

**WEST SOMERSET COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 February 2013 at 4.30 pm**

**in the Council Chamber, Williton**

**Present:**

Councillor D D Ross ..... Chairman  
Councillor G S Dowding ..... Vice-Chairman

Councillor A M Chick	Councillor M J Chilcott
Councillor H J W Davies	Councillor M O A Dewdney
Councillor J Freeman	Councillor S Y Goss
Councillor P N Grierson	Councillor A P Hadley
Councillor B Heywood	Councillor A F Knight
Councillor K V Kravis	Councillor R P Lillis
Councillor E May	Councillor I R Melhuish
Councillor K M Mills	Councillor P H Murphy
Councillor K J Ross	Councillor D J Sanders
Councillor L W Smith	Councillor M A Smith
Councillor T Taylor	Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew
Councillor K H Turner	Councillor D J Westcott

**Officers in Attendance:**

Chief Executive (A Dyer)  
Corporate Director (B Lang)  
Section 151 Officer (S Campbell)  
Corporate Manager Environment, Customer and Community (S Watts)  
IT Manager (K Penfold)  
Principal Accountant (S Plenty)  
Meeting Administrator (K Kowalewska)

**C99      Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Morgan and S J Pugsley.

**C100     Minutes**

(Minutes of the Meeting of Council held on 23 January 2013, circulated with the Agenda.)

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of Council held on 23 January 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

**C101     Declarations of Interest**

Members present at the meeting declared the following personal interests in their capacity as a Member of a County, Parish or Town Council:

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Name	Minute No.	Member of	Action Taken
Cllr S Y Goss	All	Quantock Vale	Spoke and voted
Cllr P N Grierson	All	Minehead	Spoke and voted
Cllr P H Murphy	All	Watchet	Spoke and voted
Cllr K J Ross	All	Dulverton	Spoke and voted
Cllr L W Smith	All	Minehead	Spoke and voted
Cllr A H Trollope-Bellew	All	Somerset County	Spoke and voted
Cllr K H Turner	All	Brendon Hills	Spoke and voted
Cllr D J Westcott	All	Watchet	Spoke and voted

In addition, the following interests were declared:

C102	Name	Minute No.	Description of interest	Personal or Prejudicial	Action Taken
	<u>Public Participation</u>				
	None of the Members of the Council have requested to speak			Personal	Spoke and voted
	Cllr K J Ross	C105	Wife is employed by Engage and is Chair of CLOWNS	Personal	Spoke and voted

**C103 Chairman's Announcements**

11/02/2013	Attended Watchet Town Council meeting to witness the presentation of awards to George Reeder and Tanya Allen for their brave actions in saving baby Sam Cooper-Stevens who was blown off the West Pier into Watchet Harbour
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The Vice-Chairman announced that on 18 February 2013 he had attended the reopening of Goviers Lane Crossing in Watchet, and on 15 February 2013 he had tea with the Captain of HMS Somerset.

**C104 Corporate Plan 2013-16**

(Report No. WSC 20/13, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was for Council to consider approving the Corporate Plan for 2013-16.

The Leader presented the report and advised of an amendment to the Corporate Plan which was circulated and tabled at the meeting which related to the delivery of affordable homes key task and its associated target being moved from Objective 5 to Objective 2. He reported that, following the recommendation received from the Local Government Association, the most fundamental change to the plan was the reduction of the Corporate Priorities from six to two, namely local democracy and new nuclear development at Hinkley Point,. However, he reminded Members that the elements of the previous priorities had been incorporated within the two proposed priorities.

The Leader proposed the recommendation in the report which was seconded by Councillor K V Kravis.

During the debate the following issues were raised:

- Disappointment was expressed that matters concerning the environment had been incorporated within the two main priorities and that it was not in a priority of its own.
- An explanation was sought as to why the Leader had not taken the opportunity to reduce the number of Cabinet members by the same ratio as the reduction in the number of priorities. The Leader explained he believed the size of Cabinet to be adequate and it was a minimum sized cabinet in order to be active and to enable healthy debate.

