

WEST SOMERSET COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 February 2015 at 4.30 pm

in the Council Chamber, Williton

Present:

Councillor G S Dowding Chairman
Councillor A F Knight..... Vice-Chairman

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|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Councillor M J Chilcott | Councillor H J W Davies |
| Councillor M O A Dewdney | Councillor J Freeman |
| Councillor S Y Goss | Councillor A P Hadley |
| Councillor B Heywood | Councillor K V Kravis |
| Councillor E May | Councillor I R Melhuish |
| Councillor C Morgan | Councillor P H Murphy |
| Councillor S J Pugsley | Councillor K J Ross |
| Councillor D J Sanders | Councillor L W Smith |
| Councillor T Taylor | Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew |
| Councillor K H Turner | Councillor D J Westcott |

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive (P James)
Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer (B Lang)
Director of Operations (S Adam)
Assistant Director – Resources (P Fitzgerald)
Finance Manager (S Plenty)
Meeting Administrator (K Kowalewska)

C114 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Chick, S Y Goss and K J Ross.

C115 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 H J W Davies | All | SCC | Spoke and voted |
| Cllr P H Murphy | All | Watchet | Spoke and voted |
| Cllr L W Smith | All | Minehead | Spoke and voted |
| Cllr K H Turner | All | Brompton Ralph | 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 E May | C121 | Council Rep on CLOWNS | Personal | Spoke and voted |
| Cllr P H Murphy | C121 | Wife is involved with Artlife | Personal | Spoke and voted |
| Cllr D D Ross | C121 | Wife is involved with Artlife | Personal | Spoke and voted |

C116 Public Participation

Agenda Item 5 – Annual Budget and Council Tax Setting 2015/16

Nik Harwood spoke on behalf of Clowns and described the impact of the proposed budget reduction on Clowns’ ability to provide services for children and families in West Somerset.

Ray Tew spoke on behalf of Artlife and provided an overview of the organisation and its projects, events and initiatives which were supported by external funding.

Both representatives requested Members to reconsider reinstating the level of the existing grants to both Artlife and CLOWNS due to the benefits of being able to lever in significant additional funding.

C117 Chairman’s Announcements

On 23 February 2015 the Chairman and Leader attended the official opening ceremony of Bridgwater College’s Construction Skills and Innovation Centre.

C118 Corporate Plan 2015/16

(Report No. WSC 28/15, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for the refreshed WSC Corporate Plan for the 2015/16 financial year.

The Leader of Council presented the report advising that the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet had considered the Corporate Plan and as a result modifications had been made. He provided an explanation of the Golden Thread as illustrated in the report, and made reference to the measures being used to enable to track progress on delivering the two corporate priorities.

The Leader proposed the recommendation in the report, with an amendment to be made to correct the title of the Housing Portfolio to read “Housing, Health and Wellbeing”. The amended recommendation was seconded by Councillor M J Chilcott.

During the debate the following main points were raised:

- The Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Development spoke on Objective 4 of Corporate Priority 2 highlighting it to be a good news story for WSC. She provided examples of projects already being undertaken by the WSC Hinkley team which was showing great results and stated that there would not have been the capacity to do the good work without the Hinkley development.
- Particular concern was articulated regarding the omission from the Corporate Plan for the potential of tidal and marine power in the district. The importance was noted and as officers had already undertaken preparatory work on this matter, it was suggested that this could be looked at as a high priority when developing the new four year Corporate Plan after the May elections.
- Strengthening economic opportunities to link in with the Council's Local Plan.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Plan for 2015/16, as amended, be approved.

C119 **Proposed Shared Legal Service**

(Report No. WSC 25/15, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was for Council to endorse the draft business case approved by Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet for establishing a shared legal service between Mendip District Council (MDC), Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council, and to approve an inter-authority agreement under which the shared service would operate with effect from 1 April 2015.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the item and provided Members with the background information, highlighting the key points from the report. She advised that both MDC and TDBC had recently endorsed the business case and approved the inter-authority agreement at their full Council meetings.

The Lead Member went on to propose the recommendations which were duly seconded by Councillor E May.

The Assistant Chief Executive Extensive reported that extensive consultation had been undertaken in this regard. Questions were raised regarding whether there would be a possibility of providing legal services to parish and town councils, and what would happen if the number of core hours allocated was not required. In response, the Assistant Chief Executive stated that, at the moment, the service was not set up to provide legal support to parishes, nevertheless one of the ambitions of the partnership was to expand and gain more trade from other authorities. The focus at present was to ensure the three councils received a good service that was at least at the level of the service currently provided. He advised that there would be a formalised record of hours and workloads and the core hours would be monitored more specifically in years four and five of the arrangement.

