

WEST SOMERSET COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 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 H J W Davies
Councillor S Y Goss
Councillor A P Hadley
Councillor A F Knight
Councillor E May
Councillor K M Mills
Councillor P H Murphy
Councillor K J Ross
Councillor L W Smith
Councillor T Taylor
Councillor K H Turner

Councillor M J Chilcott
Councillor M O A Dewdney
Councillor P N Grierson
Councillor B Heywood
Councillor R P Lillis
Councillor I R Melhuish
Councillor C Morgan
Councillor S J Pugsley
Councillor D J Sanders
Councillor M A Smith
Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew
Councillor D J Westcott

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive (A Dyer)
Corporate Director (B Lang)
Corporate Manager Housing, Welfare and Economy (I Timms)
Efficiencies and Performance Manager (K Batchelor)
Principal Accountant (S Plenty)
Meeting Administrator (H Dobson)

Also in Attendance:

Ian Baker, Group Audit Manager, South West Audit Partnership

C106 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Freeman and K V Kravis.

C107 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 S Y Goss	All	Quantock Vale	Spoke and voted
Cllr P N Grierson	All	Minehead	Spoke and voted
Cllr C Morgan	All	Stogursey	Spoke and voted

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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:

Name	Minute No.	Description of interest	Personal or Prejudicial or Disclosable Pecuniary	Action Taken
Cllr A Knight	C111	Daughter was a member of staff	Prejudicial	Left the Chamber
All members	C113	Council Tax payer	Disclosable Pecuniary	Spoke and voted

NOTE: A dispensation was granted to all Members present to allow them to frankly and fully participate and vote in relation to the setting of the Council Tax for 2013/14 in Minute C113.

C108 Public Participation

No members of the public had requested to participate during the meeting.

C109 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman had no new announcements since the last meeting of full Council, held the previous week.

C110 SWAP Governance Arrangements

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

The purpose of the report was to request West Somerset Council to become a member of the South West Audit Partnership Ltd. (SWAP Ltd.) and to dissolve the current South West Audit Partnership Joint Committee (SWAP).

The Leader introduced the report advising of the need to improve governance arrangements in order to meet the current and future needs of an increasingly expanding partnership.

The Chief Executive introduced the Group Audit Manager for SWAP and advised that in the new proposed governance arrangements his area of responsibility would include West Somerset Council.

The Chairman welcomed the Group Audit Manager for SWAP to the meeting.

The Group Audit Manager for SWAP reported that the quality and performance of the internal audit service had improved and the subsequent success of the partnership with increased membership had led to difficulties in particular areas of the current governance model as listed in the report, attached to the agenda. The report proposed changes to the governance arrangements with no change in how the service was run or what it cost.

Councillor A Trollope-Bellew reported that, as Chairman of the Audit Committee, he had attended the workshop as described in 4.2 of the report, along with Councillors E May and K Mills. He was of the opinion that the most appropriate governance model for SWAP was a company, limited by guarantee, and proposed the recommendations in the report, which were duly seconded by Councillor E May.

RESOLVED (1) that the formation of a company, limited by guarantee, to replace the existing SWAP Joint Committee, be approved;

RESOLVED (2) that the Council elects to be a member of the SWAP Ltd from 1 April 2013, on the terms and basis set out in the articles of association, deed and service agreement;

RESOLVED (3) that the dissolving of the SWAP Joint Committee at a date to be determined, but not later than 30 June 2013, be approved;

RESOLVED (4) that the separation of responsibilities and the membership profiles of the Members' Board and the Board of Directors, be noted;

RESOLVED (5) that the fees for the provision of internal audit services by SWAP Ltd, for the financial year 2013/14, will not increase on the fees paid to SWAP by the Council in 201/13, be noted;

RESOLVED (6) that the appointment of the membership of the Members' Board and the Board of Directors be delegated to the West Somerset Audit Committee to decide.

C111 Pay Policy Statement 2013/14

(Report No. WSC 18/13, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to seek approval from Council for the 2013/14 Pay Policy Statement.

The Chief Executive presented the report and advised of the minor changes to the Statement and an amendment to the recommendation, as follows:

“That Council approve, subject to the addition of a new third paragraph under 5 (f) as set out below, the Pay Policy Statement 2013/14 as set out in Appendix A to the report and amendments to the Written Statement on Local Government Pension Scheme Employers Discretions and Key Pensions Policy as set out in Appendix E.

‘That where severance payments for staff exceed £100,000 they will be reported to full Council for approval and in presenting information to full Council the components of the relevant severance package will be clearly set out. These components may include salary paid in lieu, redundancy compensation, pension entitlements, holiday pay and any bonuses, fees or allowances paid.’”

Councillor M Chilcott proposed the amended recommendation of the report, which were duly seconded by Councillor D Westcott.

