

WEST SOMERSET COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 February 2016 at 4.30 pm

in the Council Chamber, Williton

Present:

Councillor B Heywood In the Chair
Councillor J Parbrook Vice-Chairman

Councillor I Aldridge	Councillor D Archer
Councillor A Behan	Councillor M J Chilcott
Councillor R Clifford	Councillor H J W Davies
Councillor M O A Dewdney	Councillor S Y Goss
Councillor A P Hadley	Councillor T Hall
Councillor I Jones	Councillor B Leaker
Councillor R P Lillis	Councillor B Maitland-Walker
Councillor K M Mills	Councillor C Morgan
Councillor P H Murphy	Councillor S J Pugsley
Councillor R Thomas	Councillor N Thwaites
Councillor A Trollope-Bellew	Councillor K Turner
Councillor T Venner	Councillor D J Westcott
Councillor R Woods	

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive (P James)
Director of Operations/S151 Officer (S Adams)
Assistant Chief Executive/Monitoring Officer (B Lang)
Assistant Director Resources (P Fitzgerald)
Senior Accountant and Deputy Section 151 (J Nacey)
Finance Manager (S Plenty)
HR Manager (F Wills) – Item 7
Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager (P Harding) – Item 6
Media and Communications Officer (D Rundle)
Meeting Administrator (K Kowalewska)

C108 Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor J Parbrook be appointed Vice-Chairman for the meeting.

C109 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor G S Dowding.

C110 Minutes

(Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 20 January 2016, circulated with the Agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 20 January 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

C111 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:

Name	Minute No.	Member of	Action Taken
Cllr I Aldridge	All	Williton	Spoke and voted
Cllr D Archer	All	Minehead	Spoke and voted
Cllr H Davies	All	SCC	Spoke and voted
Cllr S Goss	All	Stogursey	Spoke and voted
Cllr B Maitland-Walker	All	Carhampton	Spoke and voted
Cllr C Morgan	All	Stogursey	Spoke and voted
Cllr P Murphy	All	Watchet	Spoke and voted
Cllr J Parbrook	All	Minehead	Spoke and voted
Cllr R Thomas	All	Minehead	Spoke and voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All	Dulverton	Spoke and voted
Cllr A Trollope-Bellew	All	Crowcombe	Spoke and voted
Cllr K Turner	All	Brompton Ralph	Spoke and voted
Cllr T Venner	All	SCC / Minehead	Spoke and voted
Cllr D J Westcott	All	Watchet	Spoke and voted

In addition the following interests were declared:

Name	Minute No.	Description of interest	Personal or Prejudicial	Action Taken
Cllr K Mills	C119	Artlife Director	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P Murphy	C119	Wife is a board member on Artlife	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr A Trollope-Bellew	C119	Chair of AONB	Personal	Spoke and voted

C112 Public Participation

Agenda Item 11 – Annual Budget and Council Tax Setting 2016/17

Tony White, Vice-Chairman of the Conservation Society, raised concerns regarding the closure of public conveniences and the effect this would have on West Somerset tourism.

Christine Lawrence spoke about the reduction in the local economy if the funding for public toilets was withdrawn; West Somerset could not afford to lose its tourist trade; and that under the Equalities Act, it was important to provide disabled toilet facilities.

Eddie May, Vice-Chairman of CLOWNS, spoke on the work of the charity and its impact on the community, and urged Council not to cut its funding as it helped the organisation to lever in extra external match funding.

C113 Chairman's Announcements

In the absence of the Chairman, there were no announcements to record.

C114 Corporate Strategy 2016/20

(Report No. WSC 23/16, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for the adoption by the Council of the Corporate Strategy 2016/20.

The Leader of Council presented the report and provided information on the key elements of the Strategy. He drew Members' attention to the 'Role and Purpose' section and emphasised that the Strategy was developed and produced following a series of member workshops and feedback sessions. He further stated that many of the objectives within the Role and Purpose section of the Strategy could be achieved for the people of West Somerset without the need for the Council to spend money.

