

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 July 2014 at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor P H MurphyChairman
Councillor R P LillisVice Chairman

Councillor M O A Dewdney
Councillor B Heywood

Councillor P N Grierson
Councillor K J Ross

Members in Attendance:

Councillor K Kravis
Councillor D J Sanders
Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew
Councillor D J Westcott

Councillor K Mills
Councillor T Taylor
Councillor K H Turner

Officers in Attendance:

Monitoring Officer (B Lang)
Assistant Director – Resources (P Fitzgerald)
Assistant Director – Housing and Community Development (S Lewis)
Assistant Director – Corporate Services (R Sealy)
Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager (P Harding)
Efficiencies and Performance Manager (K Batchelor)
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)
Administrative Support (A Randell)

SC1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors M J Chilcott, G S Dowding and J Freeman.

SC2 Minutes

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 14 April 2014 – circulated with the Agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 14 April 2014, be confirmed as a correct record.

SC3 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 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

SC4 Public Participation

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

SC5 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 2 July 2014, be noted.

SC6 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 19 June 2014, circulated with the agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan published 19 June 2014, be noted.

SC7 Corporate Performance Report : April-March 2013-2014

(Report No. WSC 102/14, Circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on progress in delivering the corporate priorities and performance of council services for the period from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

Councillor T Taylor introduced the report and stated that monitoring the Council's performance - which included progress against quarterly performance indicators and the delivery of corporate priorities with the associated objectives and key tasks - was a key element in the Council's Performance Management Framework.

Councillor K Ross declared an additional interest in his wife being an employee of Engage West Somerset

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

- It was confirmed that long terms sickness cases had had an affect and made the current average higher than normal. It was confirmed that stress related illness was not a major factor in the current sickness figures.
- IT issues were believed to be a sizeable barrier preventing Somerset Fire and Rescue moving to West Somerset House.
- An update was given relating to the proposed Building Control partnership. A decision was due to be made later in the year with Mendip District Council being the authority taking the lead on the project.
- Work was anticipated to be done on aligning the fees and making the service more competitive taking into account the increase in building work being undertaken. The issues surrounding the competitiveness of the Building Control service could be due to the Council being required to publish the fee structure. This enabled private sector companies to undercut them.
- KPI 51 – the total number of properties made decent in the private sector through informal or formal action – concern was raised that the current target was unachievable and that it should be reviewed given the change in the funding framework from Warm Streets to Green Deal.
- Affordable Homes figures were discussed. Members were keen for these figures to be achieved given the local need for housing.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1) The progress in delivering the Corporate Priorities for 2013/2014 be noted; and
- 2) The performance against group and service indicators be also noted.

SC8 Revenue and Capital Outturn 2013/2014

(Report No. WSC 103/14, Circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of this report was to provide members with details of the Council's financial Outturn position for both revenue and capital budgets, together with information regarding the end of year reserve balances.

Councillor K V Kravis introduced the report, the high level headlines of which could be summarised as follows:-

- The Outturn against the Revenue Budget was a net underspend of £101,000. The Final Budget included an allocation of £102,000 from General Reserves in the year, however the underspend meant that only £1,000 had been used.
- The General Reserves Balance at the end of the financial year (subject to audit) was £992,000, which was above the recommended minimum balance of £500,000.
- Total Capital Expenditure for the year was £1,101,000. After taking into account the use of funding from capital grants plus Section 106 Agreement contributions, the outturn had produced a £75,000 overspend

against budget. This overspend had been funded using the Capital Receipts Reserve.

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

- The £101,000 underspend was discussed. This was to be used to finance the revenue budget.
- An update was requested on the circumstances relating to Clanville Housing and properties up for sale. The situation regarding this was to be investigated and brought back to Councillors for consideration at a later date.
- It was questioned how the support in the delivery of further affordable homes would be pursued following their sale.
- The underspend surrounding open spaces was considered along with the Blenheim Gardens budget.
- The £10,000 spent on sand improvements was debated. Members asked whether a permanent solution should be considered to prevent further costly improvements being required in the future. The rainwater gullies were believed to be the problem with a poor original design.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1) The financial position for the 2013/2014 financial year be noted and that the proposed transfers to and from earmarked reserves and general reserves be supported.
- 2) The proposed recommendations to Council to allocate supplementary budget allocations of £5,500 for improvements to Blenheim Gardens and £10,000 for sand clearance from drains and gulleys on the seafront in Minehead be endorsed.

SC9 Towards a Financially Fit Future

(Report No. WSC 104/14, Circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to share the latest updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) position and to outline the proposed approach to budget setting for 2015/2016 and beyond.

The Assistant Director – Resources introduced the report which provided details of the updated MTFP and a suggested new approach to financial planning and budget setting.

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

- Questioning took place on the impact on shared services if one authority decided it could not afford a service whilst the other could. This could only ever be considered depending on circumstances at the time.
- The timetable was discussed which highlighted the importance of keeping Councillors involved, particularly in view of next year's elections.
- It was questioned how far the New Homes Bonus income stream would be eroded by empty home figures. Due to there no longer being an Empty

Homes officer in WSC, work would need to be done around this area to assess what would be necessary.

- Officers were thanked for the work that had already been done, to close the budget gap in the previous financial years.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1) The updated MTFP position and key messages therein be noted; and
- 2) The proposed approach to budget setting for 2015/2016 outlined in the report be supported.

SC10 Review of Scrutiny Working Practice

(Report No. WSC 105/14, circulated with the Agenda.)

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with details of how Scrutiny could change its working procedures for the year ahead.

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report which had been drafted following an informal meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in June when a number of suggestions as to how the Committee could change its working practices were discussed. This was aimed at ensuring the Committee remained focused, efficient and continued to add value to the work of the Council.

Particular thought had been given to the introduction of agenda setting meetings and pre-meetings, as well as a new approach for dealing with Performance and Financial Monitoring reports.

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

- Members were requested to seek answers to specific points of concern before a Scrutiny meeting to enable a more in depth discussion to take place.
- Members could also ask for the relevant officers to attend meetings when particular topics were due to be considered.
- It was clarified that all Councilors were able to put items on the Forward Plan.
- The pre-meetings and layout suggested in the report was largely welcomed by Councilors, although it was stressed that business should always be concluded in public committees.
- Some Councillors objected to a change of reporting timescales for performance and financial monitoring from quarterly to six monthly.
- Officers would be encouraged to attend pre meetings as this enabled greater focus on more important matters to be discussed at the Scrutiny Committee.
- Members requested that paper copies of the quarter 1 and quarter 3 monitoring reports be circulated to the Committee as well as to electronic copies.

RESOLVED that the suggested changes to the working practices of the Committee, as set out in the report, and as amended at the meeting, be endorsed.

SC11 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. It was agreed at the last meeting (SC134) that this item would be put back on the agenda for consideration.

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

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

- The GP out of hour's specification was discussed. It was felt that the proposed new contract should be considered.
- Members requested the opportunity to scrutinise Engage West Somerset at a future committee.

RESOLVED that the Work Plan be adopted.

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm.