

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 January 2014 at 3.30 pm**

**Present:**

Councillor K J Ross .....Chairman  
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 K V Kravis  
Councillor K M Mills  
Councillor T Taylor  
Councillor K H Turner

Councillor I R Melhuish  
Councillor D J Sanders  
Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew  
Councillor D J Westcott

**Officers in Attendance:**

Director of Operations (S Adam)  
Executive Director (Interim) (A Dyer)  
Director of Housing & Communities (J Barraah)  
Section 151 Officer (S Campbell)  
Assistant Director Corporate Services (R Sealy)  
Assistant Director Operational Delivery (C Hall)  
Assistant Director Housing & Community Development (S Lewis)  
Assistant Director Planning & Environment (T Burton)  
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)  
Planning Manager (A Goodchild)  
Performance & Efficiencies Manager (K Batchelor)  
Principal Benefits and Fraud Officer (P Lamb)  
Administrative Support (H Dobson)

**SC89 Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Freeman.

**SC90 Minutes**

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 December 2013 – circulated with the Agenda).

The Executive Director (Interim) provided clarity with regard to the last bullet point of the Scrutiny Committee minute SC 86 and advised that the minute be amended accordingly, with the approval of the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, after the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to an amendment to the last bullet point of Minute No. SC86 and to be agreed with the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 December 2013, be confirmed as a correct record.

**SC91 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:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Minute No.</b>	<b>Description of Interest</b>	<b>Personal or Prejudicial or Disclosable Pecuniary</b>	<b>Action Taken</b>
Cllr P N Grierson	All Items	Alcombe	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

**SC92 Public Participation**

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

**SC93 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 8 January 2014, be noted.

**SC94 Cabinet Forward Plan**

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 9 January 2014, circulated with the agenda).

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Forward Plan published 9 January 2014, be noted.

**SC95 Scrutiny Committee Work Plan**

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

During consideration of the work plan it was confirmed that an update report from the Minehead Events Group be scheduled and to include how the group's funding was monitored using the SMART objectives and ideas going forward.

Councillor P Murphy requested that the Scrutiny Committee review the progress to implement recommendations relating to the Section 106 and Planning Obligations process and reported by Scrutiny Committee's Section 106 and Planning Obligations Task and Finish Group.

**RESOLVED (1)** that an update report from the Minehead Events Group, be scheduled for the Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held 17 March 2014;

**RESOLVED (2)** that a report regarding the progress to implement recommendations relating to the Section 106 and Planning Obligations process and reported by the Scrutiny Committee's Section 106 and Planning Obligations Task and Finish Group, be scheduled for the Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held 17 March 2014;

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

**SC96 2015/16 Council Tax Rebate Scheme Consultation**

(Report No. WSC 5/14, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to inform Scrutiny Committee of the options modelled to incentivise work and encourage people to remain in employment, and seek their recommendations with regards to which should be used as a basis of consultation with the public.

The Lead Member for Community and Customer presented the report and highlighted the two elements (earnings disregards and tapers) that the Authority could change in order to help working claimants and the six options for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee.

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

- To implement any of the options might not make much of a difference.
- The idea of the scheme was to incentivise work and encourage more people to increase their work hours. To some people the sums involved would be a significant amount of money.

The Principal Benefits and Fraud Officer advised that the scheme defines working cases as those who worked 16 hours or more per week. A few claims where people worked for less than 16 hours per week would also benefit if earnings disregards increased. The scheme design was Somerset wide with slight variances between the Somerset authorities.

Councillor P N Grierson proposed that Option 1 be recommended to Cabinet and Council for consultation and Councillor M O A Dewdney seconded the recommendation.

Members noted that it was important that any changes did not give the Council any undue financial risks. The financial information contained in the table at point 6.4 of the report, attached to the agenda, was a 'snapshot' and could not be relied on with certainty. There would be time to re-analyse the financial information for 2015/16.

During the debate an amendment was proposed by Councillor K J Ross that Options 1 and 5 be recommended to Cabinet and Council for consultation and seconded by Councillor P H Murphy, this then became the substantive motion.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet and Council that the Authority consult for the period 24 February 2014 to Friday 23 May 2014 on possible change to the 2015/16 Council Tax Rebate Scheme.

**RESOLVED (2)** that the Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet and Council to consult on Options 1 and 5, as set out in the report and attached to the agenda.

