

**WEST SOMERSET DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 February 2012 at 4.30 pm**  
**In the Council Chamber, Williton**

**Present:**

Councillor A F Knight.....	Chairman
Councillor D D Ross.....	Vice-Chairman
Councillor M J Chilcott	Councillor H J W Davies
Councillor M O A Dewdney	Councillor G S Dowding
Councillor J Freeman	Councillor P N Grierson
Councillor A P Hadley	Councillor B Heywood
Councillor K V Kravis	Councillor R P Lillis
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 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 & Monitoring Officer (B Lang)  
Section 151 Officer (G Carne)  
Group Manager – Housing & Community (I Timms)  
Group Manager – Environment and Services (S Watts)  
Principal Accountant (S Plenty)  
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)  
Accounting Technician (P West)  
Media, PR and Communications Officer (S Beaumont)  
Meeting Administrator (H Dobson)

Prior to the start of the meeting the following was circulated:

- Relating to Item 2 of the agenda - an amendment to the minutes of 25 January 2012.
- Relating to Item 6 of the agenda - corrections notes and letter received from CLOWNS.

**C82 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A M Chick, S Y Goss, K M Mills and LW Smith.

**C83 Minutes**

(Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 25 January 2012, circulated with the Agenda).

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of Council held on 25 January 2012 be confirmed as a correct record.

**C84 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	Description of Interest	Personal or Prejudicial	Action Taken
Cllr P N Grierson	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P H Murphy	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K J Ross	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr A H Trollope-Bellew	All Items	Somerset County	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K H Turner	All Items	Brendon Hills	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr D J Westcott	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted

In addition the following interests were declared:

Cllr H J W Davies	C89	Proprietor of a newsagent which is subject to rate relief	Prejudicial	Left the Chamber
Cllr E May	C87	Vice Chairman of CLOWNS	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P H Murphy	C87	Spouse is involved with Artlife	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr D D Ross	C89	Spouse is a board member of Artlife	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K J Ross	C87	Spouse is board member of Artlife, Chairman of CLOWNS and undertaken work for some of the organisations under consideration	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K J Ross	C89	Involved with the Youth Club building, Town Hall and Heritage Centre in Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr A H Trollope-Bellew	C87	Chairman of Quantock Hills ANOB	Personal	Spoke and voted

**C85 Public Participation**

No members of the public had requested to speak on any item on the agenda.

**C86 Chairman's Announcements**

20 February 2012	Attended Official signing of the Somerset Armed Forces Community Covenant at the Yeovilton Fleet Air Arm Museum
25 February 2011	Attended a Coffee Morning at the Old Cleeve Hall, in support of raising funds relating to a Mountains & Mandalas Trek. The funds to go to St Margaret's Hospice.
To assist in raising further funds for the trek the Chairman announced that he would be holding a fund raising event, a quiz and supper evening at Washford Village Hall on 21 April 2012 at 7.30 pm. All are welcome.	
28 February 2011	Attended Civic Reception for Bath & North East Somerset.

In addition, the Chairman announced that Somerset Care were embarking on a community project in dealing with dementia. They were looking for support from the schools, businesses, local council. Their idea was to make people aware of the problems in how to support dementia cases and this would include training etc. The Chairman confirmed that he would be attending events to support this project.

**C87 Annual Budget for 2012/13**

(Report No. WSC 40/12, 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 2012/13.

An amendment sheet listing errata/exemplification relating to the report and appendices were circulated to the Council.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report in detail and advised that the budget must be set by 11 March each year. Hinkley Point figures had not been included for clarification purposes. In order to produce the budget, assumptions must be made, which included a council tax freeze for 2012/13, a council tax increase of 3.5% for 13/14, the amount of Government Grant Funding etc. The report proposed that there would be no increase for Council Tax payers for 2012/13. The Council had considered the options of either raising £70k from council tax payers by raising the tax to 3.5%, or raising £50k by freezing the council tax rate in order to be eligible for a one-off grant from central government. Table 9 of the report, circulated with the agenda, listed the savings proposed for the 12/13 budget, however, she was concerned that these savings may not be reached. Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) had been undertaken on organisations where it was proposed that funding be reduced by 13% and were considered as part of the debate.

The Council's funding grant was being reduced and there were year on year cost pressures and in 2013/14 the Council would have, at this point, a

savings target of £913k, with further savings to be identified as the years progress. However, the Council were not proposing to increase the council tax rate for residents this year or to make drastic cuts to services. There were services that could be cut, however, after consultation with Town and Parish Councils and considering the result of the budget consultation conducted earlier in the year, it was Council's opinion that they were essential to users and that to continue providing those services for one more year would make a difference to many community groups.

In order to continue with many services beyond the next year a huge amount of income would be needed to overcome the Council's large budget gap. A large increase in council tax would bring in more revenue, but if increased by more than 3.5% a referendum would have to be held. Therefore, it was likely that residents would be asked for an increase next year if they wanted services to continue. It was important to note that had this report proposed that as many savings as possible be imposed, the Council would still not have been able to bridge the budget gap. In the meantime, the Council would be working on its finances and seeking advice/assistance from central government. Under the circumstances, the Lead Member believed that the proposals of the report would enable the Council to act wisely with full knowledge and as generously as possible.

The Lead Member proposed the recommendations of the report, which were duly seconded by Councillor M J Chilcott.