RESOLVED (1) that the draft business case for a shared legal service as recommended by Cabinet at its meeting held on 7 January 2015 with an implementation date of 1 April 2015 be endorsed.

RESOLVED (2) that the inter-authority agreement – as set out in Appendix A to this report – as the framework for operating a shared legal service with effect from 1 April 2015 be approved.

RESOLVED (3) that the Assistant Chief Executive be appointed to undertake the role of “Contract Manager” as defined in the inter-authority agreement.

RESOLVED (4) that amendments to the Constitution be agreed to reflect the proposed arrangements as set out in Appendix B to the report.

C120 **Pay Policy Statement 2015/16**

(Report No. WSC 44/15, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to seek approval from Council for the 2015/16 Pay Policy Statement.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and went on to propose the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor I R Melhuish.

Discussion centred around the format and style of committee reports for WSC and TDBC and whether they should both be revised for consistency; and thanks were expressed to the Media and Communications Officer for seeking clarification and an apology from the Daily Mirror who had recently published a story alleging that West Somerset Council paid some of its staff less than the Living Wage, as the story was untrue and without foundation.

RESOLVED that the Pay Policy Statement 2015/16, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

C121 **Annual Budget and Council Tax Setting 2015/16**

(Report Nos. WSC 41/15 and WSC 45/15, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with all information required for Full Council to approve the proposed revenue budget for 2015/16, and to approve its proposed Council Tax rate for 2015/16. The proposed 2015/16 Capital Programme, the revenue implications of which were taken into account within the revenue budget, was included as a separate report for the Full Council meeting.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support advised Members that the budget for 2015-16 was balanced without the need to use general reserves. She highlighted points relating to continued financial pressure, the need for difficult decisions to be made, that the protection of frontline services had been the key aim and that there was still a lot more work to do in terms of the Council's financial position and how the Council operated. The Lead Member thanked Councillors for their considerable input into the budget process.

The budget gap had been addressed and the Lead Member advised Members on how this had been accomplished. However, she warned that there would be ongoing budget gaps year after year and as there would be limited choices of bridging the gap in the future, it was imperative that Members looked at ways of transforming Council services.

The Lead Member went on to highlight the key points of the report and commended the Section 151 Officer for producing the robustness statement and acknowledged the hard work of the new finance team.

The Lead Member proposed the recommendations contained within the report which was seconded by Councillor M O A Dewdney.

The Democratic Alliance Councillors presented two small but important amendments to the Cabinet's budget proposal as presented to Full Council for approval to reinstate the level of grant funding for Artlife and Clowns. Councillor I R Melhuish proposed the following amendments, which was seconded by Councillor D D Ross:

- (a) that full Council note the impact of the Alternative Budget proposal and support the reinstatement of the grant to Artlife of £6,245 which will be funded by a reduced revenue transfer to capital; and
- (b) that full Council note the impact of the Alternative Budget proposal and support the reinstatement of the grant to Clowns of £5,602 for 2015/16 which will be funded by a reduced revenue transfer to capital.

Reference was made to the fact that the proposal to reinstate the grants to Artlife and Clowns was only for the 2015/16 financial year.

A lengthy debate ensued on the amendment, and the following points were raised

- It was felt that the voluntary groups demonstrated fulfilling objective 1 of the Council's corporate priority 1 by delivering an effective and efficient service and retaining customer satisfaction. If funding was cut the services would be in jeopardy and time should be given for them to readjust and reorganise.
- It was important to remember that the grants were not being stopped to Artlife and Clowns. Consultations on the options proposed to reduce the grant funding had been undertaken with the organisations affected and this should have allowed them sufficient time to voice any concerns in terms of restructuring.

WEST SOMERSET COUNCIL
Council Meeting 25.02.2015

- Funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau, Homestart and Engage was being retained.
- More support should be given to rural services and this was not the right time to reduce funding.
- Concern was expressed that a precedent was being set for the charitable groups to rely on WSC as there were many other charities who were not reliant on the Council for funding.
- The voluntary sector in the district was very much appreciated, however it was becoming more of a challenge each year to provide support and grant funding was being targeted to the highest priority areas.
- The investment to save principle should be taken into consideration.
- Essential services were being provided by Artlife and Clowns which were specifically relevant to West Somerset's very rural area.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared LOST

