

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 August 2013 at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor K J RossChairman
Councillor G S DowdingVice-Chairman (for this
meeting)

Councillor M J Chilcott
Councillor J Freeman
Councillor B Heywood

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

Members in Attendance:

Councillor K V Kravis
Councillor D D Ross
Councillor T Taylor
Councillor K H Turner

Councillor K M Mills
Councillor M A Smith
Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew
Councillor D J Westcott

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive (A Dyer)
Deputy Monitoring Officer (I Timms)
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)
Corporate Manager – Environment, Customer & Community (S Watts)
Section 151 Officer (S Campbell)
Principal Benefits and Fraud Officer (P Lamb)
Administrative Support (H Dobson)

SC34 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R P Lillis.

SC35 Appointment of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor G S Dowding be appointed Vice-Chairman for the meeting.

The Chairman advised of the request to hold a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 24 October 2013 to consider the business plan of joint shared services and management with Taunton Deane Borough Council.

RESOLVED that the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee scheduled for Monday 21 October 2013 be changed to be held on Thursday 24 October 2013, at 2.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Williton.

SC36 Minutes

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 July 2013 – circulated with the Agenda).

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 July 2013, be confirmed as a correct record.

SC37 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

SC38 Public Participation

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

SC39 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 7 August 2013, be noted.

SC40 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward published 8 August 2013, circulated with the agenda).

RESOLVED (1) that the Cabinet Forward published 8 August 2013, be noted;

RESOLVED (2) that at future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee the current quarter's reports as listed in the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

SC41 Impact of Welfare Reform on the Benefits and Fraud Service

(Report No. WSC 90/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to brief Scrutiny Committee of the impact of welfare reform on the benefits and fraud service.

The Lead Member for Community and Customer presented the report and praised the department for their hard work.

In response to concerns regarding the Social Sector Size Criteria, commonly known as the 'bedroom tax', and the Council Tax Rebate the Principal Benefits and Fraud Officer advised that arrears and arrears levels data relating to Magna West Somerset would be considered at a meeting of the Community PAG to be held the next day. He confirmed that the public had made quite good use of the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme and that the expenditure was on target. He believed the scheme was quite transparent and that generally the public thought it was reasonably fair.

The Group Manager for Housing, Welfare and Economy reported that the government had recently granted an additional one off payment of approximately £81,000 to off-set the impacts of the Welfare Reform. A report would be presented to Council to consider how this additional money could be spent. With regard to the Council Tax Reduction Discretionary Scheme he believed that the number of applications were likely to increase after the second quarter, about November 2013. He confirmed that details relating to Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme and the Council Tax Reduction Discretionary Scheme would be included in the second quarter performance report.

In response to requests the Principal Benefits and Fraud Officer confirmed that he would provide: up to date information relating to the numbers of families who were affected by two or three of the reforms, after the meeting; and a rolling monthly expenditure figure of the Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme would be provided each month.

The Scrutiny Committee wished to express their appreciation to the team and thank them for their hard work.

RESOLVED (1) that the impact on the service and the actions undertaken to minimise the effect on benefit customers, be noted.

RESOLVED (2) that the Benefits Team be thanked for their hard work in administering the Welfare Reforms.

SC42 Corporate Performance Report

(Report No. WSC 108/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to provide members with an update on progress in delivering the corporate Priorities, performance of council services including budgetary information and customer satisfaction covering the period from 1 April 2013 to 30 June 2013.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the element of the report that related to the budgetary information and advised that it was difficult to provide an end of year prediction at the end of quarter one.

The Group Manager for Housing, Economy and Welfare advised that a report regarding Clanville Housing would be presented to Council at their November meeting.

In response to concerns regarding the Hinkley project the Chief Executive advised of the discussions with EDF regarding the delay in the project and associated issues related to the funding of posts. He reported that it was agreed the situation would be reviewed in September. Members requested that their concerns be noted regarding the potential that EDF monies, relating to the funding of posts, and that the Council is currently employing staff whose external funding is yet to be received.

It was requested that with regard to paragraph 5.3.3, major variances, of the report, attached to the agenda, that it would be useful to have figures if an overspend or underspend was indicated.

