

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 December 2015 at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor P H MurphyChairman
Councillor G S DowdingVice Chairman

Councillor B Heywood
Councillor R Thomas

Councillor B Maitland-Walker
Councillor R Thwaites

Members in Attendance:

Councillor I Aldridge
Councillor M Dewdney
Councillor A Trollope-Bellew

Councillor M Chilcott
Councillor K J Mills

Officers in Attendance:

Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer – (B Lang)
Assistant Director – Resources (P Fitzgerald)
Assistant Director – Energy Infrastructure (A Goodchild)
Assistant Director – Operational Delivery (C Hall)
Media and Communications Officer (D Rundle)
Administrative Support (A Randell)

SC133 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors D Archer, A Behan, R Clifford, R Lillis, J Parbrook and R Woods.

Substitutions:- Councillor R Thomas for Councillor R Lillis
Councillor N Thwaites for Councillor R Clifford
Councillor B Heywood for Councillor R Woods

In the absence of Councillor R Lillis, Councillor S Dowding was duly appointed as Vice Chairman for the meeting

SC134 Minutes

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12 November 2015 – circulated with the Agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12 November 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

SC135 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

An additional Interest was declared by Councillor Murphy who has a relative on the board of Arlife. Councillors Dowding and Trollope-Bellew declared interests as members of the AONB board.

An additional personal Interest was declared by Councillor Murphy whose partner was on the board of Arlife in regard to SC139 and Councillors Dowding and Trollope-Bellew declared personal interests in Minute No SC139 as members of the Quantock Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Board.

SC136 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 from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 2 December 2015, be noted.

SC137 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 2 December 2015, 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 2 December 2015, be noted.

SC138 Report of the Task and Finish Group established to consider the Community Impact Mitigation Fund (CIM Fund) following their review.

The Committee considered the report, WSC 188/2015, presented by Cllr Peter Murphy, circulated with the agenda.

The purpose of the report was to present the findings of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group established to consider the Community Impact Mitigation Fund (CIM Fund) following their review.

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

- The work undertaken by officers to create the report was commended. The report was considered valuable for issues to be identified that would enable the application process to be improved for all applicants.
- It was important that those that could apply to the fund were made aware of the importance attached to the seeking of match funding for all applications.
- It was suggested that a report was brought back to the committee on one occasion rather than multiple times to save officer time.
- Further detail was requested on applications that had been rejected.
- There was concern that in one case, a group had made a presentation to the Planning Obligations Board (POB) and that the POB should consider the criteria for inviting presentations in the future. The suggestion for consideration was that all applicants submitting an application for the second time should be invited to present at the POB meeting.
- The view was expressed that the board did not want to disadvantage or create an unfair impression of those who may present less well which was why they preferred a paper based approach.
- It was considered important to have a paper trail for every bid to be able to demonstrate consistency.
- An important comment from one applicant was that the Council should consider adopting a commissioning approach rather than waiting for applications to come forward and to seek to identify impacts that needed to be mitigated. Thus the recommendation that an overarching funding strategy should be commenced once the Final Investment Decision was announced.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor P Murphy and seconded by Councillor Dowding

Resolved that the following points be recommended to Cabinet:-

- 1.1. That the introduction of the application form for bids of less than £1k is monitored for a period of 6 months with a report back to members outlining the feasibility of introducing application forms for:
 - Bids of less than £1k;
 - Bids of less than £25k; and
 - Bids over £25k.
- 1.2. That all application forms and accompanying guidance make the position on requiring match funding (or not) very clear to all potential bidders.

- 1.3. That following a Final Investment Decision, a report is presented to Scrutiny Committee outlining the process that will be followed to produce an Overarching Funding Strategy and how all members can engage in that process.
- 1.4. Members support the inclusion of a more detailed explanation of the eligibility and funding criteria in the new application form and guidance notes. Members also support the production of real life case studies to support applicants in the future.
- 1.5. That information given to potential applicants provides details on the roles and responsibilities of both the CIM Fund Manager and the Housing and Community Project Lead. This information should help distinguish between the roles of each of these posts. This section of the guidance document should also make the arrangement with Engage West Somerset explicitly clear.
- 1.6. That all correspondence with applications who have submitted a successful Expression of Interest and have subsequently been invited to make a full application continues to make it clear that such an invitation should in no way be seen as an indication of future success.
- 1.7. That a critical path diagram is produced to show applicants what happens and when and how they can seek help and advice throughout the process. This should contain information about the decision making process and how and when to engage with elected members.
- 1.8. That a consistent approach to Word Counts is used and this approach is clearly explained in any documentation.
- 1.9. To avoid confusion, ensure that each question within the re-designed application form is only one question, not a question within a question.
- 1.10. That clear guidance is provided to applicants about how they can engage with the CIM Fund Decision making process. Such guidance should remind applicants that they have the opportunity to address Cabinet and Council meetings of West Somerset Council for 3 minutes in which to state the case for their project.