During the course of the debate the following issues/concerns raised included:

- Concern over the future of the Visitor Information Interpretation Centre (VIIC).
- How were £900k of proposed savings going to be addressed?
- Concern regarding the assumed cost of the waste contract over the next few years and that it was not sustainable.
- It was suggested that the cuts affecting the community groups could be avoided if the small amount of proposed savings were instead sourced from the additional grant from central government for Disabled Facilities Grants.
- Concern was expressed regarding the possible detrimental impact on the community in 2013/14 should both the proposed cuts by SCC and this Council be imposed. Therefore, it would be necessary to raise the council tax considerably and, further, it was essential that the public were fully informed of the necessity and its impact to increase the tax prior to holding a referendum.
- It was suggested that it might be more pragmatic to increase council tax a little this year and not make the proposed cuts.
- To turn down £50k from central government and take more from the public of West Somerset was not acceptable.

The Corporate Director responded with regard to the future of the VIIC in Minehead and confirmed that work was still being undertaken to consider its use and best way forward. Also, that discussions with Department for

Communities and Local Government were in progress to ascertain the situation relating to the European funding that was used to help build the centre.

The Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Growth reminded members that the current financial problems were mainly due to the results of the government spending review undertaken in October, the proposed budget before Members allowed the Council time to consult further and negotiate with central government.

The Leader advised that Members knew the Council Tax was too low, about 30% below the national average. When a referendum is held the Council would have to make their case. A referendum next year would give the people of West Somerset the opportunity to decide on the 3.5% increase carried over from this year, as well as the increase for next year. He supported the proposal to take the government money and save the people of West Somerset further expenditure for at least the next year.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support responded to concerns and advised that at this point in time it was considered that the savings gap for 2013/14 would be £900k, although a possible government grant adjustment could change the figure. Work would be conducted to make sure that the Council was as efficient as possible. Once the budget gap figure was known, the implications and how to address the gap would be considered and a new budget strategy would be presented to Council as soon as was practicable. She recognised the pressures that parish and town councils might be under due to passing on services. However, West Somerset had not yet passed on services to them. She promised that Members would be kept informed of the timetable and the budget gap when it was known.

It was agreed that recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 of the report be first voted on, then recommendation 2.4 and the recommendations 2.3 and 2.5 to 2.9 on block.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the tax freeze grant for 2012/13 from central government, as explained in Appendix A, section 6 to the report, be approved.

**RESOLVED (2)** that Council Tax be increased by 0% for 2012/13, as shown in Appendix A, section 6 of the report.

**RESOLVED (3)** that the revenue budget for 2012/13 be approved, as shown in Appendix B of the report.

**RESOLVED (4)** that the savings, as shown in Appendix B, section 3 (table 11) of the report, be approved.

**RESOLVED (5)** that the capital programme be approved, as shown in Appendix C, section 8 (table 13) of the report.

**RESOLVED (6)** that the statement on minimum reserves be approved, as shown in Appendix D of the report.

**RESOLVED (7)** that the revised Medium-Term Financial Plan, as shown in Appendix E, table 22, of the report and the budget gap for future years be noted.

**RESOLVED (8)** that a supplementary estimate in respect of the use of New Homes Bonus in 2011/12 up to the maximum of £91,000, as shown in Appendix A, section 8 (table 7), be approved.

**RESOLVED (9)** that any locally applied Council Tax be maintained at 5%.

**C88 Council Tax Resolution 2012/13**

(Report No. WSC 39/12, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to enable the council to calculate and set the Council Tax for 2012/13.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support proposed the recommendations in the report, and her proposal was seconded by Councillor S J Pugsley.

**RESOLVED** that the formal Council Tax Resolution, attached as Appendix A, B and C to these minutes, be approved.

**C89 Non Domestic Rate – Discretionary Relief & Local Discounts Schemes**

(Report No. WSC 25/12, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to ~~offer comment on proposed~~ seek Council approval of the list of rural settlements, together with a scheme for the granting of discretionary non-domestic rate relief.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and advised that the Discretionary Rate Relief scheme was very far reaching, benefiting many different types of organisations across the district. Businesses had been advised that it was proposed that the scheme would be extended until 31 March 2013. It was intended that a thorough review of the current scheme would be undertaken to ensure that it was relevant. With regard to local discounts she advised that the Council were not in a financial position to be able to support such a scheme.

The Lead Member proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor S J Pugsley who advised that this form of contribution from the authority targeted every single part of the district and what was a relatively small contribution on the Council's part resulted in a greater contribution from central government. Therefore this authority should continue with the scheme if it was possible.

The Chief Executive responded to a question as to how the proposed review of the scheme would be undertaken and advised that the Corporate Management Team would lead the review. If the results of the review were to recommend that the Discretionary Rate Relief scheme be discontinued, it would be at that point that equality impact assessments would be conducted.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the rural settlements list for 2012/13, attached as Appendix D to these minutes, be approved.

**RESOLVED (2)** that the current discretionary rate relief scheme attached as Appendix E to these minutes, be extended for twelve months to 31 March 2013.

**RESOLVED (3)** that the policy of not granting local discounts be approved.

**RESOLVED (4)** that a review of the Local Discounts Scheme be undertaken in 2012/13 and the results be reported to Cabinet and Council before the end of November 2012.

**C90 Minutes and Notes for Information**

(Draft Notes of the Exmoor Area Panel held on 19 January 2012; draft Notes of the Dunster Area Panel held on 23 January 2012, circulated via email).

**RESOLVED** that notes of the Exmoor Area Panel held on 19 January 2012 and the draft notes of the Dunster Area Panel held on 23 January 2012, be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm.