

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 July 2013 at 3.30 pm**

**Present:**

Councillor K J Ross .....Chairman (left at 5.35pm)  
Councillor R P Lillis ..... Vice-Chairman

Councillor M J Chilcott  
Councillor G S Dowding  
Councillor B Heywood

Councillor M O A Dewdney  
Councillor J Freeman  
Councillor P H Murphy

**Members in Attendance:**

Councillor K V Kravis  
Councillor D D Ross  
Councillor M A Smith  
Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew  
Councillor D J Westcott

Councillor K M Mills  
Councillor D J Sanders  
Councillor T Taylor  
Councillor K H Turner

**Officers in Attendance:**

Corporate Director (B Lang)  
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)  
Corporate Manager - Housing, Welfare & Economy (I Timms)  
Corporate Manager – Environment, Customer & Community (S Watts)  
Economic Regeneration and Tourism Manager (C Matthews)  
Principal Accountant (S Plenty)  
Administrative Support (H Dobson)

**SC21 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P N Grierson and L W Smith.

**SC22 Minutes**

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June 2013 – circulated with the Agenda).

**RESOLVED** that, subject to amendments to SC18, the first bullet point to read, ‘Concerns were expressed that some of the rhynes were not functional...,’ and the second bullet point to remove the word ‘sea’, the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17 June 2013, be confirmed as a correct record.

**SC23 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 H Murphy	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K J Ross	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K H Turner	All Items	Brompton Ralph	Personal	Spoke
Cllr D J Westcott	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke

In addition, Councillor R P Lillis expressed a prejudicial interest in Item 8, Devolution on Grounds Maintenance and Public Conveniences – Update, as he had expressed an interest in running/managing public conveniences in West Somerset and left the chamber for that item.

**SC24 Public Participation**

Mr Tony Bullen spoke on Item 8, Devolution on Grounds Maintenance and Public Conveniences – Update, to the effect that he raised concerns that the Council was not cutting an area of grass along Townsend Road which he believed the Council were legally obliged to do. He was in possession of written historical evidence to support his statement and had passed the information on to the Council. He requested that the Committee hold the Cabinet to account for not doing the work properly and questioned why the residents had not been advised of current changes to the Council's schedule of work affecting the cutting of the grass.

**SC25 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 for 3 July 2013, be noted.

**SC26 Cabinet Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward published 5 July 2013, circulated with the agenda).

Members noted that the Scrutiny Committee membership, as listed on the last page of the Cabinet Forward Plan, was out of date and requested that it be updated.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Forward published 5 July 2013, be noted.

**SC27 Devolution on Grounds Maintenance and Public Conveniences - Update**

(Report No. WSC 80/13, circulated with the Agenda).

Councillor R P Lillis left the chamber for this item.

The purpose of the report was to comply with a request from the committee for a progress report on the devolution of the grounds maintenance service and the provision of public conveniences.

Councillor Trollope-Bellew confirmed that the Council would look at the evidence relating to grass cutting in Townsend Road and act accordingly.

Councillor Chilcott informed that it had been recognised that there were some areas of land in Minehead where it was not currently known who owns them and that she was working on resolving that, however, it would take quite some time.

In response to points raised Members were advised that although the devolution process started quite some time ago it was pleasing to know that the parish and town councils had all been given the same opportunity and, essentially, time to consider the option of taking on devolved services, and had resulted in some very good examples of partnership working.

The Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Growth celebrated the progress made with regard to the partnership working with Porlock and Watchet to devolve and shape the future use of their public conveniences. She was hoping for progress with Dunster and Minehead and invited other parish and town councils to engage in dialogue with the Council.

Concern was raised with regard to the process followed that had enabled the Market Street, Watchet public conveniences to remain open with the financial assistance of the Council and how the budget had been affected.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the contents of the report be noted;

**RESOLVED (2)** that it be recommended to Council to review the decision making process in regard to the operation of the Market Street toilets in Watchet for the 2013/14 financial year and consider the impact on the budget.

**Note:** With the agreement of the Chairman this item was brought forward on the Agenda.

## **SC28 Economic Regeneration and Tourism Update**

(Report No. WSC 84/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to update Members about the work of the Economic Regeneration and Tourism service area of West Somerset Council.

The Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Growth presented the report and highlighted that although the team did not have a specific revenue budget, the amount of work conducted by the team and the external funding levered in 2012/13 was impressive.

In response to points raised the Economic Regeneration and Tourism Manager advised:

- The delay in the development of Hinkley Point C and associated funding had enabled the team to have valuable time to work in supporting the

business supply chain etc. The tourism funds were contained in phase 2 of the development, however, it has been possible to draw some funding down for the tourism centres.

- The team now had access to an excellent business database that was helping to store many more businesses, therefore the SMART target of 1% was growing as the contents of the database grows and increasing the number of businesses that would receive assistance.
- With regard to higher level skills, the Council was working with Bridgwater College and had been able to deliver some further education for adults. Given that Bridgwater College was not a higher education college it was more difficult to draw funding for that level, however, work was continuing to assist all ages and ranges.
- She acknowledged that it was expensive to produce a tourism brochure and that some members of the public would be disappointed as this year was the last time that the Visit Exmoor brochure would be produced. However, the Council was following trends which were better and more efficient at promoting tourism in West Somerset.
- She confirmed that there was funding for the Minehead Visitor Information Centre for another three years. She was pleased with their progress and would meet with them after the summer to consider how to continue supporting them over the next couple of years.

