

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st April 2016 at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor P H MurphyChairman

Councillor R LillisVice-Chairman

Councillor A Behan
Councillor G S Dowding
Councillor J Parbrook

Councillor R Clifford
Councillor B Maitland-Walker

Members in Attendance:

Councillor M Chilcott

Officers in Attendance:

Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer – (B Lang)
Tim Childs – Asset Manager
Democratic Services Coordinator (E McGuinness)
Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny (M Prouse)

SC 172 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs D Archer and R Woods.

SC 173 Minutes

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10 March 2016 – circulated with the Agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10 March 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

The Chair brought to the attention of Members the South Western Ambulance Service Trust item, and invited Members to raise any outstanding issues they wished to pursue.

Waiting times outside Accident and Emergency across the County was recognised as the most significant challenge facing the service, and that current times shared at the last meeting were unacceptable.

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator briefly gave an overview of the statutory landscape, and the role of Somerset County Council's Health Scrutiny function, and how there is no District Council representation on that Committee.

RESOLVED: that a letter be drafted, with the possibility of collaborating with the other District Council's in Somerset, addressed to the County Council requesting a more dynamic approach to Health Scrutiny.

SC 174 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 B Maitland - Walker	All Items	Carhampton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P H Murphy	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr J Parbrook	All items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted

SC 175 Public Participation

No members of the public spoke at the meeting on any item on the agenda.

SC 176 Notes of Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points

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

RESOLVED that the Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6 April 2016, be noted.

SC 177 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 5 April 2016, circulated at the meeting)

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 5 April 2016, be noted.

SC 178 Chairman's announcements

- The Chair brought to Member's attention the situation with the Pre-Meetings, which will no longer be taking place before Scrutiny Committee. Even though recommended as best practice, Member feedback from the recent questionnaires indicated that they were not seen as valuable. The Chair emphasised that the situation will remain fluid, but that it is hoped with the 'less is more' approach more Members may feel able to engage.
- Members were informed that Audit Committee have been invited to attend and participate in this meeting to make the best use of officer and member time in relation to consideration of the Asset Management Update Report.

- As this was the last meeting of the Municipal Year, the Chair thanked Members of the Committee for their commitment and contributions over the past year.

SC 179 Asset Management Service - Update

Councillor Mandy Chilcott – Lead Member Resources presented this item.

The purpose of this report was to update the Committee as requested at Corporate PAG on 16th January 2016, in respect of:

- The new Asset Management Group Terms of Reference
- The new operational procedure for dealing with recovery of costs when dealing with low value agreements.
- Land and Property assets Health & Safety statutory compliance works

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was raised that if the Agenda and Minutes are not circulated, and the dates of the AMG are not published in the calendar, how could other councillors know what was being discussed and when.
- It was emphasised that AMG was not a formal committee and was used as an opportunity for Officers to brief the Portfolio Holders collectively to make the best use of officer time, no formal minutes are produced.
- Previous quadrennials it was an officer only briefing but some Member engagement was thought necessary.
- In the Report it says 'Minutes' but this is an oversight and should say 'Notes' and the 'Notes' are more like bullet points, with little in the way of detail.
- Officers come out of these briefings with many Action Points.
- Committee was informed that AMG was a portfolio holder briefing for areas of responsibility.
- Terms of Reference were not a necessity but recognised as being helpful and providing some clarity.
- The Scheme of Delegations in the Constitution clarifies the position in regard to individual decisions relating to Assets, AMG is thus a way for check and balance between Officers and Members.
- With the non-publication of notes and dates, if a decision is taken at AMG by a Portfolio Holder that is then circulated, nobody will know where to look if they do not know when the meeting took place?
- It was queried that if any Councillor could request information on any subject, did this include a way to see all the notes from these meetings be requested for viewing?
- It was emphasised again that notes are for briefing, not for publication and any formalization of this would lead to more time and effort required on the part of Officers.
- A clarification was requested and reference was made the Constitution, which states that a Councillor can request all information publically available, and information held by officers which it would be reasonable for them to receive in pursuit of their roles, and these would be considered on a case by case basis.

