

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 07 August 2014 at 3.30 pm**

**Present:**

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

Councillor M O A Dewdney  
Councillor G S Dowding

Councillor M J Chilcott  
Councillor K J Ross

**Members in Attendance:**

Councillor T Taylor

Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew

**Officers in Attendance:**

Monitoring Officer (B Lang)  
Assistant Director – Planning and Environment (T Burton)  
Media and Public Relations Officer (D Rundle)  
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)  
Administrative Support (A Randell)

Chris Edwards - Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Manager.

**SC9 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors J Freeman, B Heywood, P N Grierson, K Mills and D J Sanders.

**SC10 Minutes**

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10 July 2014 – circulated with the Agenda.)

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10 July 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

**SC11 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:

WEST SOMERSET COUNCIL  
Scrutiny Committee 07.08.14

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Personal or Prejudicial or Disclosable Pecuniary	Action Taken
Cllr P N Grierson	All Items	Alcombe	Personal	Spoke and voted
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

An additional interest was declared by Councillor S Dowding as a member of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).

**SC12 Public Participation**

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

**SC13 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 6 August 2014, be noted.

**SC14 Cabinet Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 16 July 2014, circulated with the agenda.)

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 16 July 2014, be noted.

**SC15 Presentation from Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).**

(Report from Quantock Hills AONB Manager, Circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update relating to the Quantock Hills AONB service and partnership.

Chris Edwards, presented the report capturing why the Quantock Hills AONB was a nationally significant landscape, what the service and partnership provided and the potential implications of further funding cuts.

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

- Members discussed the statutory duty placed on local authorities to publish a plan for the management of the area.
- A critical element fell under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Council had a statutory duty to work together with other stakeholders to produce a management plan which was required to be revised every five years. The emphasis was placed on local authorities and not the AONB management service to create and update the management plan.

- The positive effect of the AONB to small businesses in the area were considered. It was suggested that they should have the option to contribute to the funding of the partnership to enhance the environment the local businesses benefitted from.
- The target figure funding was set by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs , who matched what other partners contributed to the service.
- Planning restrictions in the AONB were discussed. Article 1.5 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 was referred to which excluded areas of the AONB from the use of permitted development rights. There had been no change to this situation in recent years.
- Income was down 50% for the partnership and, as a result future sustainability and resilience of the service was considered.
- The possible use of mitigation funding from the Hinckley C development were discussed. However, this funding had been ring-fenced for landscape management areas to reduce the impact of Hinkley C.
- The budget for 2014/2015 was looked at. Project funding had been used to absorb cuts and used to continue to pay employees. Funding had enabled the service to replace a full time Ranger, however it was noted that the AONB was the only one of a similar nature that employed Rangers.
- EDF funding that had 'kicked in' had enabled the partnership to maintain the maximum ceiling for DEFRA contributions.
- The partnership was to undertake visitor surveys for the first time in seven years due to funding restraints. This was programmed to commence next Spring/Summer.
- A recent survey had shown that the Red Deer population had increased slightly.
- Awareness of the risks of Lyme Disease was referred to., It was determined that raising risks without discouraging visitors away from the countryside was the best approach although no specific initiatives to undertake this currently existed.

**RESOLVED** that:-

- 1) The Scrutiny Committee recognised the developments that had taken place relating to changes in funding the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in recent years and, in particular, recent discussions hosted by Somerset County Council aimed at achieving a sustainable funding position going forward. The Committee recommended that the Cabinet to consider maintaining the Council's contribution towards the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty at least at the current level for future years if required.
- 2) The Cabinet also be recommended to consider lobbying the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs through the Local Government Association to secure a more sustainable funding arrangement of all Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, in the same way that National Parks were funded, thus recognising the value of these designated parts of England and Wales and, in the interim, request that Somerset County Council provided sufficient funding to sustain the operation of the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

**SC16**     **Scrutiny Committee Work Plan**

(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 points were raised:-

- Suggested that local academies should be scrutinised along with grading results. It was suggested that intake should be related to results with comparison to the national value added figures linked to education.
- Members requested that the West Somerset Community College be invited to scrutiny for discussions as to how they aimed to address their funding gap. It was proposed that this item be included on the agenda for the December meeting with College and County Council representatives invited to attend.
- Following questioning relating to the assets of the authority it was determined that this would be addressed in an update due in October.
- A briefing note would be prepared and be circulated to all Members relating to local planning processes.

**RESOLVED** that the Work Plan be adopted.

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm.