

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 June 2013 at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor K J RossChairman (left at 5.30pm)
Councillor R P Lillis Vice-Chairman

Councillor M J Chilcott
Councillor G S Dowding
Councillor B Heywood

Councillor M O A Dewdney
Councillor P N Grierson
Councillor P H Murphy

Members in Attendance:

Councillor E May
Councillor T Taylor (left at 4.15pm)
Councillor K H Turner

Councillor D J Sanders
Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew
Councillor D J Westcott

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)
Performance and Efficiencies Officer (K Batchelor)
Principal Accountant (S Plenty)
Administrative Support (H Dobson)

SC11 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Freeman.

SC12 Minutes

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 20 May 2013 – circulated with the Agenda).

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 20 May 2013, 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 or Disclosable Pecuniary	Action Taken
Cllr P N Grierson	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
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

SC14 Public Participation

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

SC15 Notes of Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points

(Copy of Notes of Cabinet Decisions/Action Points, circulated with the agenda).

With regard to the observation that Cabinet Agenda Item 11, some resolutions, had been changed from the original recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Director advised that two reports would be presented at the next the Scrutiny Committee meeting. The first to provide the reasoning as to why any recommendations had been changed at Cabinet and the second to set out a proposed process for dealing with the reporting to cabinet of recommendations to Cabinet and the reporting back and monitoring of subsequent decisions and any related actions taken by cabinet.

RESOLVED that the Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points for 5 June 2013, be noted.

SC16 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward published 6 June 2013, circulated with the agenda).

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward published 6 June 2013, be noted.

SC17 Corporate Performance Report – Service Plan Monitoring – April to March 2012/13

(Report No. WSC 70/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with an update on progress in delivering the corporate priorities and performance of council services covering the period from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

During the consideration of the performance report the following main points were raised:

- Noted key action 1.1.2 and the concern that if the planning application for the delivery of 20 affordable homes in Townsend Farm, Carhampton keeps being delayed the income to the Council might be reduced. Members noted that issues between the developer and owners of the land needed to be agreed upon. The deadline for the developer was sometime in 2015.

- It was confirmed that with regard to key action 1.1.3, the Council was still looking for an alternative site in/around Simonsbath to deliver affordable housing as it was considered there was a demand in and around the area.
- There was concern that some of the targets were either not being met or were reached too easily due to external influences. Therefore it was questioned as to whether the housing targets were necessary. In response Members were advised that there were a range of reasons to keep targets: they were a useful aim and provided a baseline as the Council was required to meet the housing need in the area. The Corporate Manager advised that although work regarding Townsend Way and Seaward Way was slow it was ongoing and he was confident that planning applications would be submitted and would provide relevant timescales after the meeting. It was suggested that perhaps once a year the council could review targets to see if they were reasonable or not. The Corporate Director confirmed that there was a clear process to follow to adjust a target part way through the year if necessary.
- Key tasks 1.2.2, 1.2.3 and 1.2.4 – delivering empty properties back into use. Members were advised that due to the slowdown regarding the provision of affordable homes, resources had been diverted to concentrate on empty homes. The recording had changed from just recording those that were difficult, to recording the whole movement of empty properties and so the target had altered. It was suggested that the target could be increased further.
- Key tasks 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 – Submit data to support business case to be considered by Hinkley 106 Board and West Somerset Cabinet to maintain supply of all types of housing. Members were advised that a good deal of preparation work in respect of the target was being undertaken and that the Corporate Management Team were considering the issues around the delay of phase 2 and how it might affect relevant staff in the future.
- Key task 3.1.2 – Noted that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would receive a report providing detail with regard to promoting higher level skills delivery in West Somerset.
- Key task 4.1.4 – The Corporate Manager advised that he would look into the success rate regarding whether the long workless were able to access employment and advise after the meeting.
- Concern was raised with regard to the decline in fee earning applications for April 2012 - March 2013 received by the Building Control Service. It was confirmed that part of the service was statutory.
- Key task 10.2.4 –
 - Concern was raised regarding the loss of car park income and that the introduction of CPE had not generated the amount of income expected.
 - Savings from Grounds Maintenance – it was confirmed that nine volunteers had started work in Blenheim Gardens.
- After discussing the devolving of some services from the Council to town councils the Scrutiny Committee requested that progress on the devolution of services be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.
- Members noted the huge increase in Freedom of Information requests and the related cost to the Council and requested that a break-down of the type of information being asked for be provided after the meeting.
- Members noted that the Council's Community Right to Bid process would be reviewed at the end of the year by full Council.