The Leader proposed the recommendation of the report which was seconded by Councillor M Chilcott.

Members were in agreement that the role and purpose was very important at the time of financial challenges and the opportunities offered by devolution. Key Themes 1b and 2c relating to young people were pointed out as being particularly relevant and significant as it was considered that young people's aspirations were not served very well in the district of West Somerset. The Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Development informed that support had started in this regard and a tour of West Somerset College had been arranged for Members on 14 March 2016 and encouraged everyone to attend.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Strategy 2016/20 be adopted.

C115 Heart of the South West Devolution – A Prospectus for Productivity

(Report No. WSC 18/16, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to introduce to Members the Prospectus for Productivity document, the purpose of which was to open a conversation and negotiation with Government about a potential devolution deal for the Heart of the South West area (i.e. Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay).

The Leader presented the report in detail and advised there were 23 partners involved in the Devolution for the Heart of the South West, emphasising the Prospectus was produced with a view to subsequently negotiating a deal with Government. Following the negotiation, any final devolution deal would be subject to approval by all partners individually. The Leader went on to highlight the main points from the report making reference to the key areas which would benefit from devolution; the use of LEP geographies to devolve powers and budgets to local authorities; no decision had been agreed on a governance model until the deal had been approved; and the favoured option of a Combined Authority.

He went on to propose the recommendations set out in the report which were duly seconded by Councillor M Dewdney.

Various comments and issues were raised in regard to the following:

- The sharing of development costs and finance implications.
- The delivery of the key outcomes contained within the prospectus.
- The concept of a Combined Authority.
- Wider partnership working was supported especially as WSC had limited resources and to be able to work on larger projects within the devolution partnership was seen to be a positive for the area bringing in additional benefits.
- Concerns that West Somerset would be by-passed for centres of development as it was not located near the M5 corridor.
- WSC would have more influence and if part of a Combined Authority would have an equal vote with the other partners.

RESOLVED (1) that the Prospectus for Productivity (as attached at Appendix A to the report) be noted and that it be endorsed as the basis for starting a negotiation with Government.

RESOLVED (2) that any devolution 'deal' emerging from negotiations with Government will come back to full Council (and all councils in the Heart of the South West) for approval.

Note: With the agreement of the Chairman this item was brought forward on the Agenda.

C116 **Staff Severance / Compensation Policies Update and Pay Policy Statement 2016/17**

(Report No. WSC 22/16, circulated with the Agenda.)

Senior Officers (Chief Executive, Director of Operations, Assistant Chief Executive and Assistant Director Resources) whose posts were specifically referred to in the report left the room for this item.

The purpose of the report was for Council to review and approve the recommended changes to the Severance and Compensation policies as set out in the Redundancy and Retirement policies of both Councils and the approval of the Pay Policy Statement 2016/17.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report highlighting the key issues contained within. She went on to propose the recommendations set out in the report which were duly seconded by Councillor A Trollope-Bellew.

RESOLVED (1) that the changes to West Somerset Council's Severance Policy and Taunton Deane Borough Council's Compensation Policy as set out in the Redundancy and Retirement policies be approved.

RESOLVED (2) that the Pay Policy Statement 2016/17 be approved.

C117 **Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Annual Investment Strategy and MRP Policy 2016/17**

(Report No. WSC 24/16, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to obtain approval by Council of the proposed Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy for 2016/17 in line with the statutory and regulatory guidance. The updated MRP Policy will apply from 1 April 2015.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and proposed the recommendations of the report which were seconded by Councillor S Pugsley.

During the discussion clarity was provided on external borrowing within the borrowing strategy.

RESOLVED (1) that the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS), Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2016/17 be approved.

RESOLVED (2) that the Prudential Indicators included within the TMSS which include limits for borrowing and investment be approved.

RESOLVED (3) that the change to the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy be approved.

