

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 February 2018 at 3.30 pm**

**Present:**

Councillor P H Murphy .....Chairman  
Councillor N Thwaites .....Vice-Chairman

Councillor I Aldridge  
Councillor G S Dowding  
Councillor B Maitland-Walker

Councillor J Parbrook  
Councillor P Pilkington  
Councillor R Woods

**Members in Attendance:**

Councillor M Chilcott

Councillor A Hadley

**Officers in Attendance:**

Assistant Director – Resources and Support (P Carter)  
Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny (M Prouse)  
Democratic Services Officer (C Rendell)

**SC 68 Apologies for Absence**

An apology was received from Councillor R Clifford.

**SC 69 Minutes**

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 18 January 2018 – circulated with the Agenda.)

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 18 January 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

**SC 70 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 15.02.18

Name	Minute No.	Description of Interest	Personal or Prejudicial or Disclosable Pecuniary	Action Taken
Cllr I Aldridge	All items	Williton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr B Maitland-Walker	All items	Carhampton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P Murphy	All items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr J Parbrook	All items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P Pilkington	All items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr N Thwaites	All items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr M Chilcott	All items	SCC	Personal	Spoke

**SC 71 Public Participation**

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

**SC 72 Cabinet Key Decisions and Actions**

(Copy of the Cabinet Key Decisions from the meeting held on 7 February 2018, circulated at the meeting)

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Key Decisions from the meeting held on 7 February 2018, be noted.

**SC 73 Cabinet Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 26 January 2018, circulated at the meeting).

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 26 January 2018, with amendments, be noted.

**SC 74 Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman reminded the Committee Members that they had been invited to take part in the Car Park Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Maitland-Walker had attended the recent meeting of the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Scrutiny Committee and gave an update on what had been discussed at the meeting. The main highlight was the SRA Scrutiny Forward Plan and confirmation that the Authority still sought to become a precepting body.

**SC 75 Financial Monitoring 2017-2018**

The report WSC 10/18 was presented by Councillor M Chilcott.

The purpose of the report was to provide Scrutiny Committee with an update on

the projected 'outturn' on the end of year financial position of the Council for the financial year 2017-2018, as at 31 December 2017.

The current outturn forecast for the Revenue Budget for 2017-2018 was a net underspend of £49,000. The gross underspend was £179,874.

The current General Reserves balance was £858,776 which was above the recommended minimum. If the forecast for 31 December 2017 proved to be accurate, the projected balance at the end of the year was £1,017,562, which would be £317,562 above the recommended minimum. In view of the Council's financial position, increasing the reserves balance was strongly advised, therefore, the forecast underspend was welcomed from a financial resilience perspective.

The Earmarked Reserves projected balance was £3,227,213 after the proposed recommended transfers to Earmarked Reserves. The majority of those reserves were allocated to Business Rates Funding Volatility, Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment, Planning Policy, Asset Maintenance and Compliance and Creating a New Council/Transformation.

The current forecast position for the General Fund Capital Programme in 2017-2018 was a net underspend of £52,400 against a total approved budget of £11,217,020. Forecast spend during the year was £900,582 with £10,264,038 projected to be spent in the following year. Spend to date was only £585,277, therefore, a proportion of the costs were projected to be incurred in the last quarter of the year.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Chairman requested clarification on the reasons behind the recommendations.  
*Officers clarified that the accounts were in a better position from when the budget was originally set. However, they expected a potential trough when Hinkley Point B was decommissioned. Therefore, they wanted to put the money aside now whilst they had the funds to help mitigate the impact. The recommendations were used to provide contingency arrangements.*
- Members queried how many assets required an Energy Performance Certificate?  
*Approximately 30 properties with a cost of £6500. This would be clarified.*
- Concern was raised on the excess income in the car parks and open spaces maintenance budget. There was some confusion on the volatility within the figures.  
*The Maintenance Budget was set based on the known figures for maintenance works. However, there could be other works that were undertaken and could be charged for which was unknown and had to be accounted for. Walls were included and could require maintenance based on age or vandalism, which was hard to predict.*
- Concern was raised that the £10,000 Car Park Reserve had not been used.  
*Officers clarified the excess income figure for Car Parks and Open Spaces.*

