

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 May 2013 at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor K J RossChairman
Councillor R P Lillis Vice-Chairman

Councillor M J Chilcott	Councillor M O A Dewdney
Councillor G S Dowding	Councillor J Freeman
Councillor P N Grierson	Councillor B Heywood
Councillor P H Murphy	

Members in Attendance:

Councillor A P Hadley	Councillor E May
Councillor D D Ross	Councillor D J Sanders
Councillor M A Smith	Councillor T Taylor
Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew	Councillor K H Turner

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive (A Dyer)
Corporate Director (B Lang)
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)
Corporate Manager - Housing, Welfare & Economy (I Timms)
Section 151 Officer (S Campbell)
Administrative Support (H Dobson)

Also in Attendance:

Naomi Griffith, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Minehead Eye
Jessica Prendergrast, Director, Minehead Eye

SC1 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

SC2 Minutes

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 22 April 2013 – circulated with the Agenda).

RESOLVED that, subject to including Councillor P Murphy in the attendance list, the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 22 April 2013, be confirmed as a correct record.

SC3 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

SC4 Public Participation

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

SC5 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 May 2013, be noted.

SC6 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward published 2 May 2013, circulated with the agenda).

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward published 2 May 2013, be noted.

SC7 Presentation from Minehead Eye

The Chairman of the Board of Directors and the Director of Minehead Eye delivered their presentation on Minehead Eye, touching on how the facility came into being and providing an insight in to its governance, aims and objectives, staffing and volunteers, activities, business model etc. Minehead Eye was a 'not for profit' organisation and aimed to deliver good value, low cost services and activities in the area.

In response to questions Members were advised that:

- The organisation was sensitive to providing low cost and subsidised access to customers who would find the cost difficult to meet. They worked closely with schools and other agencies enabling them to engage more effectively with their customers.
- As the building was relatively new they did not envisage large maintenance bills for a while. Some maintenance costs had been included in the budget and in time it might be possible to direct more of the budget towards future maintenance costs.

- The organisation was working with a view to keeping youth clubs open, which was previously the responsibility of Somerset County Council. However, it was recognised that in order to do so it would be necessary to have a mix of funding streams available, with appropriate town and parish councils contributing/supporting the youth clubs if they wished the service to continue in their area.
- Approximately 700/800 members used the facility, the majority of which came from West Somerset and some from further afield such as Taunton, Bridgwater, Bristol, Exeter.
- To make accessibility easier for its rural members a minibus has been made available for specific events. In the past it was found that the provision of a general minibus service was not successful.
- It was important that the public understood that Minehead Eye was a social enterprise model and therefore was neither a commercial organisation nor a charity.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee thanked the Chairman and Director for Minehead Eye for the presentation and the work they do.

RESOLVED (1) that the presentation be noted and that the Minehead Eye powerpoint presentation be distributed to all members.

RESOLVED (2) that Minehead Eye be invited to provide an update to the Scrutiny Committee in May 2014.

SC8 Final Report of the Business Rate Recovery Task and Finish Group

(Report No. WSC 49/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to bring to the Committee's attention the results from the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group set up to look into the potential impact of the new Business Rate Retention Scheme on the Council's financial standing.

The Chief Executive outlined the details in the report and advised that the report was an important piece of work. The Business Rate Retention Scheme formed part of the Council's core funding and the way in which it was funded had recently changed resulting in the amount of income becoming hard to predict and therefore extremely volatile. He suggested that the Committee received a regular report on the situation and that it form part of the performance report presented to Committee every quarter. Further, that an amendment to the fourth recommendation be made to include 'planning and licensing applications'.

During the course of the discussion Members noted the following main points:

- Officers were congratulated for the high collection rates in comparison to neighbouring authorities.
- It was disappointing to note that the new scheme did not allow the Council the opportunity to control its own financial future.

- The following amendments to the report were suggested:
 - That the names of the Task and Finish Group and officers involved in writing such an informative report should be included in the report.
 - That the appendices be renamed accordingly.

RESOLVED (1) that the following proposals be recommended to Cabinet:

(a) that the quarterly performance report presented to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet should include table 1 of the report, attached to the agenda, but containing up to date figures and estimates. This would clearly show any variance in the estimated Net Yield, highlight the reasons for the variance and subsequently any change in the amount of business rates that the Council could expect to retain;

(b) that in order to assess the strategic financial impact of any variation, the quarterly performance report should contain an updated Medium Term Financial Plan that not only reflects the impact of any variation in business rates retention but also any other known amendments;

(c) that the quarterly performance report should also include an aged debtors report similar to that shown in table 4 of the report, attached to the agenda;

(d) that a process is established to enable the revenues team to be aware of planning and licensing applications where it is thought that what is planned will have an impact upon the rating list;

(e) that details of any individual write-off that is in excess of £1,000 are forwarded to the local ward member(s) for their information and possible comment;

(f) that the Valuation Officer is invited to provide both relevant staff and all members with training on issues pertaining to business rate liability;

(g) that the staff involved in the Business Rate billing and recovery processes are congratulated on their performance;

RESOLVED (2) that Councillor M J Chilcott be elected to present the report, as amended, to Cabinet on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee.

SC9 Update on Family Focus Project

(Report No. WSC 60/13, circulated after the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to update Scrutiny Committee on the delivery of the Family Focus Project.

The Corporate Manager presented the report and advised that the name of the project had changed from Troubled Families to Family Focus Project which was seen to be more positive.

In response to questions, he advised that the programme was paid by results and the ethos was that the services supporting these families would be

redesigned over time and cost less. The Council had reached its allotted target at the end of March 2013 and received payment accordingly. Further, an assessment of progress will be made every quarter. Evaluating the processes and results will require a lot of resources and, as a result, the team were looking to engage with one of the Universities.

RESOLVED (1) that the update on the Family Focus Project report, be noted.

RESOLVED (2) that a further update on the Family Focus Project be reported to the Scrutiny Committee in May 2014.

SC10 Setting the Annual Work Programme

(Report no. WSC 61/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to present to Scrutiny Committee the annual work plan for 2013/14 and to give members the opportunity to suggest any additional topics for inclusion.

During the discussion the following topics were considered:

- All aspects of Asset Management
- Somerset Waste Partnership
- Planning and pre application advice service
- Car parks; their income and permit sale trends, and administration of the car parks estate.
- Flooding – local rhynes and watercourses
- Flooding - Somerset issues - noted that information would be available after the flood meeting in June.
- GP Out of Hours service
- Taunton Deane Borough Council partnership working project
- East Quay, Watchet

RESOLVED (1) that the following changes/additions to the Scrutiny Committee Workplan be made:

- The Economic Regeneration Update report scheduled for 17 June be moved to 15 July, 2013
- The Impact of Welfare Reform on the Benefits and Fraud Services report scheduled for 15 July be moved to 19 August, 2013
- Taunton Deane project be added to 16 September 2013
- Flooding –local rhynes and watercourses be added to 17 June 2013
- Flooding Somerset Issues be added to 17 June, 2013 or as soon as the report is ready
- Car parks; their income and permit sale trends be added to 21 October, 2013
- Planning and pre application advice service be added to 16 December, 2013

RESOLVED (2) that the following items be added to the Scrutiny Committee Work plan as and when appropriate and reported by appropriate officers:

- East Quay Watchet (review post August Council)
- Out of hours GP provision – outcome of review from 2012/13
- Somerset Waste Partnership update;

RESOLVED (3) that a Task and Finish Group be set up to look at asset management, with terms of reference and membership to be agreed at the meeting to be held on 17 June, 2013.

RESOLVED (4) that the Annual Work Plan be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.12 pm.