgwater and Yeovil and also for Minehead, Williton and Watchet, as well as Wincanton and Bruton. LCWIP for Castle Cary is being developed.
- Collaborative working with Public Health, Climate Development, Public Transport including Rights of Way colleagues.
- Commissioned extensive mapping to identify gaps in active travel provision and to address maintenance, sometimes delivered via volunteer networks to meet local community need.
- Engagement with 15-minute town agenda for community and also leisure, tourism, ecological and environmental benefits.
- Positively anticipating working with the new Local Community Networks (LCNs) and benefits of the new unitary council

Questions were invited:

- A Councillor questioned the inclusion of horse-riding in Active Travel as this is almost exclusively a leisure activity and not a travel option. The Councillor continued to say that routes should be demand-led.
- A Councillor asked for examples of how Active Travel would be more inclusive referring to the high number of contacts they have with constituents regarding drop kerbs and blocked pavements for mobility scooter users. The Officer stated that LCWIPs are now focussing more on short journeys and that kerb issues and overhanging vegetation are very much part of this remit. There has been engagement with individuals and groups with mobility issues. The Councillor asked if funding is available for 20mph zones and Quiet Lanes to promote active travel where parish councils are unable to fund this. It was confirmed that Active Travel England will fund improvement works for dropped kerbs etc and that there is now a broader urban and rural scope for works to link urban and rural centres of population market towns. Scoping studies are considering a whole-town approach for Active

Travel measures including freight routes, no parking zones, dropped kerbs, pavement maintenance.

- A Councillor expressed support for e-scooters in encouraging a different audience to engage in Active Travel. The Officer confirmed that e-bikes and e-scooters are defined as Active Travel to the length of journeys that are possible and the move away from reliance on cars and can be used by those not as fit as traditional cyclists.
- A Councillor asked for confirmation of actions taken or planned to encourage change in behaviours towards all transport. It was explained that mapping work will help with behavioural change to make journey planning easier and link to rail and bus routes. Mapping is expected to be completed by the end of 2023.

The importance of working with local communities to meet need and collaborative working with landowners was discussed. An upswing in local active travel since lockdown was highlighted.

- A Councillor said there was a need for secure lockable storage for privately owned e-bikes. The Officer said that two secure storage areas will be operational in Taunton in the next few months.

-

Andy Soughton and Wes Read left 1.00

9. Asset Disposal Update – Item 6

The Chair invited Oliver Woodhams – Head of Property and co-lead on the LGR Asset Optimisation Workstream to give a verbal update and share a presentation.

The following points were highlighted:

- Huge task of combining asset records of the five authorities ahead of Vesting which will be an ongoing task. 2022-23 opening balance across the five authorities held in reserves (capital receipts) was £18.7m with a significant reduction at closing combined level of capital reserves with assumptions in the financial plans. Approx. £12m used for flexible use of capital receipts for LGR transformation as well as each authority's use of capital receipts for financing capital programmes. Approx. £10m capital receipts banked with £5m closing balance.
- 2023-2024 first year of new Council estimated opening balance £4.9m encompassing £4m for transformational revenue expenditure and another £6.4m for capital program. As budget requirement of £10.4m is in excess of £4.9m opening balance, there will be a need to sell some property assets to meet financial commitments. Healthy pipeline of assets to be considered for disposal including low risk assets such as flats development at Coal Orchard in Taunton and also in Yeovil which

should complete in 2023-24. Asset based is consolidated with a regular turnover giving a strong market position. Properties can sit in the sales and disposals pipeline for some time and may be rented in the short term to avoid standing vacant. 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 expected £7.4m asset disposal required.

- SCC Asset Disposal Policy since 2014 and will run to 31 March and until new policy in place. All disposals in line with this policy whether end of lease or service no longer required. Working with other services for re-use/re-purposing opportunities. Asset Strategy Group discuss disposal proposals to endorse or reject before consideration by Full Council following consultation with local and executive members. Asset Management Strategy and new Council Plan recently approved which will feed into an updated Asset Disposal Policy.
- New Asset Management System, TechForge, as part of LGR to understand the estate held and for accurate records accurate with all buildings now set up on new system with land assets to be completed in 2023.
- LGR and increased hybrid and dynamic working post-covid and to support climate emergency, provides opportunity for asset rationalisation.
- Project with central government, One Public Estate (OPE), for funded research of the estates of Somerset Council, NHS Somerset and Avon and Somerset Police to identify opportunities for surplus office space to meet financial imperatives of heating and paying business rates on sparsely used buildings. Staff have been relocated to Broughton House at Blackbrook in Taunton for revenue savings with Petter's House in Yeovil also being reviewed. A review of council properties in West Somerset began in early 2023. Condition surveys and decarbonisation works will be considered. C Block of County Hall is similarly being considered, possibly linking with accommodation requirements in Taunton.

Questions were invited:

- The Chair drew parallels with the disposal of the redevelopment of Quantock House and County Hall C Block
- A Councillor asked the level of risk to the disposal of housing stock indicated. The Officer explained that the two flats developments previously mentioned are the only significant residential assets which are bespoke assets but are not however significant in the context of the whole property portfolio. Many units are already sold with some impact from lower market value. The Councillor continued to ask if the new Asset Disposal Strategy is operational. The Officer said there have been

initial conversations with lead members with much work to be completed which will be prioritised after April.