**SC97 Financial Standing & Budget 2014/15**

(Report No. WSC 8/14, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to inform Scrutiny Committee of the latest status of the Council's financial planning, including the latest Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the processes involved in its drafting.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report. The Medium Term Financial Plan had been based on a number of assumptions including a council tax increase of 2% and retaining the new homes bonus for a three year period. The Council had recognised the financial challenge it faced and had identified and made necessary savings, the budget contained in the report was a credit to all the Council.

The Lead Member confirmed that a Member's Seminar would be scheduled to provide all members the opportunity to identify further savings.

During the course of the discussion the points raised were:

- A request that table 1 of the report include 'general reserves brought forward figures' under the existing heading 'movement in reserves'.
- Concern that the interest payments due on external loans might not be paid in time.

Councillor M J Chilcott requested that it be acknowledged that whilst the Scrutiny Committee would like to carry out its role as set out in 5.4 of the report, under the current financial situation the Scrutiny Committee were not able to do so fully.

**RESOLVED** that the proposed budget for 2014/15 together with the new three year Medium Term Financial Plan.

**SC98 Draft 2014/15 Service Plans**

(Report No. WSC 10/14, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to provide the Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity of scrutinising the draft Service Plans for 2014/15 prior to their approval in the light of the refreshed Corporate Priorities agreed by Council.

Members noted that due to joint working with Taunton Deane Borough Council the format/process of the service plans could change, if when reviewed and with member input it was considered that manageable improvements could be made.

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

- Concern that the Council were delivering more than appeared in the Council's vision/corporate priorities. It was suggested that more detail could be added to inform the public.
- Concern regarding how some of the Hinkley related objectives would be met after the departure of some EDF funded staff. Members were advised that currently it was difficult to predict what might happen, the situation would be monitored. There were many projects that will be ready to implement once the funding was available.
- It was requested that SWOT analyses be available to provide members with an understanding of staff concerns and confirmed that the analyses would be made available after the meeting.
- Concern that it would not be possible to measure the key action at 4.2.2 – address identified barriers which are restricting individuals' access to employment and training opportunities. This includes lack of basic skills and IT skills, (mental) health issues, criminal activity/anti-social behaviour and homelessness.
- The KPI52 target (Disabled Facilities Grants: average time taken end to end to complete adaptation works (days)) would be confirmed as to whether it was achievable after the meeting.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the draft Service Plans for 2014/15 be noted.

**RESOLVED (2)** that Cabinet be advised of the points raised by the Committee as set out above.

#### **SC99 Scrutiny Review of Asset Management**

(Report No. WSC 12/14, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to outline the findings of the Task & Finish Group in relation to the review of Asset Management.

Councillor K J Ross, Chairman, left the meeting at this point and Councillor R P Lillis chaired the remainder of the meeting.

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer presented the report and advised that the aim of the Task & Finish Group was to determine if the assets were managed effectively and whether they delivered value for money.

Comments from members of the public had been received on relevant assets as follows:

- Recommendation 3.7 – consideration is given to obtaining a valuation for the land at North Hill Road, Minehead known as Molly's Patch with a view to disposal. Confirmation had been received that the aforementioned piece of land was transferred to West Somerset Council some years previously and that Covenants existed on the land that prevented development and restricted its future use;
- Recommendation 3.12 – to review the former Quay West Radio building should it not form part of the future plans of the Marina Operator. Watchet Town Council were currently keen to purchase the freehold;

- Recommendation 3.16 – consideration is given to initiating discussions with Dulverton Town Council and Exmoor National Park to explore the potential for an asset transfer of Exmoor Lawns, Dulverton. Councillor K J Ross requested that neighbouring areas and trees around the car parks be included;
- Councillor K J Ross requested that consideration be given into entering into discussions with Dulverton and district Civic Society with regard to the asset transfer of the Old Cheese Store situated in the Guildhall car park.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support commented on the useful meeting held with the Task and Finish Group regarding Asset Management and noted the issues raised.

Members noted that the lease end date for Townsend House was 16.10.2082.

An amendment to the recommendation and to include comments received from relevant parties, as listed above, was proposed and seconded:

‘That the recommendations with amendments be referred to the Asset Management Group for consideration and that the Asset Management Group be requested to report back to the Scrutiny Committee regarding any further work that the Asset Management Group would wish the Task and Finish Group to undertake.’

