

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 October 2013 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor K J RossChairman
Councillor R P Lillis..... Vice-Chairman

Councillor M J Chilcott
Councillor G S Dowding
Councillor B Heywood

Councillor M O A Dewdney
Councillor J Freeman
Councillor P H Murphy

Members in Attendance:

Councillor H J W Davies
Councillor A F Knight
Councillor E May
Councillor K M Mills
Councillor D J Sanders
Councillor T Taylor
Councillor K H Turner

Councillor A P Hadley
Councillor K V Kravis
Councillor I R Melhuish
Councillor D D Ross
Councillor M A Smith
Councillor A H Trollope-Bellew
Councillor K H Turner

Officers in Attendance:

Chief Executive (P James)
Monitoring Officer (B Lang)
Deputy Monitoring Officer (I Timms)
Section 151 Officer (S Campbell)
Scrutiny and Performance Officer (S Rawle)
Performance and Efficiencies Manager (K Batchelor)
HR Consultant (M Griffin)
Administrative Support (H Dobson)

Also in Attendance:

Councillor J Williams, Leader for Taunton Deane Borough Council
Shirlene Adam, Project Manager, Taunton Deane Borough Council
Debbie Rundle, Communications Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council
Stephen Edmonds, Finance Co-ordinator, Somerset County Council

SC54 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P N Grierson.

SC55 Minutes

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

Noted that the concerns raised at the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in August 2013 regarding the future of EDF funded posts were yet to be reported back to the Committee and that this be added as an item to the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 16 September 2013, be confirmed as a correct record.

SC56 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 H Murphy	All Items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr K J Ross	All Items	Dulverton	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr H J W Davies	All Items	Somerset	Personal	Spoke
Cllr K H Turner	All Items	Brompton Ralph	Personal	Spoke

SC57 Public Participation

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

SC58 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 2 October 2013, be noted.

SC59 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 24 September 2013, circulated with the agenda).

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan published 24 September 2013, be noted.

SC60 Proposed Governance Arrangements – Inter Authority Agreement

(Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council Proposed Governance Arrangements – Inter Authority Agreement, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to outline the proposed inter authority agreement setting out the governance arrangements to be put in place in the event of the Taunton Deane Borough and West Somerset Councils agreeing to approve the Business Case for Joint Management and Shared Services.

The Corporate Director presented the report advising that should the Business Case be approved both Councils would keep their current democratic processes in place and that special governance would be required, as set out in the proposed agreement and attached to the agenda, in order to progress the project. The proposed Joint Partnership Advisory Group (JPAG) would be made up of five councillors from each authority, including the Leaders, and to be decided by each authority. The JPAG would ensure that the project was being delivered in accordance with the agreed Business Plan. The meetings would not be public but subsequent notes would be available to all members.

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

- A suggestion to insert the word 'potential' in front of 'transformation' in paragraph 2.1
- An assurance was sought that any changes to the agreed Business Case would be the subject of further consideration by the two Councils
- The establishment of the proposed Joint Partnership Advisory Group was welcomed. Membership should be left to politicians of each authority to establish.
- A request that all elected members are fully informed of progress
- A suggestion that the wording in clause 13 on Insurance is clarified to ensure that it applied to the position of moving towards all staff being employed by one Council.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that the Scrutiny Committee strongly urges the Council to take the above concerns, comments and suggestions into consideration when debating the report at the Special Council meeting scheduled to be held 12 November 2013.

Note: With the agreement of the Chairman this item was brought forward on the Agenda.

SC61 Creating a Shared Workforce

(Creating a Shared Workforce and Transition Redundancy Policy, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to outline the proposals for the creation of a shared workforce for the West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council.

The HR Consultant outlined the proposals of the report which had been developed in consultation with the Joint Project Board, Joint Member Advisory Panel and the Joint UNISON Board. UNISON and its Regional Board had agreed for it to be put before members.

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

- An explanation was given as to why the host employer model was being recommended and confirmation was given that other models had been considered.

- A request that members need clarity as to how the two authorities would be branded from a customer perspective should the project go ahead.
- Confirmation that the Joint Unison committee had agreed to the proposals.
- Detailed concern about TUPE and a recognition that this would not be a straightforward process. A suggestion was made to further explore the timing of any arrangements.
- Confirmation was given by officers that the apportionment of recruitment and redundancy costs would be as set out in the Business Case.
- The proposal to become a 'Living Wage' authority(ies) was welcomed by members.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that the Scrutiny Committee strongly urges the Council to take the above concerns, comments and suggestions into consideration when debating the report at the Special Council meeting scheduled to be held 12 November 2013.

Note: With the agreement of the Chairman this item was brought forward on the Agenda.

SC62 Joint Management Structure Proposal

(Joint Management Structure Proposal for West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to propose the creation of a joint management team that will serve both West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council.

The Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Project Manager and Performance and Efficiencies Manager left the Chamber for this item.

The Chief Executive delivered a presentation setting out the background, design principles, HR considerations, corporate roles, proposed management structure, financial implications and member involvement. The proposal takes into consideration the corporate priorities and is financially driven to make sure savings are delivered. The joint management proposal would not produce immediate savings for West Somerset Council but would open the door to significant savings as the project progressed to the shared workforce phase. The key benefits included access to business case savings, greater resilience and critical mass, access to a broader range of skills and experience including a greater capacity to maximise community and economic benefits of Hinkley Point C.