- The Chair requested Asset Disposal to be added to a future work plan.
- The Officer was thanked for a very comprehensive presentation and acknowledged the work of the Property Team who are working at full capacity.

Cllr Dingwall left the meeting at 13.30pm

10. Dillington House Update – Item 9

The Chair invited Ian Rowswell – Head of Service, Dillington House to give a verbal update and share a presentation which highlighted the following:

- Decision taken in September 2022 to cease activities on 30 September 2023 with final exit to be complete by 30 November 2023 and relinquish the full repairing lease to mitigate many liabilities incurred for SCC. Subsequently negotiations have continued to allow Somerset Centre for Integrated Learning (SCIL) to continue operating it's Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course for one year in the first instance. Hospitality activities at Dillington were majorly impacted by lockdown.
- Consultation with staff and trade unions has been undertaken which has encompassed the impacts of closure and the risk of redundancy. A discretionary retention scheme has been finalised with the aim of incentivising staff to remain to allow delivery of bookings. General Manager left at end of December 2022 with an internal promotion to fill that vacancy. Any new staff are employed on short term contracts and additional casual staff employed which is optimising operations.
- Bevan Brittan have been instructed to provide legal advice with reference to the lease and issuing notice of the lease which has now been done. Risks remain regarding the full repairing liabilities. Negotiations continue with the landlord for a settle commercial solution.
- Alder King have been deployed to schedule the condition of the property and to negotiate dilapidations costs and are now liaising with the landlord and surveyors. Meetings are taking place with colleagues in SCC Facilities Management to support exiting and future arrangements. Inventory has been reviewed to assess the large number of assets within the property, focussing initially on artwork either SCC owned or on-loan to find suitable alternative arrangements by November 2023.
- Discussions with Heritage colleagues to create a Dillington Collection to mark the SCC tenure to include photographs, adult education course programme etc. Work has continued to find alternative provision for

community education courses with venues potentially interested in talking to tutors for day courses. Suitable alternative locations for SCIL have not yet been found with landlord negotiations continuing regarding SCIL using part of the site.

- Cost pressures continue on the revenue operating budget on staff and pay and also on energy and consumables including food and drink. 2023-02 24 expected budget overspend for six months to end of November 2023 is likely to be £170,000. Costs of ceasing operations and exit are currently on track as reported at September 2022 at £3.1m. Writing-off of the Hyde building loan and dilapidations costs are not yet known with a higher risk.
- Current head of service will leave post at end of March 2023 with Mickey Green assuming the role of senior reporting officers from April with a managed move of responsibility when the post is filled.
- Staffing is a remaining risk in terms of filling posts and retaining staff and also staff performance. The Officer praised existing staff for their professionalism. Securing a financial settlement with the landlord with regard to dilapidations is also a significant risk. A increase in landlord engagement is expected now that the lease notice has been served. Questions were invited.
- A Councillor recalled previous assurance that many options were available for SCIL which have not materialised which may jeopardise the ITT arrangement and asked for confirmation of the Hyde building loan write-off figure. The Officer responded with reassurance of SCIL activities continuing and the value of the service, and continued to say that landlord negotiations for an interim period at a similar rate were key until an alternative location is found. The Officer offered an update to a future scrutiny committee on exit costs.
- A Councillor highlighted the risk of SCIL remaining at Dillington if a suitable rent cannot be negotiated and dilapidation costs escalate. The Officer stated that the surveyor had made multiple visits and has reported that estimates appear broadly accurate. The Councillor questioned the decision to extend operation past March 2023 to September 2023 to safeguard budget pressures. The Officer stated that if events including weddings had been cancelled then compensation payments would have been made and great inconvenience caused as well as reputational issues.
- The Chair requested Asset Disposal to be added to a future work plan.

11. Exclusion of the Press and Public – Item 11

To consider passing a resolution having been duly proposed and seconded under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 197 that the press and public be excluded during the remainder of the meeting on the basis that

if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure to them of exempt information of the following description:

- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

This was proposed by Cllr Prior-Sankey and seconded by Cllr Deakin. The Committee voted unanimously in favour.

The meeting continued in closed session.

12. Contract Award for Software Reseller Framework – Item 12

The Committee considered the recommendation that the Executive:

- **Approves the award of a four-year contract to the three suppliers identified in the attached Confidential Appendix B for the supply of computer software and associated services from 1 May 2023.**
- **Agrees that Appendix B be treated in confidence, as the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing that information.**
- **To agree to exclude the press and public from the meeting where there is any discussion at the meeting regarding exempt or confidential information (Appendix B).**

13. Any Other Urgent Items of Business – Item 13

As the last meeting of the Scrutiny and Policies and Place Committee, the Chair thanked the Officers from Democratic Services for their support.

On behalf of the Committee, Cllr Butt Philp thanked Cllr Wren for his dedication to scrutiny in his position as Committee Chair.

The meeting ended at 14.07pm

END

This page is intentionally left blank