On being put to the vote the amendment was:

**RESOLVED** that the following recommendations with amendments be referred to the Asset Management Group for consideration and that the Asset Management Group be requested to report back to the Scrutiny Committee regarding any further work that the Asset Management Group would wish the Task and Finish Group to undertake:

- (1) Consideration be given to initiating exploratory discussions with Minehead Town Council to gauge interest in the asset transfer of Townsend House to the Town Council;
- (2) Consideration be given to obtaining an up to date valuation of a commercial rent from the District Valuer in respect of Blenheim Gardens Café, Minehead;
- (3) Consideration be given to initiating exploratory discussions with Minehead Town Council to gauge interest in the asset transfer of Wellington Square to the Town Council;
- (4) Consideration be given to initiating exploratory discussions with Minehead Town Council to gauge interest in the asset transfer of Culvercliffe open space to the Town Council;
- (5) Consideration be given to initiating exploratory discussions with Minehead Town Council to gauge interest in the asset transfer of various small parcels of land (Minehead) to the Town Council;

- (6) Consideration be given to continuing discussions with Watchet Town Council to pursue the asset transfer of the shrub area at Mill Street, Watchet;
- (7) Consideration be given to obtaining a valuation for the land at North Hill Road, Minehead known as Molly's Patch with a view to disposal, subject to the legal position being clarified following correspondence received;
- (8) Old Gasometer Site, Quay Street - Ownership of this land should be retained;
- (9) Consideration be given to commencing discussions with parish and town councils and any other interested groups on the asset transfer of public conveniences;
- (10) Consideration be given to entering into dialogue with the Watchet Boat Museum and Watchet Town Council concerning a new lease, including its duration and terms and conditions regarding maintenance requirements. The objective being to enable Watchet Boat Museum to proceed with seeking grant funding to renovate the building and associated facilities;
- (11) Consideration be given to initiating exploratory discussions with Watchet Town Council to gauge interest in the asset transfer of Watchet Library to the Town Council;
- (12) To review the former Quay West Radio building should it not form part of the future plans of the Marina Operator;
- (13) Consideration be given to initiating discussions with West Somerset Railway and Watchet Town Council to explore the potential for an asset transfer of Watchet Footbridge;
- (14) Consideration be given to initiating discussions with Somerset County Council with a view to an asset transfer of the road bridge at Mill Street;
- (15) Consideration be given to initiating discussions with Watchet Town Council to explore the potential asset transfer of the bus shelter at The Cross, Watchet;
- (16) Consideration be given to initiating discussions with Dulverton Town Council and Exmoor National Park to explore the potential for an asset transfer of Exmoor Lawns, Dulverton and that neighbouring areas and trees around the car parks be included;
- (17) Consideration be given to initiating discussions with Dulverton Town Council to explore the potential for an asset transfer of the Mill Leat, Dulverton;
- (18) Consideration be given to initiating discussion with Somerset County Council to explore the potential of an asset transfer of the road from Barle Bridge to the Caravan Park, Dulverton;

- (19) Consideration be given to obtaining a valuation for the land at Upton with a view to disposal;
- (20) Consideration be given to initiating discussions with parish/town councils and/or Magna West Somerset to explore the potential of an asset transfer of those playing fields in ownership of the Council;
- (21) Consideration be given to initiating discussions with parish/town council to explore the potential of an asset transfer of the non income generating car parks at Crowcombe, Kilve and Withypool.
- (22) Consideration be given into entering into discussions with Dulverton and district Civic Society with regard to the asset transfer of the Old Cheese Store situated in the Guildhall car park.

**SC100 Cabinet Response to Scrutiny Recommendations: Section 106 & Planning Obligations Review**

(Report No. WSC 11/14, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to set out Cabinet's response with regard to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group further to their attendance and observations of the meeting of the Planning Obligations Group on 2 September 2013.

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer presented the report and advised that should the Shadow Portfolio Holder for Resources be unable to attend a meeting of the Planning Obligations Group there would be no opportunity to arrange a substitute.

Councillor P H Murphy was pleased to note the comments received from the Cabinet.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet response to the Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group recommendations relating to the Section 106 and Planning Obligations review be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm.