

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th October 2016 at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor P H MurphyChairman
Councillor R ThwaitesVice-Chairman

Councillor I Aldridge	Councillor R Clifford
Councillor G S Dowding	Councillor B Leaker
Councillor B Maitland-Walker	Councillor J Parbrook
Councillor R Woods	

Members in Attendance:

Councillor D Archer	Councillor M Chilcott
Councillor K J Mills	Councillor M Dewdney
Councillor A Trollope-Bellew	

Officers in Attendance:

Corporate Strategy and Performance Manager (P Harding)
Assistant Director – Resources (P Fitzgerald)
Finance Manager (J Nacey)
Revenues and Benefits Service Manager (H Tiso)
Corporate Strategy and Performance Officer (R Doyle)
Democratic Services Co-ordinator (E McGuinness)
Democratic Services Officer (M Prouse)
Democratic Services Officer (A Randell)

Councillors Murphy, Woods and Archer left the meeting at 5pm and Councillor Thwaites was appointed Chairman for the remainder of the Committee.

Councillor Dowding left at 5.45

SC 23 Apologies for Absence

An apology was received from Cllr K Turner.

SC 24 Minutes

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 August 2016 – circulated with the Agenda.)

The minutes were put to the vote.

As the majority of members voting approved the minutes it was:

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 August 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

SC 25 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 B Maitland - Walker	All Items	Carhampton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P H Murphy	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr J Parbrook	All items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted

SC 26 Public Participation

No members of the public spoke at the meeting on any item on the agenda.

SC 27 Notes of Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points

(Copy of Notes of Cabinet Decisions/Action Points, circulated at the meeting.)

RESOLVED that the Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 September 2016, be noted.

SC 28 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 4 October 2016, circulated at the meeting)

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 4 October 2016, be noted.

SC 29 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman made the committee aware that as additional Scrutiny meeting had been arranged for November 24th where the Budget Update and Minehead Events group would be considered.

SC 30 Review of Council Tax Rebate Scheme for 2017/2018

The report WSC 100/16 was introduced by Councillor Chilcott and presented by the Revenue and Benefits Service Manager.

The purpose of the report was for members to consider proposed revisions to the local CTR scheme and to consult with interested parties if it wishes to change the scheme. Consultation on the agreed options and consideration

must now be given to the scheme for the financial year 2017/18 that would require approval by Full Council by 31 January 2017.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- A 20% council tax contribution from working age recipients was discussed. If this was adopted it would align West Somerset with the Taunton Deane scheme.
- Concerns were expressed with proposals in withdrawing the entitlement for those aged 18-21. Only 18% of those in the consultation supported this.
- Members were made aware that option 4 could still be recommended without removing support for those in the 18-21 age group.
- Rate relief was considered on a case by case basis, based on circumstances such as health issues..
- Concerns were expressed that those that had their benefits reduced would be put in the same position as new applicants for council tax rate relief, with the likelihood of a greater rate relief bill in future years. This was seen as an issue which could be factored in.
- Councillors suggested aligning the rate relief scheme with other authorities would give a consistent approach and avoid a postcode lottery in the area.
- Members were requested to be mindful of budget issues and consultation responses. Administration costs of the scheme impacted on the budget. An increase by more than 20% would likely lead to a drop in the collection rate.

RESOLVED that:-

The Scrutiny Committee, following the consultation response and the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA - see Appendix 4), recommends the Council amends the current CTR scheme to that illustrated in Model 11. This would implement a combination of Options 2 and 4 and would:

(a) Reduce the maximum CTR available to people of working age to 80%;
and

(b) Align the CTR scheme for 2017/18 with changes made by the Government to other welfare benefits with the exception that applicants aged 18-21 would continue to be eligible for CTR.

2) The 2017/18 Council Tax Rebate scheme is recommended for 2017/18 only.

SC 31 Quarter 2 2016/2017 Performance Report

The report WSC 111/16 was introduced by Councillor Trollope-Bellew

The purpose of the report was to provide members with key performance management data up to the end of month 5 Quarter 2 2016/17, to assist in monitoring the Council's performance.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- Delays in the processing times of housing benefit claims were raised. It was determined that there had been a delay in the claims due to annual billing undertaken in quarter 1, which focused the majority of resource. New staff and a new computer system had also been introduced which added to delays. Delays in claims had improved in August with the average claim being at 30 days.
- There had been a new home improvement agency contract awarded to undertake adaptations, an improvement would be reported next quarter with the response times anticipated to be reduced from 40 weeks to around 30.
- Sickness absence figures were considered. It was requested that figures providing a comparison with other authorities be resent to Councillors.