- Chair clarified thus that he was making a blanket request for all notes on AMG whenever they take place.
- The next part of questioning focused on the relationship between the Asset Project Group and the AMG.
- It was considered that the APG was set up to do a specific job, and was cross party, but as it was coming to the end of its remit it was considered whether it could be incorporated into the AMG? Would it be possible for a member of the Opposition or even a Member of Scrutiny to sit on the AMG?
- It was emphasised that most of the meeting is a briefing on ongoing projects, and the areas that involve decisions are only a small part of the AMG, and any that are taken are published and subject to call-in should that be deemed necessary.
- It was emphasised that hundreds of small items go through AMG, there are no real big ticket items.
- Asset Management Plan could be found on the Internet and copies can be provided to all members upon request
- The Asset Management Strategy is currently being updated, but it has been more than a simple rewrite of the old strategy, as there has been a large amount of change since last written.
- In terms of compliance, there is now a substantial amount of data on the properties in WSC ownership, with a lot of work being done on the new plan and new strategy.
- During the last 12 months work has focused on understanding the property portfolio and the conditions, so as a council the tools are in place to deliver on the strategy and plan.
- Compliance in respect of health and safety took precedence over updating the strategy.
- As regards the operational procedure, questions were asked as to how can something be prescriptive yet flexible? And when does an internal guidance document not become a new policy?
- It was suggested that a lot of other councils recover costs on everything they do.
- This system allows for the fact that some small groups may not have the finances, and gives the opportunity for small groups to engage and for each case to be considered on its merits.
- With Toilet Transfers it has been decided by Cabinet that costs will be covered by WSC and that this is the right thing to do as a Council.
- It was considered whether in all transactions solicitors could act for both sides to save costs. It was suggested this possibility be raised with the SHAPE Partnership.
- Members appreciated the work that has gone on in compliance since the appointment of the Asst. Director.
- It was commented that just under 50% of the 'Red' Category Assets had been completed in 4 months and a reason for this was sought?
- It was offered that priorities were considered against the resources the Council currently has.
- It was asked whether Capital Works Surveys would be done in future before deciding on an Asset being kept.
- All Assets have now been inspected.
- It was acknowledged that the current system of recording the undertaking of work was seen as ineffective.

- Licensing Dept. has improved in this area and was advocated as a possible route to follow.
- At the end of May, we will have a clearer picture on budget requirements, not able to give a guide at this stage, but at the moment on track.
- There was a request to rollover funds in the compliance budget for 2016/17.
- Assets recognised as biggest risk for this Council, there was recognised uncertainty in what the surveys will bring up in terms of further work.
- The Assets Manager Tim Child was thanked for all his hard work and effort.

RESOLVED that:-

- The Scrutiny Committee **comment and** note the:
 - a) Asset Management Group Terms of Reference
 - b) Land and Property assets Health and Safety statutory compliance update

And support the:

- a) Recovery of Costs when dealing with low value agreements – Operational Procedure
- b) Members agreed to support any future budget roll over requests in relation to the successful delivery of this service.**

SC 180 Scrutiny Committee Work Plan.

(Copy of the Forward Plan for 2016, circulated with the agenda.)

- Members were reminded that this was their opportunity to suggest items for the Work Programme – all requests will be considered using the process agreed by the Committee in June 2015. In the first instance, all suggestions should be made to the Scrutiny Team.
- It was stated that the practice of Scrutiny receiving Performance and Financial Monitoring Reports in the second and fourth quarters would continue.
- Members were informed that an update from the Economic Development team on the work they are doing to pro-actively engage with West Somerset College will be coming forward to Scrutiny later in the year.
- Committee was informed that Business Plans on future arrangements were currently being prepared and that it is likely that these will be considered by Scrutiny in July.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Forward Plan published on 21st April be noted.

The meeting closed at 5.30pm.