- Concern was raised on delays to maintenance work due to legal action and disputes on ownership.
- Members queried if it was a coincidence that £30,000 had been transferred in and out the Asset Maintenance and Compliance Reserve and was that the reason for recommendation 2) c).  
*Yes it was a coincidence and was expected to be spent within the year, but it was not the reason for the recommendation.*
- Members queried if the savings generated by Building Control was due to work not being carried out.  
*No. The savings were due to joint work within the Somerset Building Control Partnership.*
- Members queried the savings created within Environmental Health based on a vacant post and if recruitment was planned for this post.  
*No, there was a recruitment freeze at West Somerset Council (WSC).*
- Members queried whether West Somerset Employment Hub funding was allocated to all community outreach programmes so they could become self-sufficient.  
*Officers would check and send a response to the Committee.*
- Concern was raised on the money that had not been spent from the Hinkley Point Empty Homes Fund. There was an issue in the District with empty homes and officers should be more proactive.  
*Officers had not had enough resource during the year, but there was some work due to take place that would ensure the money was spent.*
- Concern was raised over the Business Rates Levy Payment and the volatility based on the likely recalculation of the Hinkley Point rates.  
*The Levy was based on all Business Rates within the District. It was not based wholly on the Hinkley Point recalculation.*
- Members queried the Destitute Burial Reserve and how many did officers expect in the year.  
*Officers could not budget for how many would be needed, the figure was based on previous years.*
- Concern was raised that the Dulverton Mill Leat had lost £12,000.  
*Officers had confirmed that the money was not required earlier in the year.*
- Members queried whether the freeze on recruitment applied to Taunton Deane Borough Council as well as WSC. Concern was raised based on two posts that had been recruited during the freeze.  
*Yes there was a recruitment freeze across both Councils. The posts that had been recruited were deemed necessary to the organisation throughout the Transformation Project. However, the concern would be passed on to the Senior Management Team.*
- Members queried why WSC was in a better financial position.  
*Officers explained that the one off windfall was due to the changes to the Levy and Tariff payments made to Government.*
- Concern was raised on the delay in the Transformation Project and whether that had caused an extra cost which had led to recommendation 2) b). Members queried whether both Councils had put money aside for the project.  
*The recommendation was simply a contingency arrangement for the restructure. Both Councils had recommended to put money aside.*
- Members urged officers not to delay the Transformation Project any further due to concerns raised on behalf of staff.

- Concern was raised that there wasn't any information within the report that related to Invest to Save projects and that there should be someone in post to work on the opportunities within the Sustainability Reserve. *There was a report due to be considered at the next WSC Full Council meeting. Officers hoped that the post would be filled due to the amount of work that needed to be carried out for Invest to Save projects.*
- Members made a commercial suggestion that WSC could charge companies for advertisement space on the website.
- Members suggested that WSC could charge Town and Parish Councils for the use of the Data Protection Officer's expertise with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) due to take effect in May 2018. *Officers commented that they needed to know more about the implications of GDPR before they could offer support to other Councils.*
- Members highlighted that WSC needed to be more proactive and set up schemes that generated income.

**RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Committee:-

- 1) Noted the Council's financial performance forecast as at 31 December 2017 with the estimated position at the end of the financial year; and
- 2) Supported the recommendation to Cabinet and Full Council to transfer:
  - a) £600,000 to the Business Rates Smoothing Reserve;
  - b) £70,000 to the Sustainability Reserve instead of the Transformation Reserve; and
  - c) £30,000 to the Asset Management and Compliance Reserve.

## **SC 76 Scrutiny Committee Work Plan**

The following items were highlighted for the Forward Plan:-

- The Revenue Outturn Report was highlighted for the June meeting;
- Members requested that the Broadband Report was brought forward to the April meeting; and
- A report on Commercialism was requested to be added to the Forward Plan.

Members were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Scrutiny Officer.

**RESOLVED** that the content of the Work Plan be noted.

The meeting closed at 5.06pm.