- Key task 9.1 – Value for money. It was noted that the council continued to gather information on its services which was used for benchmarking and as part of the proposed partnership work with Taunton Deane.

Officers noted the information requested by the Scrutiny Committee and would arrange to circulate the said information after the meeting.

RESOLVED (1) that a progress report on the devolution of council services be included on the Scrutiny Committee work plan.

RESOLVED (2) that officers and Lead Members be encouraged to keep targets realistic and under review and amend if considered appropriate.

RESOLVED (3) that the progress in delivering the corporate priorities for 2012/13 be noted.

RESOLVED (4) that the performance against Group and service Indicators be noted.

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

SC18 Maintenance of Water Courses on Council Owned Land

(Report No. WSC 69/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to provide members of the Scrutiny Committee with information in regard to the Council's responsibility in maintaining and monitoring water courses that are on WSC land.

The Lead Member for Environment presented the report and advised that the previous year had been the wettest in England for 100 years and, as a result, the water courses have been thoroughly tested. He highlighted the WSC land drainage programme summary at appendix A, attached to the agenda.

The Corporate Manager for Environment, Customer and Community advised of a strategic county wide group at Somerset County Council (SCC) who would meet to discuss flooding issues on a quarterly basis and would include the relevant Portfolio Holders from all Somerset authorities. Further, under the Land Drainage Act, SCC was looking to devolve land drainage duties back to this Council who would receive £7,500 per annum to undertake the work. There was local knowledge to draw upon and the Council was working with small groups to resolve the issues.

During the course of the debate the following points were raised:

- Concerns were expressed that some of the ryhnes were not functional and that it would be prudent to ensure that they were cleared sooner rather than later.
- The drainage system was also to assist with the quick removal of water and there was concern that the attenuation ponds were not free flowing due to debris causing obstruction.

- It was suggested that perhaps the Drainage Board might take over the maintenance of some/all of the water courses if they were of a particular standard.
- It was noted that with regard to the proposed new housing along Seaward Way any mitigating measures in place to offset flooding issues would be at the discretion of the Environment Agency. Also, the planning process would determine how the S106 monies, associated with the new housing, might be used.

The Principal Accountant confirmed that he would provide a breakdown of the flood defence and coastal protection budgets for the previous and current years after the meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

SC19 **Asset Management Review – Nomination of Members to Task & Finish Group**

(Report No. WSC 71/13, circulated after the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to agree membership of a task and finish group to undertake a review of the Asset Management Strategy and associated matters.

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer suggested that the terms of reference for the Group would include the range of assets held by the Council, community use, income, terms of agreement and how rents are set.

RESOLVED that the membership of the Asset Management Review Task and Finish Group be comprised of Councillors P Grierson, R Lillis, M Dewdney and P Murphy and cover the terms of reference as set out above.

SC20 **Scrutiny Committee Work Plan**

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

RESOLVED (1) that a progress report on the devolution of Council services to town and parish councils be scheduled for an appropriate future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED (2) that an update on the Taunton Deane Partnership project and the Somerset Waste Partnership be scheduled for the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on 16 September 2013.

RESOLVED (3) that an invitation be sent to NHS Somerset requesting an update on the issues relating to the out of hours GP provision.

RESOLVED (4) that the Work Plan be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.18 pm.