During the course of the debate, it was suggested that members should have involvement in "slot ins" of staff just as if there had been a recruitment process.

The Leader for West Somerset Council reassured members that he had discussions on the issues raised with the Chief Executive when searching questions had been asked and that he had been reassured by the answers.

The Leader for Taunton Deane Borough Council thanked the Committee for inviting him to attend the meeting. He recognised that the two councils had huge challenges ahead. It was important to ensure a system was in place so that issues were dealt with equitably and fairly and that the councils had a basis for a great relationship going forward.

There was considerable debate on the question of ensuring that the appropriate resource and expertise to deal with the Hinkley Point project being retained which led to the following recommendation:

RECOMMENDED that some recognition is allowed in the structure that recognises that Hinkley Point A, B, C, D and everything to do with it past, present and future is the expertise of West Somerset and needs to remain the responsibility of somebody who has 100% West Somerset responsibility.

RESOLVED that the Joint Management Proposal be noted and that the Scrutiny Committee strongly urges the Council to take the above comment and recommendation into consideration when debating the report at the Special Council meeting scheduled to be held 12 November 2013.

The Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Project Manager and Performance and Efficiencies Manager returned to the Chamber.

Note: With the agreement of the Chairman this item was brought forward on the Agenda.

SC63 Joint Management & Shared Services Business Case

(Joint Management and Shared Services Business Case, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to present the Business Case for Joint Management and Shared Services for West Somerset Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council.

The Leader for West Somerset introduced the report and set out the history of events that had resulted in the proposed Business Case. The savings are set out in the Business Case with a possibility of making further savings. On the whole he believed the Council could not afford to ignore the Business Case and continue without such a partnership.

In response to questions, the four members of the Joint Members Advisory Panel explained their role in the project and how they had helped to shape the business case and why they felt that they were able to commend the proposal to the two councils for approval.

The Leader of Taunton Deane Borough Council was invited to speak on the Business Case. He responded by saying that he wanted to reinforce that West Somerset was viewed as an equal partner and that the business of serving both communities were equally important. He believed that the business case would help both Councils and was confident that should the Business Case be approved both Councils would have a positive future.

The Project Manager made a presentation setting out the context and reasons for making savings, ambitions about saving money and resilience, finance modelling assumptions, transformation costs, timeline, independent assurance review etc. She invited members to attend drop-in sessions or contact her direct should they have any questions regarding the Business Case.

During the course of the debate the following points were raised/addressed:

- The costs of the project to date were clarified.
- It was suggested that the original project mandate aims had not been addressed by the Business Case and the Project Manager explained why, in her opinion, the proposals did meet these aims.
- In response to a question, an assurance was given that West Somerset Council would not be responsible for any termination costs relating to the current South West One contract.
- Concern was expressed that there were no figures provided in the Business Case for saving from the transformation phase and it was explained that such cost could not be identified until after the shared management and shared workforce stages had been completed. The savings identified related to these two phases only and so any costs from the transformation phase would be additional and subject to decisions to be taken by both councils in the future.
- A request that savings identified in the Business Case should show far more detail.
- A request that Council should be sure that proposed ICT costs are necessary in the merging of staff and services and whether these proposed costs represent best value and would not provide a further barrier to other partners joining the partnership in the future.
- A request that an assurance should be sought that any further reduction in staff at WSC does not negatively impact on service delivery.
- A view was expressed that if the proposed joint management structure was implemented, members would not have as good an access to senior officers as they had now and it was acknowledged that new and smarter ways of working would need to be adopted.
- A request that assurance should be sought in relation to the impact of possible changes to staff terms and conditions including any Job Evaluation process on the level of savings predicted.
- There was general concern that the level of savings for West Somerset from the project were more marginal than for Taunton Deane and could call into question the value of undertaking the project. The response was that the project still provided an opportunity of delivering significant savings to the council without directly impacting on service provision to the customer.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and that the Scrutiny Committee strongly urges the Council to take the above concerns, comments and suggestions into consideration when debating the report at the Special Council meeting scheduled to be held 12 November 2013.

SC64 Medium Term Financial Plan – Council Tax Support Grant to Parishes

(Report No. WSC 136/13, circulated with the Agenda).

The purpose of the report was to ask Scrutiny Committee to consider the level of Council Tax Support Grant to be allocated to parishes.

The Lead Member for Resources and Central Support presented the report and highlighted the effect of each of the proposals as set out in the report and attached to the agenda.

Members noted that the Council were not required to pass on funding identified to support towns and parishes to help mitigate the impacts of the Council Tax Support Reforms.

During the course of the discussion members considered the various options and their possible effects to the councils and suggested that the options could be considered each year.

RESOLVED that it be recommended to Council that the level of parish grant to be allocated to parish and town councils be reduced incrementally in line with the reduction in funding.

SC65 Scrutiny Committee Work Plan

RESOLVED (1) that an update report be received from the Minehead Events Group to be scheduled at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee;

RESOLVED (2) that an update on the Task and Finish Group relating to Assets Review be scheduled at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee;

RESOLVED (3) that the Community Safety – Report from the Local Inspector and Community Safety Officer on Local Police Issues be deferred from 18 November 2013 to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee;

RESOLVED (4) that concerns regarding the future of EDF funded posts be reported to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED (5) that the Scrutiny Committee Work Plan be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.40 pm.