

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 August 2012 at 4.30 pm**

**Present:**

Councillor K J Ross.....Chairman  
Councillor G S Dowding.....Vice-Chairman

Councillor M J Chilcott  
Councillor B Heywood  
Councillor R P Lillis

Councillor M O A Dewdney  
Councillor P N Grierson  
Councillor D D Ross

**Members in Attendance:**

Councillor C Morgan  
Councillor S J Pugsley  
Councillor T Taylor  
Councillor D J Westcott

Councillor P H Murphy  
Councillor D J Sanders  
Councillor K H Turner

**Officers in Attendance:**

Chief Executive (A Dyer)  
Corporate Director (B Lang)  
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)  
Group Manager – Environment and Community (S Watts)  
Group Manager – Resources (G Carne)  
Principal Benefits Officer (P Lamb)  
Efficiencies & Performance Manager (K Batchelor)  
Administrative Support (K Kowalewska)

**SC21 Apologies for Absence**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Freeman.

**SC22 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 July 2012**

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 July 2012 – circulated with the Agenda).

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 July 2012 be confirmed as a correct record.

**SC23 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	Action Taken
Cllr P N Grierson	All Items	Alcombe	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K J Ross	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P Murphy	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke
Cllr K H Turner	All Items	Brompton Ralph	Personal	Spoke
Cllr D J Westcott	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke

**SC24 Public Participation**

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

**SC25 Notes of Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points**

(Copy of Notes of Cabinet Decisions/Action Point, circulated at the meeting)

**RESOLVED** that the Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points for 1 August 2012, be noted.

**SC26 Cabinet Forward Plan**

(Copy of Cabinet Forward Plan No. 3 - September 2012 to September 2013, circulated at the meeting).

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Forward Plan No. 3 - September 2012 to September 2013, be noted.

**SC27 Corporate Performance Report - April to June 2012/13**

(Report No. WSC 113/12, 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 2012 to 30 June 2012.

The Leader presented the part of the report relating to quarterly performance and hoped that Members of the Committee found the comments submitted by the Group Managers helpful.

The Group Manager – Resources presented the financial information contained in the report and advised that the detailed figures relating to council tax, business rates and housing benefit had been removed from the performance reporting process and in future they would be reported annually at Audit Committee to allow for comparative data reporting etc., enabling Scrutiny Committee to focus on monitoring performance and the overall budget variances. The Group Manager then drew Members’ attention to the forecast budget and reported that at the end of the first quarter it was predicted that the Council would be slightly under budget for the 2012/13 year.

During the course of the debate the points raised included:

- Clarification was sought as to why the figures in the report indicated that there was a dramatic increase in the number of sickness days per quarter within the Housing and Economy Group. It was confirmed that the figures would need to be checked and it was agreed to amend the target for all the groups to reflect an annual target for the whole authority of the average number of sickness days per employee.
- In response to a query raised as to why there was no information against the three measurable targets for delivering empty properties, it was confirmed that these actions were ahead of target.
- Updates on the following housing projects were provided:  
Sale of Seaward Way – to date the conditional contracts had been signed but not exchanged. The two main conditions being a successful planning permission and the removal of a unilateral notice and a hearing was scheduled in September/October 2012.  
Townsend Farm, Carhampton – following a meeting with Hastoe Housing Association a planning application was expected in the third quarter.
- It was noted that KPI 46 (% of homeless applications accepted as statutory homeless) was on target and would be changed to Amber.
- The Group Manager – Resources confirmed that the figures for car parking income would be circulated to Members once the August results had been issued.
- Members and Officers should be proud of the performance of council services as the results were very positive.

Members of the Committee were pleased to see the amount of actions that were above target and expressed their appreciation for the good work carried out by officers. Best wishes for the future were passed on to the Group Manager – Resources, Graham Carne who was leaving the Authority at the end of the month.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the progress in delivering the corporate priorities for 2012/13, be noted.

**RESOLVED (2)** that the performance against Group and Service Indicators, including the Budget Monitoring Indicators, be noted.

**SC28 Future Provision of Services currently delivered under a Contract with Veolia**

(Report No. WSC 110/12, circulated after the Agenda).

The current contract with Veolia for the provision of a number of key services is due to expire on 30 September 2012. The purpose of the report was to provide the Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to comment on the appropriateness of the proposed approach for the continuing delivery of these services and correlation to the requirement to reduce overall levels of expenditure.

The Lead Member for Environment outlined the details in the report and drew Members' attention to the recommendations contained in Addendum 1 to the report. He stated that the proposed service level agreement with Veolia, if

agreed, would be beneficial and worthwhile to West Somerset Council. The Chief Executive expressed his thanks to the Scrutiny task and finish group for their helpful work in reviewing the street cleansing service.

In response to a question raised regarding the proposed financial savings and how this would affect the Service Level Agreement, the Chief Executive confirmed that Veolia was aware of the Council's financial position and was happy to enter into the agreement.