During the course of the debate the following issues were raised relating to the performance section of the report:

- Members noted that the issues regarding mortgage availability around the Council's Low Cost Home Ownership Scheme were due mainly to lenders being concerned over the restrictions. It was suggested that if the properties were sold then the profit could be put into affordable housing.
- The Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Growth confirmed that she was in receipt of some data relating to the parking service and would make the information available once the data was complete.
- Councillor P Murphy thanked all those involved in the superb work undertaken to deliver the Goviers Lane railway crossing.
- Noted that some targets were subject to seasonal variations and could improve as the year progressed.
- With regard to KPI 25 Abandoned call rate % - it was believed that 12% for the first quarter should not be considered below target.
- KPI 21, number of unique visitors to the Council website - it was believed that the target should be higher.
- The Committee wished to thank the staff involved with Payment of Creditors and Land Charges for their performance exceeding the target.
- The Chief Executive confirmed that he would investigate the possibility of undertaking a staff survey.

Members noted the capacity needed in order to respond to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. The Scrutiny and Performance Officer advised that she would update members on the sources of FOI requests received by the Council, after the meeting.

In response to the possibility that the performance report might be re-formatted the Committee made the following suggestions:

- To compare like for like i.e. current quarterly targets with the previous year's quarterly targets.
- Targets relating to the Hinkley project are not included until the project becomes relevant again
- Ensure that red targets are clearly explained
- To keep targets realistic and up to date with changing events

Concern was raised regarding whether there were a set criteria used to determine the status (red, amber or green) of a target. In response the Chief Executive suggested that perhaps a report could go to the Scrutiny Committee that sets out any criteria used in the past, what the criteria were and whether the criteria were appropriate; if no criteria were in place then perhaps the Scrutiny Committee may wish to introduce a clear set of criteria.

RESOLVED (1) that the progress in delivering the corporate priorities for 2013/14 be noted;

RESOLVED (2) that the performance against Group and Service Indicators, including the budget monitoring indicators, be noted.

SC43 Cabinet Response to Scrutiny Recommendations: Section 106 & Planning Obligations Review

(Report No. WSC 101/13, circulated after the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to set out Cabinet's detailed responses with regard to changes to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group in respect of the Section 106 and Planning Obligations process.

The Leader presented the report and advised that the Cabinet very much appreciated the reports from the Scrutiny Committee regarding the Section 106 and Planning Obligations Review and recognised that there should have been more time to allow time to seek clarification on the recommendations.

During the discussion of the amendments to the recommendations the following comments and suggestions on how to improve the process were made:

- Noted that the current review whereby Scrutiny made recommendations to Cabinet to consider taking forward was incomplete as Members of the Task and Finish Group needed to attend the September meeting of Planning Obligations Group, and after discussion report their observations to Scrutiny Committee.
- That after the Task and Finish Group had attended a meeting of the Planning Obligations Group the Task and Finish Group meet with the relevant Portfolio Holders to discuss the recommendations modified by Cabinet, as contained in the report and attached to the agenda, and how the issues might be resolved.
- That perhaps in future a written explanation could be attached to each recommendation to Cabinet.
- That once future Task and Finish Groups have drafted their final report the Portfolio Holder would be involved in the process and receive a copy of the report and invited to attend the final meeting of the Task and Finish Group. The Portfolio Holder would gain a better understanding of the recommendations when the report was presented to Cabinet.
- Cabinet were thanked for their responses.

RESOLVED (1) that the response received from Cabinet be noted.

RESOLVED (2) that the suggestions for improving the process, as listed above, be noted.

SC44 **Somerset Flooding Summit – Draft Final Report**

(Report No. WSC 110/13, circulated after the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to present the final draft report of the Somerset Flooding Summit to members of the Scrutiny Committee for comment prior to consideration by Cabinet.

RESOLVED (1) that the Somerset Flooding Summit draft report produced from the Joint Scrutiny Review, at Appendix A to the report, be noted;

RESOLVED (2) that Somerset Flooding Summit draft report be referred to Cabinet for their consideration.

SC45 **Scrutiny Committee Work Plan**

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

In response to questions the Scrutiny and Performance Officer advised that she would be contacting members regarding dates for the Assets Task and Finish Group and that she would pass on any requests relating to the content of the Magna half yearly report. Further, that a report on Rhynes would be included in the list to be scheduled.

RESOLVED (1) that the Business Case of West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council be added to the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on 24 October 2013;

RESOLVED (2) that the Magna half yearly update report scheduled for November be moved to 24 October 2013;

RESOLVED (3) that a report from the Section 106 Task and Finish Group be scheduled for the Scrutiny Committee to be held on 24 October 2013.

RESOLVED (3) that Community Safety scheduled for October be moved to 18 November 2013.

The meeting closed at 5.45 pm.