

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 August 2011 at 4.30 pm

Present:

Councillor K J Ross.....Chairman
Councillor R P LillisVice-Chairman

Councillor A M Chick
Councillor G S Dowding
Councillor P N Grierson
Councillor M O A Dewdney
Councillor J Freeman

Members in Attendance:

Councillor A F Knight
Councillor P H Murphy
Councillor T Taylor
Councillor D J Westcott
Councillor K V Kravis
Councillor D J Sanders
Councillor K H Turner

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive (A Dyer)
Corporate Director (B Lang)
Section 151 Officer (G Carne)
Group Manager – Environment Services (S Watts)
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)
Efficiencies and Performance Manager (K Batchelor)
Administrative Support (H Dobson)

SC20 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M J Chilcott and D D Ross.

SC21 Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 July 2011

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 July 2011 – circulated with the Agenda).

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 July 2011 be confirmed as a correct record.

SC22 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:

WEST SOMERSET COUNCIL
Scrutiny Committee 22.8.11

Name	Minute No	Description of Interest	Personal or Prejudicial	Action Taken
Cllr P Grierson	All Items	Minehead	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 Turner	All Items	Brompton Ralph	Personal	Spoke
Cllr D Westcott	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke

SC23 Public Participation

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

SC24 Notes of Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points

RESOLVED that the Key Cabinet Decisions/Action Points for 21 July and 3 August 2011 be noted.

SC25 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of Cabinet Forward Plan No. 3, - September 2011 to September 2012 - circulated with the Agenda).

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan No. 3 - September 2011 to September 2012, be noted.

SC26 Draft Budget Strategy 2012/13

(Copy of Report No. WSC 102/11, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to seek the view of Scrutiny Committee on the appropriateness of the draft Budget Strategy in assisting the Council to close the reported budget gap and set a balanced budget for 2012/13.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and advised that savings achieved for the current year to date indicated that the target had not yet been reached, however, this could reduce over the coming months. At the same time the Medium Term Financial Plan took into account the potential shortfall of savings and the result was that the accumulative budget gap from 2012 - 2015 had increased. Further, years of implementing efficiency savings had reduced staffing levels to just over 83 full-time equivalent, hence, there was very little flexibility in the current budget. Therefore, the strategy aimed to help with future budget savings by providing guidance in a more radical and strategic way.

Once the Council had determined the level at which it was viable it could then reintroduce any discretionary services that could be afforded. The Council was in the process of completing the tasks, as set out in 2.1 of Appendix A, attached to the agenda, in the Budget Strategy 2012/13, that would help determine its level of viability.

In response to questions the Lead Member for Resources and Central Support advised that she was aware that staff were the greatest asset to the Council and that fewer staff could not continue to carry out the same number of services. She also advised that to raise council tax bills may require the Council to carry out a referendum which in turn would require extra resources. Should the result be that the electorate did not want the rise then the Council would have to re-bill. Even if the result was positive the rise may not produce savings due to the cost of the extra work. However, the Council must first make sure that it was running as efficiently as possible and also ensure that the public was made aware that a rise would only affect a very small proportion of their council tax bill.

Concern was raised regarding the possible scenario of the Council only being able to afford to provide statutory services.

In response to questions the Chief Executive advised that service plans were not used in the Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) process. The Council had started by identifying statutory services and then asked staff to allocate their time, in percentage terms, by what they do which could be interpreted as either statutory or discretionary. It was then possible to ascertain what cuts would be necessary to provide statutory services only. The data was based on current service delivery levels. The calculation would provide the Council with the cost to provide a viable local authority, which will also need to include those discretionary services that were needed to deliver statutory services, such as, the website and performance management.

Concern was raised regarding the use of capital receipts, in that, future capital expenditure would be funded entirely from revenue sources. It was confirmed that the Council did still have some assets but that this future use of capital expenditure would help to stop unnecessary spending.

RESOLVED that the draft Budget Strategy 2012/13 be noted.

SC27 Corporate Performance & Budget Monitoring 2011/12 - Quarter 1

(Copy of Report No. WSC 103/11, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to present to Members a combined performance and budget monitoring report covering the period from 1 April to 30 June 2011. The budget monitoring exercise aims to forecast the year-end position as at 31 March 2012.

The Leader presented that part of the report that related to performance and the Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the element that related to the budget.

During the course of the debate and in response to questions the following points were raised:

- With regard to the variance regarding Central Services the Section 151 Officer advised that it partly accounted for the way the pension costs were presented. Further, that table 10 in the report, attached to the

agenda, recognised that the Council was not achieving all the savings. As the year progressed the team would be monitoring and looking for savings where possible.

- Council tax debts were written off when they were non-pursuable and all avenues had been exhausted.
 - The Lead Member for Housing advised that with regard to the Townsend Farm project, the delay was due to the HCA funding application process and the development partners business case to advance the Porlock project first ~~process for applications had recently changed making it more lengthy.~~ The project in Porlock had been held up by various problems that relied upon other organisations, it was however, moving slowly forward.
 - It was confirmed that the Visit Exmoor website would be available shortly.
 - With regard to the implementation of CPE, Somerset County Council had not progressed the scheme yet, and was in the process of being revisited at a senior level. Mendip District Council would be considering a revised report on 5 September 2011.
 - The Lead Member for Community and Customer responded to a question advising that pest control came under the contract with the dog warden service, which had been reviewed a few months ago and had made considerable savings. Performance figures could be provided if required.
 - Members of the Committee were advised that fly tipping had increased in line with the reduced availability of recycling centers. It was noted that it has not been as large as when first anticipated. The increased costs were being monitored and discussed at the Somerset Waste board meetings.
 - Concern was expressed that due to the timescale it was difficult to address any potential problems relating to annual indicators not reaching their target. However, it was noted that to look at the figures more frequently would change them to quarterly indicators, which may be not be practical for some, and would entail more work.
- ~~Sam was anything agreed here?~~ No

RESOLVED (1) that the progress in delivering the Corporate Priorities for 2011/12, be noted.

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

SC28 **Protocol for Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups**

(Copy of Report No. WSC 103/11, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to establish general principles for the operation of Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups.

RESOLVED that the proposed principles, attached to the report of the agenda, for the formation of Scrutiny Task & Finish Groups, be approved.

SC29 **Terms of Reference for Scrutiny Reviews**

(Copy of Report No. WSC 105/11, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to agree Terms of Reference for Street Cleansing and Community Safety reviews.

During the discussion it was noted that timescales would be discussed at the first meetings of each Task & Finish Group.

RESOLVED (1) that Terms of Reference for the Task & Finish Group for Street Cleansing, be approved.

RESOLVED (2) that, subject to including 'and subsequently to scrutinize in depth any/all of the above', after the fifth bullet point, the Terms of Reference for the Task & Finish Group for Community Safety Reviews, be approved.

RESOLVED (3) that, subject to confirmation from Members of the Scrutiny Committee not present who may wish to be included, the Street Cleansing Task & Finish Group ~~consist~~ comprise of Councillors A Chick, M Dewdney, G S Dowding, P Grierson and R Lillis.

RESOLVED (4) that, subject to confirmation from Members of the Scrutiny Committee not present who may wish to be included, the Community Safety Review Task & Finish Group ~~consist~~ comprise of Councillors J Freeman, P Grierson, and K Ross.

SC30 Scrutiny Committee Workplan Review

(Scrutiny Committee Workplan, circulated with the Agenda).

RESOLVED that, subject to including dates when the Task & Finish Groups report to Committee, the Workplan be agreed.

The meeting closed at 6.24 pm.