C118 **Capital Programme 2016/17**

(Report No. WSC 25/16, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was for Council to approve the recommended Capital Programme for 2016/17 including the proposed funding arrangements.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and advised that the Council would be taking a low risk approach, giving assurance that it would not commit to any capital schemes that could not be delivered. She went on to highlight the proposed capital schemes for 2016/17.

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

In response to a question, the Director of Operations/S151 Officer confirmed that the capital programme was based on resources the Council had available to spend, there was no financial risk and the funding plan was secure for the 2016/17 capital programme.

In response to a question regarding funding for the approved capital programme for 2015/16, it was agreed that a written response would be circulated to all Members detailing what capital money had been spent to date.

RESOLVED (1) that the 2016/17 Capital Programme Budget totalling £375,000, funded through a combination of capital receipts reserves and external grant funding, be approved.

RESOLVED (2) that a Supplementary Estimate to increase the 2015/16 Capital Programme by £15,000 to accurately reflect total asset disposal costs of land in Minehead be approved.

NOTE: Councillor B Leaker left the meeting.

C119 **Annual Budget and Council Tax Setting 2016/17**

(Report No. WSC 26/16, circulated with the Agenda; Report No. WSC 30/16, circulated prior to the Meeting; Voluntary Sector Grants Match Funding Leverage, circulated at the Meeting; and amended Appendix E Equality Impact Assessment re toilet funding 2017/18, circulated at the Meeting.)

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with all the information required for Council to approve the proposed revenue budget for 2016/17, and to approve its proposed Council Tax rate for 2016/17.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report in detail, emphasising the significant facts and figures contained within. It was noted that with regards to public toilets, Members should be aware from the detail in the appendices that the savings for 2017/18 included £107,000 for the council to stop directly funding the toilets from April 2017. In the meantime the Council would continue to work with towns, parishes and other local groups to seek ongoing provision and where this could not be achieved the facilities would close, and engagement thus far was proving very successful.

The Lead Member thanked Officers and Members who had taken part in the budget setting process for their hard work and cooperation.

The Lead Member proposed the recommendations of the report which were seconded by Councillor M Dewdney.

The West Somerset Opposition Group presented some amendments to the budget proposal for 2016/17, advising the changes would be for next year only and would have no significant impact on the long-term financial position of the Council. Councillor P Murphy congratulated and thanked officers for managing to provide a balanced budget. He added that the importance of financial sustainability for the Council was recognised, but it must be balanced against supporting the West Somerset community through the delivery of services and partnership working. One of the key themes was to raise the educational outcomes of young people and some of the voluntary sector groups played an important role in this.

The West Somerset Opposition Group stated the extra Rural Services Delivery Grant (RSDG) received by the Council through the Final Settlement should not be used exclusively to increase reserves, but be partly used to deliver services to the rural areas and to maintain funding to the following local community organisations at the existing level in 2016/17 only: Homestart; Engage West Somerset; CLOWNs; the Quantock Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); the West Somerset Advice Bureau (WSAB); the Exmoor Lengthsman Service, and Artlife.

The Leader of Council pointed out that these community organisations would have to find alternative ways of working and operate with the reduced level of funding as the Council could no longer afford to maintain the same level of support, and it was confirmed that long-term discussions with the groups had been undertaken on the proposed funding cuts. Extra match funding was available to most community organisations due to the fact that the Council supported them regardless of the amount; and it was hoped that parish and town councils could provide additional support. Attention was drawn to the charitable fund raising feasibility study which was currently looking at ways of providing funding to local organisations.

Both the Leader and Lead Member for Resources and Central Support advised the benefit from the RSDG money was welcome, however recent information indicated the Council faced a significant risk of business rates refunds that had not been allowed for within the draft budget, potentially in excess of £300,000, of which details were contained in the report at paragraph 7.19.

The following amendments were proposed and seconded by the West Somerset Opposition Group and were voted on separately:

(i) WSAB - that the proposed budget saving of £3,800 for 2016/17 is not progressed.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared LOST.