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|--------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|---------|
| Councillor M J Chilcott | Against | Councillor H J W Davies | For |
| Councillor M O A Dewdney | Against | Councillor G S Dowding | Against |
| Councillor J Freeman | For | Councillor A P Hadley | For |
| Councillor B Heywood | Against | Councillor A F Knight | Against |
| Councillor K V Kravis | Against | Councillor R P Lillis | Against |
| Councillor E May | For | Councillor I R Melhuish | For |
| Councillor K M Mills | Against | Councillor C Morgan | Against |
| Councillor P H Murphy | For | Councillor S J Pugsley | Against |
| Councillor D D Ross | For | Councillor D J Sanders | Against |
| Councillor L W Smith | Against | Councillor M A Smith | For |
| Councillor T Taylor | Against | Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew | Against |
| Councillor K H Turner | Against | Councillor D J Westcott | Against |

Further discussion ensued concerning the original motion, and the following main points were made:

- The budget setting process had been very challenging for all Members.
- The budget information contained within the report provided a great deal of clarity.
- Artlife and Clowns should look to other areas to make up the shortfall to help mitigate the effect of the proposed grant reduction.
- Encourage residents to recycle more so that the money saved from sending waste to landfill could be used to support council services
- It was acknowledged that there was still a lot more work to be done to address the serious financial challenges ahead and to bridge the budget gap.

On being put to the vote the original motion was declared CARRIED

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|--------------------------|---------|-------------------------|---------|
| Councillor M J Chilcott | For | Councillor H J W Davies | Against |
| Councillor M O A Dewdney | For | Councillor G S Dowding | For |
| Councillor J Freeman | Against | Councillor A P Hadley | For |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---------|--------------------------------|---------|
| Councillor B Heywood | For | Councillor A F Knight | For |
| Councillor K V Kravis | For | Councillor R P Lillis | For |
| Councillor E May | For | Councillor I R Melhuish | Against |
| Councillor K M Mills | For | Councillor C Morgan | For |
| Councillor P H Murphy | Against | Councillor S J Pugsley | For |
| Councillor D D Ross | Against | Councillor D J Sanders | For |
| Councillor L W Smith | For | Councillor M A Smith | Against |
| Councillor T Taylor | For | Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew | For |
| Councillor K H Turner | For | Councillor D J Westcott | For |

RESOLVED (1) that the forecast Medium Term Financial Plan, and the Council's forecast reserves position be noted.

RESOLVED (2) that the S151 Officer's Robustness Statement as set out in Appendix A of the report be noted.

RESOLVED (3) that a 2015/16 Council Tax increase of 1.99% be approved.

RESOLVED (4) that the 2015/16 Revenue Budget be approved.

C122 Capital Programme 2015/16

(Report No. WSC 42/15, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to approve the recommended Capital Programme for 2015/16.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the item. She provided a summary of the projects within the capital programme which had previously been approved and those recommended for approval, and thanked officers for providing clarity on the cost of the projects and where the funding originated from; she also explained the reasons for deferring those bids considered to be lower priority. The Lead Member highlighted other key points of the report and it was recognised that this was a minimal capital programme of schemes that had been fully costed and funded, and that potential costs could come forward for consideration during the year.

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

RESOLVED (1) that the prioritisation applied to, and proposed funding arrangements for, the Capital Programme for 2015/16 be approved.

RESOLVED (2) that the 2015/16 Capital Programme Budget totalling £790,000, comprising scheduled spend of £461,000 for previously approved schemes plus £329,000 related to new prioritised schemes be approved.

C123 Council Tax Resolution 2015/16

(Report No. WSC 43/15, as amended, circulated prior to the Meeting.)

The purpose of the report was to enable Council to calculate and set the Council Tax for 2015/16.

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

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

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|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-----|
| Councillor M J Chilcott | For | Councillor H J W Davies | For |
| Councillor M O A Dewdney | For | Councillor G S Dowding | For |
| Councillor J Freeman | For | Councillor A P Hadley | For |
| Councillor B Heywood | For | Councillor A F Knight | For |
| Councillor K V Kravis | For | Councillor R P Lillis | For |
| Councillor E May | For | Councillor I R Melhuish | - |
| Councillor K M Mills | For | Councillor C Morgan | For |
| Councillor P H Murphy | For | Councillor S J Pugsley | For |
| Councillor D D Ross | For | Councillor D J Sanders | For |
| Councillor L W Smith | - | Councillor M A Smith | For |
| Councillor T Taylor | For | Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew | For |
| Councillor K H Turner | For | Councillor D J Westcott | For |

NOTE: Councillors I R Melhuish and L W Smith left the meeting at 6.30 pm.

The meeting closed at 6.48 pm