

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 July 2011 at 4.30 pm

Present:

Councillor R P LillisChairman (for this meeting)

Councillor A M Chick
Councillor M O A Dewdney
Councillor P N Grierson

Councillor M J Chilcott
Councillor G S Dowding
Councillor D D Ross

Members in Attendance:

Councillor E May
Councillor T Taylor
Councillor D J Westcott

Councillor D J Sanders
Councillor K H Turner

Officers in Attendance:

Corporate Director (B Lang)
Section 151 Officer (G Carne)
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)
Group Manager – Housing & Community (I Timms)
Group Manager – Customer & Corporate Support Services (W Bass)
Administrative Support (H Dobson)

SC11 Apologies for Absence

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

SC12 Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 March 2011

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 June 2011 – circulated with the Agenda).

RESOLVED that, subject to including Councillor P N Grierson in the declarations of interest as a member of a Town Council, the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 June 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

SC13 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 Grierson	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr D Westcott	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke
Cllr K Turner	All Items	Brompton Ralph	Personal	Spoke

SC14 Public Participation

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

SC15 Notes of Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points

RESOLVED that the Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points for 6 July 2011 be noted.

SC16 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of Cabinet Forward Plan No. 2, - August 2011 to August 2012 - circulated with the Agenda).

Members noted that:

- Somerset West Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy would be presented to Cabinet in December and Council in January,
- Draft Economic Strategy would be presented to Scrutiny in August, Cabinet and Council in September, and
- Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) – Final Report would be moved to later in the year.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan No. 2 - August 2011 to August 2012, be noted.

SC17 Corporate Performance Report – April to March 2010/11

(Copy of Report No. WSC 96/11, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with a regular update on progress in delivering the corporate priorities, performance of council services including budgetary information and customer satisfaction covering the period from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011.

The Leader of Council presented the report and advised that the monitoring report attached as Appendix A to the agenda, related to a full year. He advised that Lead Members monitored the objectives and key tasks of the report and may be involved with agreeing the actions with the Group Managers.

The Leader and officers were thanked for the improvement in the presentation of the report.

During the course of the debate and in response to questions the following points were raised:

- Members were advised that with regard to 1.1.1 of the report relating to the Cutcombe Market scheme all eight units were now occupied.
- With regard to KPI 41, the Council had received some responses from customer satisfaction questionnaires however the number of responses

received did not provide valid statistical information. This would be reviewed.

- With regard to KPI 52 , in response to concerns, Members were advised that although customer feedback had been acted upon when appropriate there had not been a system in place to record the actions taken. In future relevant service managers would be advised of customer feedback, this would be discussed with the Group Manager as to whether it was appropriate to act upon any comments and amend service plans. Actions agreed would then be collated by the Corporate Management Team. In addition there was a formal process in which all complaints were responded to within 20 days and acted upon accordingly.
- With Mendip DC unable to provide a procurement resource, Members were advised that individual officers had dealt with procurement negotiations which had proved to be successful to date. Should the Council have a major procurement exercise to undertake in the future Mendip District Council would be able to offer assistance.
- The target for the number of serious acquisitive crimes per 1000 residents had been increased to take account of the possible rise in crime due to the economic climate.
- Community profiling relating to fraud risks had recently been undertaken, however, it had not proved to be useful.

The Section 151 Officer advised that, with regard to the financial statistics in the report, due to the report deadline and work still being carried out on the closing of the accounts, there had been little time to provide explanations to all variances. He advised that being able to capitalise the redundancy costs had assisted with the revenue reserves.

In response to a question the Section 151 Officer advised that officers continually pursue debts, however, there would always be uncollectable debts due to debtors leaving the area and not traced and debts from people who have died.

RESOLVED (1) that the progress in delivering the corporate priorities for 2010/11 be noted.

RESOLVED (2) that the performance against the dashboard of Group and Service Indicators including the budget monitoring indicators, be noted.

SC18 Updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2012-2015

(Copy of Report No. WSC 95/11, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to present the updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2012-2015 to Scrutiny Committee for consideration and comment and to provide the context and framework for the budget 2012-13.

The Leader presented the report in detail and advised of the increased financial difficulties expected in future years due to a government grant that did not sufficiently take into account the unique difficulties that faced a large and sparsely populated district. As a result, from 2013 onwards the

Council may be looking at providing statutory services only supported by limited discretionary services with some of the cuts phased in by using reserves. It was expected that the government grant formula would change and could be geared around the amount of Business Rates that an authority raises. In this case, the Council would need to ensure that the Council would benefit when taking into consideration Hinkley Point A & B and the proposed development of Hinkley Point C.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- In 2.2 of the report, the MTFP was based on a 3.5% council tax increase, not 0% as written in the report sent with the agenda.
- Financial circumstances could lead to the Council deciding to conduct a referendum to ask the electorate their opinion in raising Council Tax rates. It would normally be held in May when other elections take place although if the referendum result was against the suggested rise there would be rebilling costs to meet in addition to funding the cost of the referendum itself.
- During a non-election year referendum costs could amount to circa £30-40k with the extra cost of re-billing.
- There were some supplementary estimates agreed for 2011/12 as follows – Dulverton Household Waste Recycling Centre - £32k, Minehead Summer Festival up to £5k and expected redundancy costs for this year of £240k.
- There was no mention in the MTFP that raising Council Tax by a significant percentage could be an option.
- Sort-It+ would incur on-going annual costs of £86,200 which would cover roll out costs, information packs etc. The Council intended to pay for the bins out of capital monies and had access to grants paid by Somerset County Council.

In response to questions the Leader advised that:

- The cost of the Council providing statutory services only was being investigated. He had asked that the costs be extracted from the service plans, a task that has not been completed yet. However, information so far suggested that the Council could provide statutory services within budget. It was likely that the number of staff needed to run the Council would be higher than the number needed for statutory services only as support staff were essential.
- If the budget gap was not bridged the Council would need to debate the issue of raising Council Tax. However, in his opinion, before that point the Council must have a balanced revenue budget and be running as efficiently and leanly as possible before the people of West Somerset were asked whether Council Tax should be raised or not.

RESOLVED (1) that Scrutiny Committee note the assumptions made in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012-15 and request that when considering this matter Cabinet should take into account the implications of increasing council tax revenue significantly and the importance of making every effort to avoid any overspend in the 2011/12 financial year.

RESOLVED (2) that the budget gap of £891,000 for 2012-13 and £1.4m for the life of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012-15 be noted.

SC19 Scrutiny Committee Workplan Review

(Scrutiny Committee Workplan, circulated with the Agenda).

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer advised that during the Committee's work programming workshop Members had expressed an interest in forming Task and Finish Groups to review the effectiveness of certain services. Some concern was raised regarding street cleaning and whether it was delivering the service as set out in the contract. The Veolia contract was due to be renewed within the next 14 months so this was seen as an opportune time to scrutinise the service. Community Safety was also selected as a service for further review and to scrutinise whether it demonstrated value for money. It was proposed that a Task & Finish Group approach should be formally agreed by the Committee and that terms of reference should be determined for the scrutiny review of street cleaning and community safety.

RESOLVED (1) that the Committee agree the formation of Task & Finish Groups to review the services of street cleaning and community safety and that a protocol for Task & Finish Groups is presented to the Scrutiny Committee to be held in August 2011, for adoption.

RESOLVED (2) that, subject to a Task and Finish Group protocol being adopted in accordance with Resolved (1) above, draft terms of reference are prepared for scrutiny reviews of street cleaning and community safety and presented for consideration to the Scrutiny Committee to be held in August 2011.

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm.