

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 December 2014 at 3.30 pm**

**Present:**

Councillor P H Murphy .....Chairman  
Councillor R Lillis .....Vice Chairman

Councillor M J Chilcott  
Councillor G S Dowding  
Councillor K Ross

Councillor M O A Dewdney  
Councillor J Freeman  
Councillor D J Sanders

**Members in Attendance:**

Councillor K Kravis  
Councillor D Ross  
Councillor T Taylor  
Councillor D J Wescott

Councillor E May  
Councillor K H Turner

**Officers in Attendance:**

Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer (B Lang)  
Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development (S Lewis)  
Assistant Director – Operational Delivery (C Hall)  
Assistant Director – Resources (P Fitzgerald)  
Media and Communications Officer (D Rundle)  
Technical Officer (K Richards)  
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)  
Administrative Support (A Randell)

Brenda-Maitland-Walker – Member of the Public.

**SC43 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors J Freeman and B Heywood.

**SC44 Minutes**

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November 2014 – circulated with the Agenda.)

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November be confirmed as a correct record.

**SC45 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 or Disclosable Pecuniary	Action Taken
Cllr K J Ross	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P H Murphy	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K H Turner	All Items	Brompton Ralph	Personal	Spoke

Additional personal Interests were declared by Councillor E May as Vice Chairman of CLOWNS. Councillor Lillis as the District Council Representative of Engage West Somerset and Councillor K Ross who is a Director of ArtLife and whose wife is Chairman of CLOWNS and an employee of Engage West Somerset.

**SC46 Notes of Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points**

(Copy of Notes of Cabinet Decisions/Action Points, circulated with the agenda.)

**RESOLVED** that the Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points from the meeting held on 5 November 2014, be noted.

**SC47 Cabinet Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 29 October 2014, circulated with the agenda.)

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 29 October 2014, be noted.

**SC48 Discretionary Grants – Update Reports from Voluntary Sector Partners**

(Report No WSC 169/14, circulated with the agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to provide members of the Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to consider the work over the past year of the voluntary sector community organisations who receive a grant allocation from the Council.

Councillor Murphy reminded Scrutiny Members that in recent months the Committee had received informative reports from the Quantock Hills AONB partnership and from Engage West Somerset and that the Scrutiny Committee had recommended to Cabinet that consideration be given to retaining the current level of funding for 2015/16.

During the course of discussion the following points were made:-

- Councillors observed that a service level agreement was in place with the West Somerset Advice Bureau and a partnership agreement with ArtLife. It was requested that an item be added to the scrutiny forward plan so that members had an opportunity to scrutinise delivery against the service level agreement criteria. It was confirmed that the service level agreement with

the West Somerset Advice Bureau was a joint agreement with Somerset County Council who also fund the Bureau.

- Councillor Westcott explained that the majority of the funding received from the district council was not earmarked to specific projects which meant it could be used for day to day running costs. The organisations valued their association with the Council as it demonstrated the value of the organization and subsequently they were able to lever in additional funds.
- In the past year the West Somerset Advice Bureau had assisted 2107 clients and had been successful in retrieving in the region of £24,000 in council tax arrears on behalf of the Council.
- The work done by Homestart was recognised as valuable to the community and had supported 250 families in the last financial year. In addition the leverage effect of the funding was that £1 brings in £28 additional funding.
- It was recognized that besides the play scheme project CLOWNS also provided the Play Bus, Toy Library and the Scrap Store. Family outreach sessions were also provided and funded by Barnadoes. CLOWNS delivered an enormous amount in the very rural communities.
- Artlife was important to the local community as it was able to support artists in making a living and providing them with a local service which they otherwise not be able to access locally. It was confirmed that Artlife act as guarantor to a lot of the events which happen in West Somerset.
- Members commended all of the organisations for their use of volunteers, ability to lever in additional funding streams and the valuable services that they provided to the communities of West Somerset.
- That funding for the four organisations should be maintained at the current levels for 2015/16.

Councillor M Dewdney proposed that the report be noted which was seconded by Councillor M Chilcott.

**RESOLVED** that the report is noted.

#### **SC49 Budget Update and Initial Savings Options 2015/16.**

(Report No WSC 170/14, circulated with the agenda.)

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with an update on budget estimates for 2015/16 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) forecasts, and to consider initial savings options towards addressing the Budget Gap for next year.