(ii) Homestart – that the proposed budget saving of £2,000 for 2016/17 is not progressed.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared LOST.

(iii) CLOWNS – that the proposed budget saving of £2,000 for 2016/17 is not progressed.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared LOST.

(iv) Engage West Somerset – that the proposed budget saving of £2,000 for 2016/17 is not progressed.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared LOST.

(v) Quantock AONB – that the proposed budget saving of £4,000 for 2016/17 is not progressed.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared LOST.

(vi) Exmoor Lengthsman Service – that the proposed budget saving of £2,000 for 2016/17 is not progressed.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared LOST.

(vii) Artlife – that the proposed budget saving of £6,000 for 2016/17 is not progressed.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared LOST.

At this stage the amendments relating to the removal of funding for the feasibility study for fundraising, and the reduction in transfer to the Sustainability Earmarked Reserve were withdrawn by the West Somerset Opposition Group.

During the discussion concerning the original motion, Members were urged to work collectively and openly as the Council would face further considerable challenges in the future. Government's Revenue Support funding to WSC had reduced by over £1 million since 2013 and the impacts of this were reflected in the budget report, however, valued frontline services had been protected and the Council would continue to support the community in every way it could; and the Lead Member for Resources and Central went on to give some examples of what was currently being accomplished.

Councillor Murphy gave notice of two amendments at which point the Leader proposed a motion that the vote be now put. The Chairman took the vote which was carried. Given the fact that notice of the amendments had already been put it was agreed that Councillor Murphy could set out his proposed amendments which were in relation to recommendation 3.4 and 3.8, as follows:

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- recommendation 3.4 – a request to separate the proposals for budget savings in 2016/17 and 2017/18 and thereby divide the recommendation into two to enable a separate recorded vote to be taken in respect of the 2017/18 proposed savings;
- recommendation 3.8 – to include the requirement of some scrutiny to the delegated decision;

at which point the mover and seconder of the original motion agreed to incorporate the amendments into the motion.

It was agreed to vote on all the recommendations, as amended, with the exception of 3.4 (b) which would be voted on separately.

Councillor I Aldridge	For	Councillor D Archer	For
Councillor A Behan	Against	Councillor M Chilcott	For
Councillor R Clifford	For	Councillor H Davies	Against
Councillor M Dewdney	For	Councillor S Goss	For
Councillor A Hadley	For	Councillor T Hall	Against
Councillor B Heywood	For	Councillor I Jones	Against
Councillor R Lillis	For	Councillor B Maitand-Walker	For
Councillor K Mills	For	Councillor C Morgan	For
Councillor P Murphy	Against	Councillor J Parbrook	For
Councillor S Pugsley	For	Councillor R Thomas	For
Councillor N Thwaites	For	Councillor A Trollope-Bellew	For
Councillor K Turner	For	Councillor T Venner	Against
Councillor D Westcott	For	Councillor R Woods	For

Recommendation 3.4 (b) that full Council approves a further budget saving of £122,000 in 2017/18, was then voted on.

Councillor I Aldridge	Against	Councillor D Archer	For
Councillor A Behan	Against	Councillor M Chilcott	For
Councillor R Clifford	For	Councillor H Davies	Against
Councillor M Dewdney	For	Councillor S Goss	For
Councillor A Hadley	For	Councillor T Hall	Against
Councillor B Heywood	For	Councillor I Jones	Against
Councillor R Lillis	For	Councillor B Maitand-Walker	For
Councillor K Mills	For	Councillor C Morgan	For
Councillor P Murphy	Against	Councillor J Parbrook	For
Councillor S Pugsley	For	Councillor R Thomas	For
Councillor N Thwaites	For	Councillor A Trollope-Bellew	For
Councillor K Turner	For	Councillor T Venner	Against
Councillor D Westcott	Abstain	Councillor R Woods	For

On being put to the vote the original motion, as amended, was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED (1) that the forecast Medium Term Financial Plan and Reserves position be noted, and the S151 Officer's Robustness Statement as set out in Appendix A of the report be noted.