**RESOLVED** that the West Somerset Council Corporate Plan 2013-16, included at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

**C105**      **Annual Budget for 2013/14**

(Report No. WSC 14/13, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with all information required for Council to approve the revenue budget and capital programme for 2013/14.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support advised that the council tax resolution paper to calculate and set the council tax for 2013/14 would be presented to full Council at its meeting on 27 February 2013 due to the Council not being in receipt of all the parish and town council precepts. She drew Members' attention to the Section 151 Officer comments contained in the report, highlighting that the budget was judged to be robust and that this was a requirement before the budget could be approved. The Lead Member reported that comments from the Scrutiny Committee had been addressed and were reflected in the appendices to the report. She emphasised the challenges faced in setting the budget for 2013/14 considering the reforms to government funding and the late announcement of funding levels. The report also highlighted that significant savings to set a balanced budget in 2015/16 would still have to be made next year and beyond; and the Lead Member then went on to present the budget setting paper in detail.

During the presentation, the following main points were highlighted:

- The impact and the risks associated with the business rate retention scheme.
- The refund figure on the NNDR1 Form had been increased as there was an anticipated one-off large refund payable to Hinkley Point in 2013/14 when one of their reactors would shut down.
- The contribution to the Earmarked Reserves figure had been increased to mitigate the risk of the business rate retention scheme and for clarity

an explanation was given as to why the sum going into the earmarked reserve was £5 less than shown in the report.

- The minimum revenue provision needed to be addressed through the sale of assets, as detailed in the capital programme.
- Further savings had been gained as a result of a recent officer budget monitoring exercise to refine budgets.
- Section 6 of appendix A to the report illustrated what the Council was proposing to do and the figures in the budget were calculated based on these principles.
- Central government had recognised that West Somerset Council's level of council tax was in the lower quartile nationally and as a result the Council was able to increase its council tax by a higher percentage than the government's 2% cap.
- The New Homes Bonus would be brought back into the general fund to finance net expenditure rather than ring fencing the money for specific projects as in previous years.
- Considerable savings had been achieved above the predicted savings, whilst at the same time protecting frontline services to the public and maintaining the same level of grant funding to voluntary bodies – this was seen to be a commendable achievement and showed a commitment to gaining efficiencies.
- IT Projects in the capital programme were based on a two year plan and had been refined as much as possible.
- The four proposals identified in the Equalities Impact Assessment were much less than initially anticipated.

The Lead Member proposed the recommendations in the report which were seconded by Councillor K H Turner.

Members were advised that the Audit Committee would undertake the role of investigating council tax and business rate collections, debts and refunds.

In response to a question as to what action was being taken to provide railings at the West Pier following the recent accident at Watchet Harbour, the Chief Executive reported that a risk assessment had been undertaken which would be considered by the Corporate Management Team who would then decide on what action to take. The Section 151 Officer advised that provisions in the general reserves fund would be held for emergency situations.

During the discussion there was a request to provide an update report on how the mitigating actions were progressing in relation to the reduced toilet facilities in selected locations throughout the district. A verbal update was given by the Lead Member for Resources and Central Support on the progress being made.

The Chief Executive clarified that to compensate for the reduced level of council tax income, the Council had been given a council tax support grant. He confirmed that the amount of council tax collected in 2013/14

would be a lot less than the current year, but it would be supplemented by the net effect of the grant.

During the debate, Members requested further clarification on a number of issues concerning income relating to the Minehead contact centre, public conveniences, the VIIC building and legal fees.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the Equalities Impact Assessment (**Appendix 'D'** to the report) in accordance with guidance contained in paragraph 7 of the report and the assessment itself be initially considered.

**RESOLVED (2)** that in response to the Equalities Impact Assessment referred to in resolution (1) above public toilet facilities for both males and females remain available in Blenheim Gardens during the period April to October each year. The reduction in efficiency savings being £1,550.

**RESOLVED (3)** that Council Tax in 2013/14 is increased by 3.7% making a Band D charge £137.82.

**RESOLVED (4)** that the revenue budget for 2013/14, as amended and presented in **Appendix B** to the report, be approved.

**RESOLVED (5)** that the draft schedule of savings, as shown in **Appendix B, Table 12** to the report, as amended and presented, be approved.

**RESOLVED (6)** that the capital programme in **Appendix C, Table 13** to the report, as amended and presented, be approved.

**RESOLVED (7)** that the revised Medium-Term Financial Plan in **Appendix B, Table 9** to the report, as amended and presented, be approved.

The meeting closed at 6.06 pm.