Paul Fitzgerald, the Finance Manager, presented the report providing an update for members in meeting the financial strategy and objectives as set out by the Director of Operations in her "Towards a Financially Fit Future" report to Scrutiny Committee on 10 July 2014.

During the course of the discussion the following points were raised:-

- Concerns that raising car parking income to support the budget would be deemed an unlawful act. The Assistant Director for Operations clarified that this applied to off street parking and that the Council were entitled to

retain surpluses generated from the operation of its own off street municipal operated car parks.

- There were some concerns that the increase in car park charges could negatively impact on tourism.
- The capital debt repayment provision (MRP) of £68k as detailed in Table 1 of the report was questioned. The Assistant Director for Resources explained that the overall MRP is estimated in line with the Councils policy which in this respect is to set aside or repay 4% per year of the brought forward balance in respect of the total amount of capital debt borrowing. The combined internal and external capital debt for the authority is in the region of £7.4m.
- Net savings from the JMASS project will not be realized until 2017/18.
- The calculation of the New Homes Bonus in relation to the number of affordable housing and open market homes was questioned. It was confirmed that further details on the calculation of New Homes Bonus would be included in the Christmas Budget Packs to all Members.
- Members were pleased to see that frontline services were being maintained in light of the difficult decisions needing to be made.
- Further discussion took place on any proposed council tax increase and what this would be capped at.

**RESOLVED** that:- the report be noted.

**SC50 Public Participation**

Brenda Maitland-Walker introduced herself as the County's representative on the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee.

Brenda-Maitland-Walker read out a statement detailing concerns in relation to the likelihood of surface water flooding in the urban area of Minehead, commenting that the maintenance of a rhyme or watercourse is a statutory responsibility and that an annual maintenance scheme would be less than the cost of flooding to people and businesses.

**SC51 Maintenance of Rhynes on West Somerset Council Owned Land in and around Minehead.**

(Report No WSC 170/14, circulated with the agenda.)

The report provided members of the Scrutiny Committee with a briefing on the condition of the 'Rhynes' in and around Minehead and to explore future options for their maintenance.

Chris Hall, Assistant Director – Operational Delivery, presented the report providing Members with an update on progress of the work done on the Rhynes and future maintenance. It was explained that more work had to be done and there was an identified need for an on-going maintenance schedule. Capacity in the Open Spaces Team had been utilized to supplement maintenance of the rhynes.

The Technical Officer advised Members that nearly 75% of the area had now been trimmed and obstacles had been removed from the rhynes so this had increased the flow. There was still more work to be done with the various riparian owners in the area.

The Section 151 Officer comments were verbally provided to Members –

‘In respect of the Internal Drainage Board Levy’, the budget should be updated to reflect the true cost to the Council. Given the overall cost pressures faced by the Council it is recommended that a virement is sought from other existing budgets and would suggest that the same action is required to uplift the land drainage budget to cover on-going sand bag use. This will ensure that budgets can be aligned correctly in future years’.

During the course of the discussion the following points were raised:-

- Officers were commended on the clarity and thoroughness of the report.
- It was discussed if the regular maintenance was affordable.
- Members recognised the work that had been undertaken so far to alleviate problems and felt that continuing the work was vitally important.
- Money had been in the budget for this for the previous two years, which would have been put back in reserves and used in other areas if not spent.
- It was considered if work could be prioritized and based around the maintenance schedule.
- Members felt that this should be a priority considering the weather last autumn, with it a possibility that the weather may get more critical, more run off capacity would be needed with consideration of new developments in the future.
- Members stressed the need to ensure that where development occurred adjacent to rhynes and waterways that adequate space was incorporated into the development design to ensure that waterways could be properly maintained.
- It was proposed that a task and finish or a joint working group be set up with officers to monitor the progress on this issue.

**RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report and agree the following recommendations:-

(1) That a separate budget be retained for land drainage responsibilities.

(2) To uplift the land drainage budget to cover the uplift in the internal drainage board yearly charge from £2,500 to £2762.65, an increase of £262.65 for the current fiscal year.

(3) Cabinet be recommended to establish a wider working group of members with officers to monitor progress on land drainage issues across the district.

(The Scrutiny Committee work plan, circulated with the agenda was considered.)

The report provided the Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to consider the meeting timetable for 2014/2015.

Councillors were requested to consider and comment on the proposed Work Plan submitted.

During the course of the discussion the following point was raised:-

- An interim written update was requested on out of hours care in West Somerset.

**RESOLVED** that the Work Plan be adopted

The meeting closed at 6.00 pm.