

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 January 2016 at 3.30 pm**

**Present:**

Councillor P H Murphy .....Chairman

Councillor R Lillis.....Vice-Chairman

Councillor A Behan  
Councillor J Parbrook  
Councillor R Thomas  
Councillor R Woods

Councillor G S Dowding  
Councillor B Maitland-Walker  
Councillor R Thwaites

**Members in Attendance:**

Councillor M Chilcott  
Councillor A Hadley  
Councillor A Trollope-Bellew

Councillor M Dewdney  
Councillor B Heywood  
Councillor D J Westcott

**Officers in Attendance:**

Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer – (B Lang)  
Assistant Director – Operational Delivery (C Hall)  
Assistant Director – Resources (P Fitzgerald)  
Democratic Services Manager (R Bryant)  
Democratic Services Coordinator (E McGuinness)  
Somerset Waste Partnership Development and Monitoring Manager - Dave Mansell  
Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny (M Prouse)

**SC141 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors D Archer and R Clifford.

Substitutions:- Councillor N Thwaites for Councillor R Clifford.  
Councillor R Thomas for Councillor D Archer.

**SC142 Minutes**

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17 December 2015  
– circulated with the Agenda.)

Proposed by Councillor Maitland-Walker and seconded by Councillor Dowding.

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17 December 2015 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the removal of the duplicated paragraph on page 6 relating to declarations of interest.

**SC143 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 R Thomas	All items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted

Additional personal interests were declared by Councillor Murphy whose partner was on the Board of Arlife, Councillor Maitland-Walker as a representative on the Board of the Somerset Waste Partnership and Councillor Lillis as the Chairman of the Joint Waste Scrutiny Committee and Chairman of Arts Interest.

**SC144 Notes of Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points**

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

The Chairman drew the attention of the Committee to the Cabinet's consideration of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group's recommendations relating to the CIM Fund. Although five of the six recommendations had been accepted, the Cabinet had not been able to support the proposed changes relating to the process for inviting applicants to present to the Planning Obligations Board.

**RESOLVED** that the Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6 January 2016, be noted.

**SC145 Cabinet Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 6 January 2016, circulated with the agenda.)

It was requested that when items were included on the forward plan for the Cabinet, consideration be given as to whether they should be submitted first to the Scrutiny Committee.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 6 January 2016, be noted.

**SC146 Somerset Waste Board Business Plan**

The Committee considered the report, WSC 5/16 circulated with the agenda, introduced by Cllr Martin Dewdney, and presented by Chris Hall and Dave Mansell.

The purpose of the report was to seek approval for the Somerset Waste Partnership's Draft Business Plan for 2016-2021. Whilst the Business Plan had a five year horizon Members were only requested to approve the plan for the financial year 2016/2017. The inflationary figure for WSC was -0.2% which meant a saving in the contract price for 2016/2017.

Dave Mansell made a presentation to Members with regard to the analysis of the 'Recycle More' trials that had taken place in the Wiveliscombe area before Christmas. The feedback received had been very encouraging and it was therefore likely that 'Recycle More' would be rolled-out later in the year.

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

- The re-use proposals identified in the presentation were welcomed. There would be a great deal to be gained from this.
- The investment in the West Somerset area was welcomed particularly the improvement to the access to the Household Waste Recycling Centre in Minehead.
- The education process was important to make West Somerset residents aware that new materials could be recycled. This had been trialed in Wiveliscombe and there would be a media campaign to ensure that residents would be fully aware of changed arrangements.
- Details were given of the communications strategy which was being prepared. Information would be provided through the press, websites and via newsletters.
- Concerns were expressed that containers were too flimsy and had a tendency to break easily. Lids for recycling containers could be purchased through the website.
- The robustness of containers would be reviewed. The 'Recycle More' scheme would provide an opportunity to replace damaged containers.
- The proposed App would not only provide details of collection dates but would also send other appropriate messages/reminders directly to customers.
- There were no proposals to remove any existing charges to Household Waste Recycling Centers (HWRCs) before 2020.
- Different types of asbestos had to be received by HWRCs, and a charge was needed to be levied to cover the costs of disposal.

- There were concerns expressed about the proposed licensing of vans and trailers. The detail relating to permits was still to be finalised and there would be a long lead in to its introduction.

The recommendations were proposed by Cllr Murphy and seconded by Cllr Lillis.

**Resolved** that:-

- (1) The Somerset Waste Partnership's Budget for 2016/2017 be approved; and
- (2) The content for the Business Plan 2016-2021 be noted.

#### **SC147 Draft Corporate Strategy 2016/2020**

The Committee considered the report, WSC 6/16, presented by Cllr Trollope-Bellew, which had been previously circulated.

The purpose of the report was to introduce the draft Corporate Strategy for 2016/2020 as it began its path through the democratic process.

The Strategy outlined the Council's direction for the next four years, setting out a vision, priorities, values and principles. It would guide West Somerset's planning and allocation of resources as detailed corporate and operational plans were established each year.