On consideration of the report the following points were raised:

- A request that each ‘ready reckoner’, contained in the report attached to the agenda, stipulate whether the figures relate to weeks or months.
- Concern that the Pay Policy Statement had not been considered initially by an appropriate Policy Advisory Group.
- A suggestion that a ‘living wage’ which was a little more than the minimum wage, be considered when the next opportunity for review of the Pay Policy Statement arises.

In response to questions the Chief Executive confirmed that no definite decision had yet been taken in relation to a review of the Essential Car User Scheme. Also, for the Council to be considered a good employer, the Westfield Health Scheme was a good option in which counselling could be made available to staff should it be needed.

RESOLVED that, subject to the additions of a new third paragraph under 5 (f), as set out above, the Pay Policy Statement 2013/14 as set out in Appendix A to the report and amendments to the Written Statement on Local Government Pension Scheme Employers Discretions and Key Pensions Policy, as set out in Appendix E, be approved.

Note: Councillor A Knight left the chamber prior to the start of this item.

C112 **Joint working between West Somerset Council & Taunton Deane Borough Council – Project Mandate**

(Report No. WSC 23/13, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to seek Council's approval of the mandate for the proposed joint working between the Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC).

The Leader presented the report in detail and advised that it was prudent to get a structure up and running in West Somerset that was affordable; there would be no detriment to the local taxpayers of either Council.

Resilience was important and with low numbers of staff it was not possible to reduce numbers further in a piecemeal fashion. Should there be a shared officer core it was also important that West Somerset and TDBC remain democratically independent of each other.

The Leader proposed the recommendations of the report, which were seconded by Councillor E May.

In response to questions the Leader confirmed that with regard to the cost of external advice (HR/Legal) that TDBC were proposing to contribute £20,000 and WSC £5,000. This would help fund setting up costs and should there be a successful outcome of joint working between the councils, the running costs would not need to be subsidised.

During the course of the debate the following points were raised:

- That Members other than from the ruling group be represented on the Joint Members Advisory Panel.
- In addition to the £5,000 of HR/Legal costs, it was estimated that the backfill to be funded by WSC regarding three days per week towards admin/project office support would cost approximately £25,000.
- Concern that the proposed joint working might not be able to provide sufficient savings and sustain quality services.

In response to concerns regarding the outcome of the proposed project, the Leader believed that if the business case did not stack up with TDBC, who were eager for the case to succeed, then it was unlikely that it would work with any other authority. However, it was necessary to produce the business case before determining whether joint working could be a successful way forward. In order to achieve the level of savings required the sharing of services would not be enough alone, the big savings would come from management, offices costs, overhead costs etc. In addition, WSC could also work with other councils to look at further savings across the local government family. The Council were facing huge challenges to sustain the future of local democracy in West Somerset; to do nothing was not an option.

RESOLVED (1) that the detailed project mandate at Appendix A to the report, be approved;

RESOLVED (2) that the initial funding requirements totalling £30,000 as detailed in paragraph 5.2.5 to the report, be approved.

NOTE: In light of the decision by TDBC to approve the joint working mandate, subject to WSC underwriting the estimated cost of £25k to procure specialist advice, an urgent report, to that effect, was considered at the meeting of Cabinet held on 6 March 2013, when the concept of underwriting the total of £25,000 estimated cost of providing specialist advice to assist with the drafting of a business case was approved.

C113 **Council Tax Resolution 2013/14**

(Report No. WSC 25/13, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to enable the Council to calculate and set the Council Tax for 2013/14.

An updated report and appendices were distributed at the start of this item due to incomplete information when the agenda was distributed and the Chief Executive drew members' attention to the changes.

Councillor T Taylor proposed the recommendations of the report, which were duly seconded by Councillor M Dewdney.

Councillor L Smith queried the council tax increase figure for Minehead, as shown in Appendix C. The Principal Accountant advised that he would confirm the figure with Minehead Town Council after the meeting.

RESOLVED that, subject to confirmation of the Council Tax increase figure for Minehead, the formal Council Tax Resolution, attached as Appendix A, B and C to the minutes, be approved.

NOTE: It was confirmed, after the meeting and after discussion with Minehead Town Council regarding the Council Tax increase figure for Minehead tabled at the meeting, that Minehead Town Council would amend their Precept to an increase of 2.00% meaning that the Precept chargeable to the taxpayers in Minehead would be £313,944.00. The appendices were amended accordingly and attached to the minutes.

C114 **Minutes and Notes for Information**

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

RESOLVED that the draft notes of the Dunster Area Panel held on 28 January 2013, be noted;

RESOLVED that the draft notes of the Watchet, Williton and Quantocks Area Panel held on 4 December 2012, be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.21 pm.