RESOLVED (2) that the use of £429,300 from capital receipts reserves to fund the annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) of £143,100 from 2015/16 to 2017/18, thus reducing the revenue budget requirement for MRP to £0 from 2015/16 to 2017/18 be approved, and to further note that the Medium Term Financial Plan included a revenue budget requirement for MRP of £143,100 in 2018/19 and subsequent financial years.

RESOLVED (3) that the following reserve transfers be approved:

- a) £225,300 saving from the 2015/16 MRP Budget to General Reserves
- b) £51,500 to General Reserves in 2015/16 comprising surplus earmarked reserves of £39,384 plus surplus income of £12,116
- c) £200,000 from General Reserves to the Business Rates Smoothing Reserve in 2015/16
- d) £50,000 from General Reserves to a Planning Service Earmarked Reserve in 2016/17
- e) £166,456 from General Reserves to the JMASS Reserve to set aside funds to support transformation
- f) £22,302 from Final Settlement additional funding to the Sustainability Reserve in 2016/17 to help support invest to save schemes and other measures to help smooth the transition as the Council implements change
- g) £139,882 from Final Settlement additional funding to Business Rate Smoothing Reserve in 2016/17, with a further £79,168 to be reflected in the MTFP in 2017/18 to mitigate the new risks around business rates that could be in excess of £300k more than our current estimate of possible business rates refunds.

RESOLVED (4) (a) that the 2016/17 Revenue Budget be approved, including the total budget saving of £259,000 in 2016/17; and **(b)** a further budget saving of £122,000 in 2017/18.

RESOLVED (5) that a 2016/17 Council Tax increase of 3.56%, increasing the Band D basic tax rate by £5 to £145.56 per year be approved.

RESOLVED (6) that a further 2016/17 one-off Council Tax increase of 1.25% in respect of funding for the Somerset Rivers Authority, adding £1.76 to a Band D tax charge per year be approved.

RESOLVED (7) that the minimum reserves level at £600,000 be approved.

RESOLVED (8) that a decision be delegated to the Leader, Lead Member for Resources and the S151 Officer, subject to appropriate scrutiny, regarding acceptance of a four year settlement provided it is in the Council's interests to do so.

C120 Council Tax Resolution 2016/17

(Report No. WSC 27/16 - amended, circulated at the Meeting.)

The purpose of the report was for Council to approve the calculation and setting of the Council Tax for 2016/17.

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The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and proposed the recommendation of the report which was seconded by Councillor A Trollope-Bellew.

Councillor I Aldridge	Abstain	Councillor D Archer	For
Councillor A Behan	Against	Councillor M Chilcott	For
Councillor R Clifford	For	Councillor H Davies	Abstain
Councillor M Dewdney	For	Councillor S Goss	For
Councillor A Hadley	For	Councillor T Hall	Abstain
Councillor B Heywood	For	Councillor I Jones	Abstain
Councillor R Lillis	For	Councillor B Maitand-Walker	For
Councillor K Mills	For	Councillor C Morgan	For
Councillor P Murphy	Abstain	Councillor J Parbrook	For
Councillor S Pugsley	For	Councillor R Thomas	For
Councillor N Thwaites	For	Councillor A Trollope-Bellew	For
Councillor K Turner	For	Councillor T Venner	Against
Councillor D Westcott	For	Councillor R Woods	For

RESOLVED that the formal Council Tax Resolution, as shown in Appendix A, B and C to the report, be approved.

C121 **Minutes and Notes for Information**

(Minutes and Notes relating to this item, circulated via the Council's website.)

RESOLVED (1) that the notes of the Exmoor Area Panel held on 19 January 2016 be noted.

RESOLVED (2) that the notes of the Dunster Area Panel held on 25 January 2016 be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.02 pm