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

- The document was commended for its clarity and it could be used straightaway for public consultation.
- The Chairman referred to point (f) of Key Theme 3 – Support improvement of public transport provision within West Somerset – which he felt should be moved to Key Theme 1. He considered this point related well to 'communities remaining viable'.
- It was confirmed that the draft Corporate Strategy could only be viewed as aspirational as funding could not be guaranteed. There were hopes that parts of the vision could be provided, for example through lobbying for better transport and the provision of further affordable housing through future Section 106 Agreements.

The recommendation was proposed by Cllr Murphy and seconded by Cllr Thwaites.

**Resolved** that the adoption of the Corporate Strategy be supported subject to the suggested alteration set out in the second bullet point above.

**SC148 Financial Standing and Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17**

The Committee considered the report, WSC 7/16, presented by Cllr Chilcott, which had been previously circulated.

The purpose of the report was to inform the Scrutiny Committee of the latest status of the Council's financial planning, including the latest Medium Term Financial Plan forecasts and the processes involved in its drafting.

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

**Council Tax**

- The Government's solution for funding the Somerset Rivers Authority would involve a shadow precept representing a rise of 1.25% in Council Tax. Was the Cabinet minded to support this rise?
- If all the other Somerset authorities were in favour, it was likely West Somerset would support the solution too. So far all Councils appeared supportive and there was some confidence that this would go ahead.
- Sedgemoor District Council already supported its Internal Drainage Boards financially, but the indication was that Sedgemoor would support the scheme if all other Councils subscribed.
- The Council had to also consider increasing Council Tax to the maximum level permitted to reflect current financial pressures on services.
- The report from the consultant Bill Roots would be made available at the next Corporate PAG.
- It was noted that the Maximum Basic Tax Rate increase that could be applied by the Council before a referendum would be needed was £5 in addition to the 1.25% 'shadow precept' in relation to the Somerset Rivers Authority.

Moved by Cllr Maitland-Walker, seconded by Cllr Thwaites that the Cabinet recommended to agree to apply the Maximum Basic Tax Rate increase equivalent to f £5 for a band D property. This proposal was carried.

**New Homes Bonus (NHB)**

- It was questioned why Table 3 in the report indicated that the number of new homes for 2017/2018 showed a fall. The figures beyond 2016/2017 were estimated downwards as there was no certainty that the initial six year period over which NHB was currently payable would be continued by the Government.
- NHB made up 15% of the Council's income. Unfortunately, it did look certain that this figure would reduce in the future.
- Did the Cabinet recognise the need to allocate more housing sites to maximize NHB funding?

### **Rural Services Delivery Grant (RDSG)**

- Whilst the allocation of this grant was welcome news, how sustainable would the grant be in future and what could it be used for?
- The grant could be used for any purpose - lobbying had worked with the Government to a degree - but future reductions were assumed.

### **Budget Gap**

- Noted that the Budget Gap had been reduced to £252,000 since December 2015 when the figure had stood at £549,000. The officers were congratulated on their work to identify further savings.
- Information relating to Business Rates had not been finalised, capital spend had been pared back, and some bids and appeals were likely to have been received during the year. With regard to the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), it was proposed to take a MRP three year holiday but with a mitigating action of setting aside the equivalent amount in capital receipts reserves.
- It was discussed when Transformation timescales and costs would be known.

### **General Reserves**

- Could the reserves above the minimum provision be used for alternative purposes, such as dredging or to create an additional reserve for capital schemes?
- It was prudent to keep the levels higher than the recommended amount. It was likely that an earmarked reserve for capital schemes would be proposed at the forthcoming Cabinet meeting.

### **Capital Programme**

- The proposed offsite backup facility was considered a good “invest to save” project. Additional savings were likely to arise from new customer contact proposals which would be introduced in the future.

### **Appendices**

- Concerns were expressed about the ambition for further economic development in the Corporate Strategy at the same time as a proposal to remove funding for this. Despite this, the Council would still endeavor to provide economic development projects where possible.
- Members questioned the proposed removal of a budget for emergency sandbags. Although there was to be no specific provision, it was explained that some provision for a critical quantity would still be set aside.
- It was questioned if staff had been consulted over proposals to remove water coolers in West Somerset House.

The recommendations were proposed by Cllr Murphy and seconded by Cllr Thwaites.

**Resolved** that:-

(1) The financial standing of the Council through the current Medium Term Financial Plan forecasts and the draft budget estimates and proposals for 2016/2017 be noted; and

(2) The recommendation made in connection with Maximum Basic Tax Rate increase (equivalent to an extra £5 on a band D property) and the other comments made by Scrutiny be referred to the Cabinet for its consideration.

**SC149 Scrutiny Committee Work Plan.**

(Copy of the Forward Plan for 2015/16, circulated with the agenda.)

An update relating to the Ambulance Service was provided. Additional data had been requested in connection with response times but, to date, no response had been received. This would be pursued.

**RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Forward Plan published on 13 January 2015 be noted.

The meeting closed at 5.46 pm.