Members praised the Economic Regeneration and Tourism Team for their hard work over the last 18 months.

**RESOLVED** that the report and comprehensive list of achievements of the Economic Regeneration and Tourism Service area for 2012/13 and the first quarter of this financial year, be noted;

## **SC29 Funding of Capital Expenditure**

(Report No. WSC 79/13, circulated after the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to advise Members on how capital expenditure in the current year's programme is to be financed together with the strategy for the funding of programmes in future years.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and advised that she was aware of the issues that were likely to arise as the Council's assets were sold. In 2016/17 it was likely there would be no funds for capital expenditure and she was looking to include the associated issues in the Council's financial models.

On consideration of the report the following points were made:

- How would it be possible to fund maintenance for Council owned assets with reduced grants year on year?
- Concern that potential buyers would be aware of the Council's need to sell assets to raise revenue and would therefore have an advantage when bidding for an asset.

In response to concerns raised by the Committee it was confirmed that it would be sensible to look at borrowing against the selling of assets, but it would be

wrong to borrow solely because rates were low. Borrowing would entail the Council putting aside an allocation to repay the money which could have a serious impact on the revenue account and services. Although, not the whole answer to the Council's financial concerns, the proposed joint partnership working project could potentially provide savings.

The Principal Accountant confirmed that he would provide a breakdown of IT costs as shown in the Capital Programme 2013/14, Table 1 of the report, attached to the agenda, after the meeting. He confirmed that capital expenditure was reviewed every quarter to ensure that all items in the capital account were correct and any potential capital receipts were acted upon accordingly.

**RESOLVED** that the contents of the report be noted.

**SC30 Revenue and Capital Outturn 2012/13**

(Report No. WSC 82/13, circulated after the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with the financial outturn position for 2012/13.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and highlighted the underspend of over £557,588 for 2012/13. The underspend was a result of the pressing need to identify and make savings and has meant that there was now no need to move earmarked reserves into the general reserves.

Members questioned why there was an Economic Regeneration earmarked reserve relating to the remaining foot and mouth fund, and requested that it be looked into.

**RESOLVED** that the outturn position and requests for transfers to and from earmarked reserves be noted.

**SC31 Cabinet Response to Reports to Scrutiny – Update**

(Report No. WSC 85/13), circulated after the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to note reports relating to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations following the Task & Finish Group reviews of Planning Obligations and section 106 Agreements and the impact of Business Rates Retention Scheme.

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer presented the report and reminded members that this was the first time that a Scrutiny task and finish group had reported back to Cabinet with recommendations and was therefore a learning process. She advised that the following item on the agenda sets out a proposed process to follow for similar future reports to Cabinet.

Members noted that more time had been needed to allow Cabinet to fully understand the recommendations and to make responses accordingly.

During the course of the discussion the following additional recommendations were made and considered:

- That an item to consider Cabinet responses regarding recommendations received from the Scrutiny Task & Finish Groups be scheduled in the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan at six month intervals.
- That Cabinet be requested to respond formally via a report to the Scrutiny Committee providing detailed responses with regard to changes to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.

On being put to the vote it was

**RESOLVED (1)** that the decisions taken by Cabinet in response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee be noted.

**RESOLVED (2)** that the Scrutiny Committee receive a report back on the implementation of the Cabinet's decisions at a future meeting.

**RESOLVED (3)** that an item to consider Cabinet responses regarding recommendations received from the Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Groups be scheduled in the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan, at six month intervals.

**RESOLVED (4)** that Cabinet be requested to respond formally via a report to the Scrutiny Committee providing detailed responses with regard to changes to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group in respect of the Section 106 process.

### **SC32 Scrutiny Recommendations – Suggested Reporting Procedure**

(Report No. WSC 86/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to strengthen and clarify the procedure for reporting Scrutiny Committee recommendations to Cabinet and to clarify the role and relationships of Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet members throughout the process.

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer presented the report and highlighted the stages listed in the proposed Scrutiny Review Process at Appendix A to the report, attached to the agenda.

In response to members concerns the Monitoring Officer advised that the stages, as set out in the appendix, would provide a minimum interaction/dialogue that both Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet could expect and therefore would allow for as many additional discussions between the interested parties to be undertaken if needed.

**RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Review Process, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be endorsed and be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

### **SC33 Scrutiny Committee Work Plan**

(Scrutiny Committee Work Plan, circulated with the Agenda).

**RESOLVED (1)** that a follow up report to the implementation of the Task and Finish Group recommendations in respect of the section 106 process be added to the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 19 August 2013.

**RESOLVED (2)** that a joint partnership working update with Taunton Deane be added to the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 16 September 2013.

**RESOLVED (3)** that the Work Plan be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm.