

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Monday, 23 September 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Martin Dimery (Chair)
Cllr Henry Hobhouse (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Alan Bradford	Cllr Simon Carswell (In place of Cllr Adam Boyden)
Cllr Habib Farbahi (In place of Cllr Harry Munt)	Cllr Bente Height
Cllr Edric Hobbs	Cllr Tim Kerley (In place of Cllr Rob Reed)
Cllr Marcus Kravis	Cllr Dave Mansell
Cllr Matthew Martin	Cllr Tom Power

In attendance:

Cllr Steve Ashton	Cllr Dixie Darch
Cllr Graham Oakes	

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Norman Cavill	Cllr Helen Kay
Cllr Emily Pearlstone	

89 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Councillors Adam Boyden (substituted by Cllr Simon Carswell), Harry Munt (substituted by Cllr Habib Farbahi) and Rob Reed (substituted by Cllr Tim Kerley).

90 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations of interest received.

91 Minutes from the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 3

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Climate and Place held on

25th July 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

92 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

A question was received from a member of the public Mr. David Orr in respect of Agenda Item 6 – Task and Finish Group Update – Water Quality in Somerset. The statement and question is available on the Council website with the meeting agenda.

A full written response will be sent to Mr. David Orr and will be shared with the Committee.

93 Scrutiny Climate and Place Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

The Chair asked Jamie Jackson, Governance Manager, Scrutiny to present the committees Forward work plan and Outcome tracker. He invited comments and questions from members and the following points were raised and discussed:

- A member requested an update on the status of the recommendations from this committee, connected to listed buildings, the Energy Plan and the Local Plan. The officers explained how they are working towards achieving the aforementioned. A recommendation was made to move the items to the Forward Plan, as they are not visible on the Somerset Council website and was advised that this would be rectified by the Democratic Services.
- A member pointed out the delay in response regarding the Air Band in west of the country and emphasised the importance of getting a report back to this Committee. The officers gave an update on the ongoing commercial negotiations and advised that there would be a report once there is a precise plan after the discussions.

94 Task and Finish update: Water Quality in Somerset. - Agenda Item 6

The Chair invited Mr David Orr, member of the public, to read aloud a statement submitted by him for the [Public Question Time](#) relating to this item.

- Mickey Green, Executive Director – Climate and Place, thanked Mr Orr for his statement and gave his written responses (sent via email on 03/10/2024) to his statement as follows:

Dear Mr Orr,

Thank you for your statement (attached) which was submitted at the Scrutiny Climate and Place meeting held on 23rd September 2024, please see my response below:

1. Your statement includes a number of inaccuracies and misleading statements. All the points you have raised have been comprehensively responded to by Natural England as the statutory body responsible for nature conservation in an EIR response to you which you shared with

the Council on 22nd August. Officers refer you back to the information you already have on this matter from NE explaining why the removal of P requirements applies in Dorset and the very different circumstances applied in Somerset Levels and Moors.

2. Dorset Council is still dealing with Nutrient Neutrality requirements in the Poole Harbour catchment for nitrogen off set schemes and has been awarded funding in the same way Somerset has to help unlock developments. Dorset Council are also impacted by nutrient neutrality requirements for other catchment areas including the Chesil and the Fleet (phosphorus and nitrogen), River Axe (phosphorus), River Avon (phosphorus) and Somerset Levels and Moors (phosphorus). The picture painted by you that Dorset has somehow resolved their nutrient neutrality issues is incorrect.
3. Water bills are set regionally by Ofwat and cover the programme of investment across the whole area. If you have queries on pricing, you need to raise this direct with Ofwat.
4. For the majority of impacted developments in Somerset the cost of Phosphate mitigation ranges from £3,700 upwards.

Yours sincerely

Mickey Green
Executive Director – Climate and Place

- Vice Chair Cllr Hobhouse provided a verbal update on the Task and Finish Group. The following points were noted.
 1. Two people were mentioned as key contacts to discuss the movement of phosphates onto and off to the different Ramsar sites. Cllr Hobhouse requested volunteers with scientific backgrounds for the same.
 2. The Chair agreed and advised that people come forward to volunteer for the group to consolidate and bring forth ideas for consideration. It was pointed out that there is a list of interested members from the previous meeting and there was a recommendation to get a meeting put in to discuss the Task and Finish Group before the next Scrutiny meeting so there is an update to bring in.

95 Q1 Climate and Place Performance Monitoring report - Agenda Item 7

The Chair invited Mickey Green, Service Director – Climate and Place, to present the Q1 report for the directorate.

The Chair invited the members of the committee to ask any questions, and the following points were discussed:

- A member requested that the next quarters report contain comparison with the previous quarter to aide with understanding of the variations.

- A member sought clarity on funding deadlines, mentioned on Page 45 of the agenda, and the work being done to ensure we receive the said funding. Mike O'Dowd-Jones, Service Director – Infrastructure and Transport, explained the current position and assured that there are no risks.
- A member requested an update on savings relating to the recycling centre. Kirsty Larkins, Service Director – Climate and Sustainability, responded with an update on contract negotiations and the work on public consultations.
- A member sought data for School Transport and was advised that Mike O'Dowd-Jones would provide a written response with up-to-date numbers.
- Clarity was sought for Surface Dressing contracts. Mike O'Dowd-Jones explained the technical delay due to weather dependence.

96 Somerset Council's Climate Vision - Agenda Item 8

The Chair invited Kirsty Larkins, Service Director – Climate and Sustainability to present the report.

The Chair invited the members of the committee to ask any questions, and the following points were discussed:

- The Vice Chair sought clarity about the support provided to Mendip Hill farmers without providing any funding at the Ramsar site.
- Page 70 of the report – request for clarification and rewording due to contradictory statements. The officer advised that this comes from the mission statement but would be taken out to clarify more.
- Officers clarified that there is going to be a publication, after testing out new methodology, surrounding the Carbon Footprint for Newcastle. Similar tests going on in Somerset so lack of data currently, but the officers hoped to return to the committee in the future with more findings.
- A member discussed that the report seems to indicate that it's all down to individuals and communities however, the governments and councils need to be shaping the way the economy works to have policies to provide support for the same. The member raised concerns that the document does not show how the council is doing its part in shaping the system even though it is an official report and hoped for an improved version to be presented in the future.
- A member requested timescales for when the committee can expect reports from the climate partnership. The member also recommended cross party involvement with the nature partnership as well. The officers advised that it would be the next couple of months.
- A member raised concerns over council resources in terms of workforce and timings. Officers provided an update on things achieved while agreeing that the resources have drastically gone down leading to them having to seek out external partnerships, which have been successful, and reduced working spaces.

97 Somerset Economic Strategy - Approach to development of Strategy and

emerging evidence base - Agenda Item 9

The Chair invited Samantha Seddon, Service Director – Economy, to present the report.

The Chair invited the members of the committee to ask any questions, and the following points were discussed:

- A member sought clarity on how the directorate makes sure that there’s fair representation in the information that they’ve presented and was assured that there’s various group activities that took place and they received an overwhelming interest of the members of the public.
- The Vice-Chair raised the importance of having a golden thread between Economic Development and Planning.
- A member recommended putting funding towards apprenticeships and the Chair agreed for the point to be taken on board. Another member advised that it is equally important to develop green skills if we are going to develop a green economy. The officers highlighted this along with funding resources to be a fundamental challenge and how they are working to secure major investments for the same.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chair mentioned that the next Scrutiny for this committee would be held on 11th November 2024 and the date for the meeting in December would be changed.

(The meeting ended at 12.54 pm)

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CHAIR