The Task and Finish Group also recommend that the Planning Obligations Board consider inviting all applicants submitting an application for the second time should be invited to present at the POB meeting.
- 1.11. That the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group is invited at an appropriate time to consider the revised application form and guidance documents before they are made publicly available.

- 1.12. An update report on all these recommendations is presented to Scrutiny 12 months after adoption in order to monitor progress.

SC139 Budget and Further Savings Options 2016/17

a) Parking Fees and Charges Report.

The Committee considered the report, WSC 191/15, presented by Cllr Karen Mills, which had been previously circulated.

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with proposed changes to the charging process that supports traffic management of tourist industry by seeking to influence driver behavior with the following outcomes:

- Incentive for commuters to use car parks away from the main tourist sites, freeing up space for tourists and visitors to the area.
- Continue investment in parking assets.

It sought approval for changes to the summer car park tariffs; removal of the three hour zero tariff when valid blue badges are displayed in vehicles; and an increase to six months and yearly permits.

It also identified the ongoing investment needed to improve the assets, the customers experience and convenience.

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

- Charging blue badge holders was recognised as representing an important change of policy. Some considered this was unreasonable. A revised Equalities Impact Assessment was tabled which identified the adverse impacts on those with protected characteristics.
- There were fears that this was being introduced to generate more income from a service that was already generating a surplus. Members were reassured that similar policies were in place across most local authorities in Somerset, it was stated that changes had not been made for budgetary reasons but through a policy change to ensure all users of the car parks made a contribution.
- Concern was expressed that blue badge holders would use on street parking more if they were charged in car parks. It was stated that when similar charges were introduced in South Somerset there was not a significant impact in this regard. As a mitigation, Blue Badge holders would get an extra 30 minutes parking in recognition of their particular needs.
- Changes to charges were being proposed to dissuade tourist car parks from being used by commuters.

- The car parks service had been in consultation with on street parking changes with Somerset County Council. Blue badge holders were still able to access shopper's permits.
- The policy was to focus on giving those that are disabled ease of access and positive discrimination whilst not financially supporting those holding blue badges, ensuring equality for all the car parks users.

Resolved that the committee supported the changes to the fees and charges identified in the report

b) Further Savings Options for 2016/17

The committee considered report, WSC 190/2015, presented by Cllr Mandy Chillcott, previously circulated with the agenda.

The purpose of the report was to provide Scrutiny Committee with an update on budget estimates for 2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) forecasts, and to consult members on a range of further savings options being considered for the budget.

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

- Officers were commended on the work undertaken to produce the report.
- It was acknowledged that the format of appendix A had been improved to make it more legible and had taken into account the comments made at the last meeting of the Scrutiny committee.
- The columns related to Partnership Working and Health and Well Being had been removed and there was no longer any reference to the impact on the Council's Vision Statement.
- Debate took place over the level of minimum reserves that was currently held. It was questioned if some of the £300,000 that was held over the set minimum a proportion could be used to mitigate savings.
- It was explained that the minimum reserves figure was considered to be an absolute minimum to cover contingencies and that it was therefore financially prudent to retain a figure above the absolute minimum.
- The comment was made that it should be worth considering that 10% of the £300,000 above the minimum level be earmarked for use to mitigate some of the proposed savings.
- The removal of the grant to Artife was said to place the delivery of the SLA with the council in jeopardy. Members had not seen the SLA but they were informed that a new partnership agreement had been signed with Artlife to give them financial support along with a desk, phone, computer and a post facility in West Somerset House.
- It was requested that in subsequent reports the impact of any proposed savings on the Council's priorities and vision statement be included for members to consider.

- It was questioned why the multiplier effect of council funding to voluntary groups was not included in the report with exception of the Quantock AONB item. Members were informed that this was included in the report last month. It was suggested that it should be included in future reports since the paperwork no longer included the responses from the voluntary groups themselves.
- It was stated that Engage had said they were happy with the non-financial support that they had received.
- Concerns were expressed in relation to the increases in the toilet charges from 20p to 50p and it was confirmed that radar key arrangements for disabled facilities would not be affected.
- In relation to changes to the funding of public toilet facilities, members were informed that there were 16 months before the proposed changes to funding would be implemented, this time would be used to consult with town and parish councils, along with businesses to explore means (other than by Council funding) for keeping them open post April 2017.
- Some town and parish councils had already approached the council looking to take on services; the existing Veolia contract was due to run out in September.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the confidential appendices attached to the report because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 3 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

Confidential Appendices C, D, P Q and R were considered by the committee.

The committee gave consideration to the detail contained in the confidential appendices.

Resolved that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting

Resolved that Scrutiny note the latest budget estimates, savings options and budget adjustments and requests that the points raised above be taken into consideration as part of the deliberations going forward.

SC140 Scrutiny Committee Work Plan

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

The following items were to be added to the workplan for April 2016:-

- Williton Hospital Stroke Unit Business Case Consultation (provisional)
- Asset Management Update.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Forward Plan published on 9 December 2015, as amended, be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.20 pm.