RESOLVED that:- The Scrutiny Committee note the report.

SC 32 Financial Monitoring 2016/17 as at 31st August

The report WSC 112/16 was introduced by Councillor Chilcott

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the projected "outturn" – end of year – financial position of the Council for the financial year 2016/17 (as at 31 August 2016).

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members questioned if there were any further hidden housing repair costs. This was something that could be looked into if there were any risks around housing repairs.
- The costs of recent works to the Minehead cliffs had been taken into account and were factored into budget monitoring.
- There would be a review on earmarked reserves for Councillors to consider amongst the budget setting reports.
- Questioning took place on the Somerset Rivers Authority outturn budget and funding for flood defenses. Further information was to be detailed through a Bill that was going through the House of Lords.
- A reserve had been set aside for the enhancement and upgrade of toilet facilities.

RESOLVED that:- The Scrutiny Committee noted the Council's forecast financial performance as at 31 August 2016 with the estimated position at the end of the financial year.

SC 33 Four Year Finance Settlement 2016/2017 to 2019/2020

The report WSC 115/16 was introduced by Councillor Chilcott

The purpose of this report was to present to Scrutiny Committee an update on the arrangements for a possible four year funding settlement from Government in relation to certain grants.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- The New Homes Bonus was under review, due to this details of this were not included in the report.
- It was questioned if the elderly would be protected. Residents comments would be responded to and Scrutiny comments taken into account in terms of protecting the elderly residents in the finance settlement.
- The draft efficiency plan detailed in paragraph 3 on page 109 of the report was referred to. It was questioned if a report on this could be considered at a future Scrutiny meeting. It was determined that work was still being undertaken to develop this alongside the asset review for the purposes of generating income through greater commercialism.
- All assets were to be looked into as part of the review. Members voiced concerns over what could be perceived as asset stripping of assets in Minehead. There was a reluctance to sell any assets that generated income and members wanted the aspect of the social value of assets recognised under the review.
- It was requested that priority be given to selling high value assets that generate low income.
- Members requested that a list of assets be provided along with further information on how TAG's fed into the asset review.
- Reassurance was requested for receipts from the sale of any assets would not be used to benefit Taunton Deane. Councillors were reminded that under the creation of a new council there would be one budget and not separated between both authorities.

RESOLVED that:-

1) Based on the information available at this point in time, The Scrutiny Committee supports the proposal of the Leader, Lead Member for Resources and the S151 Officer to apply for a four year funding settlement in respect of grants identified in this report for the period 2016/17 to 2019/20, and Members are subsequently informed of the Secretary of State's decision.

2) Scrutiny Committee notes and comments on the draft Efficiency Plan.

SC 34 Housing Enforcement Policy

The report WSC 113/16 was introduced by Councillor Karen Mills.

The purpose of the report was to seek Member approval for the Somerset West Housing Standards Policy. The policy had been developed with the assistance of the Council's partners which include; Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, private sector landlords, tenants, Taunton Association for the Homeless, Bridgwater YMCA, and Somerset Care and Repair. This was a three year policy detailing how the partnership will regulate standards in private sector housing.

During discussion, no points were raised.

RESOLVED that:- The Scrutiny Committee recommend to the Executive to approve the Housing Standards Policy and charges.

SC 35 Amendment to the Private Sector Renewal Policy

The report WSC 114/16 was introduced by

The purpose of the report was to seek member approval for an amendment to the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy to include new prevention grant and equipment provisions to assist applicants applying for disabled adaptations and to assist with essential modifications to housing or repairs for owner occupiers and tenants with repairing obligations in order to prevent accidents or ill-health.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was confirmed that the policy had also been adopted in Taunton Deane and Sedgemoor district Councils.
- Concerns were raised with delays blocking hospital beds where patients in some instances were waiting for home adaptations. The Joint Commissioning Board which was made up of NHS care services and all local Councils worked closely together and were aware of challenges such the rising costs of care alongside an ageing population.
- Work was done alongside the NHS and quality assurance officers at Somerset County Council to ensure that adaptations are completed and checked within weeks of patient discharge from hospital.
- Stair lifts were reused and recycled where possible. Concrete ramps had been replaced by modular ramping that could be removed after it's no longer needed.
- The new contract had been awarded with 24 hour turnaround times for adaptations.
- Gas and Electric adaptations were done through grants through the companies. These were no longer undertaken by local authorities.

RESOLVED that:- The Scrutiny Committee approve the amendments to the Somerset West Private Sector Renewal Policy.

SC 36 **Scrutiny Committee Work Plan**

(Copy of the Forward Plan for 2016, circulated with the agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Forward Plan published on 5th October be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.10pm.