Members expressed their thanks to the Scrutiny and Performance Officer and Group Manager - Environment and Community for their diligence and hard work, and to Veolia management who had gone out of their way to be helpful.

A debate ensued as to whether the five public conveniences recommended to be closed in Minehead, Dunster, Watchet and Porlock should be specifically named in the report.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee support the contents of the draft report, as attached at Addendum 1 to the report, in relation to aspects of service delivery and correlation with the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) subject to suggesting that when referencing the proposal for five public conveniences to be closed, the specific locations of those to be closed in Minehead, Dunster and Porlock be named, whilst referring to the closure of one public convenience in Watchet without specifying which one.

**SC29 Police and Crime Panel for Avon and Somerset**

(Report No. WSC 94/12, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was for the Leader of the Council to update the Scrutiny Committee on progress in regard to the establishment of a Police and Crime Panel for Avon and Somerset.

**RESOLVED** that the progress undertaken to date be noted.

**SC30 Council Tax Support Scheme Consultation**

(Report No. WSC 111/12, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to inform the Scrutiny Committee of the consultation being undertaken relating to the Council Tax support scheme.

The report was presented by the Lead Member for Community and Customer who invited Members to comment on the adequacy of the consultation process being undertaken. He reported that the questionnaire had been sent to all council tax benefit claimants as well as being available to all members of the public.

During the debate the following main points were raised:

- Concerns were expressed regarding how the Council's software system would be able to deal with the 10% deficit in subsidy, and in response the

Principal Benefits Officer advised that by amending the parameters in the current systems and processes within the existing housing benefit scheme and by enhancements made by the software provider, Northgate, it would be feasible to develop a new scheme by April 2013.

- An explanation was given as to why it was not proposed to end child benefit disregard in West Somerset.
- Following the results of the consultation there would be an opportunity for Members to look at the proposed scheme at the November meeting of Corporate PAG.
- It was clarified that there were no proposals at this stage to consult with parish/town councils as they were not major precepting bodies and not all parishes levy a precept.

**RESOLVED** that the methods of consultation that are being used to gain feedback on the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme, together with the content and timing of the consultation, be noted.

### **SC31 Section 106 Task and Finish Group - Terms of Reference and Membership**

(Report No. WSC 112/12, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to agree terms of reference and membership of a task and finish group to undertake a review of the Section 106 process.

The report was presented by the Scrutiny and Performance Officer who advised that there had been a request from Councillor P H Murphy to be a member of the task and finish group. It was advised that as the group was informal, and in accordance with the Constitution, non-members of the Scrutiny Committee could be invited to participate.

During the course of the debate the need for the task and finish group was questioned and it was clarified that this work would provide the opportunity for such issues as member involvement in the section 106 process and liaison with town and parish councils to be reviewed.

The Leader briefed Members on previous work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committee in October/November 2009 relating to the planning obligations process and recommended members of the task and finish group to look at the issues debated and recommendations made at that time.

The following points were also raised during the course of the discussion:

- Information on the section 106 process was now much more readily available as a result of the hard work undertaken by the Climate Change and Community Liaison Manager.
- The allocation of 106 monies should remain flexible in order for several projects to benefit, including those received from community groups.

Councillor D Ross proposed the following additions to the terms of reference:

- Review the recommendations previously made by Scrutiny Committee.
- Examine the Planning Committee's advice and process relating to planning obligations.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the terms of reference of the Section 106 task and finish group be as set out in Appendix A to the report with the following two additions:

- Review the recommendations previously made by Scrutiny Committee.
- Examine the Planning Committee's advice and process relating to planning obligations.

**RESOLVED (2)** that the membership of the Section 106 task and finish group be comprised of Councillors P N Grierson, R Lillis, D D Ross and P H Murphy.

### **SC32 Fraud Task and Finish Group**

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer provided a verbal update regarding the work of the Fraud Task and Finish Group. She reported that the first meeting had been held on 24 July 2012 with Councillors K Ross and P Grierson in attendance with relevant officers providing a service overview. The topics discussed included the lack of surveillance currently undertaken by the Council due to resource issues and the possibility of enhanced joint working with other agencies such as Magna Housing Association and the police to carry out this work. Representatives from Magna and the police had been invited to the next meeting of the task and finish group and the Committee were advised that the Police Inspector had confirmed her attendance.

**RESOLVED** that the verbal update regarding the work of the Fraud Task and Finish Group be noted.

### **SC33 Scrutiny Committee Workplan Review**

(Scrutiny Committee Workplan, circulated with the Agenda).

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer advised that a request had been made by the Chairman to discuss the Affordable Homes to Buy policy at the September meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that initially this item should be discussed at a future meeting of the Housing PAG and that the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 17 September 2012 be cancelled.

The Vice-Chairman advised that the time of 4.30pm was not convenient for some Members of the Committee and proposed to move the start time to 3.30pm.

**RESOLVED (1)** that the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on 17 September 2012 be cancelled.

**RESOLVED (2)** that the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on 22 October commence at 3.30pm.

**RESOLVED (3)** that the Workplan be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.34 pm.