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WEST SOMERSET COUNCIL
Scrutiny Committee 14.02.2019

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE 14 FEBRUARY 2019

AT 3.30 PM

COUNCIL CHAMBER - WEST SOMERSET HOUSE

Present:

Councillor P Murphy

Chairman

Councillor N Thwaites
Councillor R Clifford
Councillor S Dowding
Councillor R Lillis

Councillor J Parbrook
Councillor P Pilkington
Councillor R Woods

Members in Attendance:

Councillor M Dewdney
Councillor A Hadley

Councillor B Maitland-Walker
Councillor A Trollope-Bellew

Officers in Attendance:

Marcus Prouse
Clare Rendell
Andrew Stark

SC32 **Apologies.**

No apologies were received.

SC33 **Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.**

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6 December 2018 – circulated with the Agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 6 December 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

SC34 **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 Murphy	All items	Watchet	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr J Parbrook	All items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr P Pilkington	All items	Timberscombe	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr B Maitland-Walker	All items	Carhampton	Personal	Spoke
Cllr A Trollope-Bellew	All items	Crowcombe	Personal	Spoke

Councillor P Murphy further declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 as he is the Chair of the Watchet Coastal Community Team.

SC35 Public Participation.

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

SC36 Chairman's Announcements.

The following items were raised by the Chairman:-

- The Chairman advised Members that the report on the East Quay, which was discussed at Shadow Executive held on Monday 11 February 2019, was on the agenda for West Somerset Full Council scheduled for Wednesday 20 February 2019 and there would be a Member Briefing at 3.00pm prior to the meeting to allow Members to clarify any matters before the public debate.
- The Watchet Coastal Community Team had submitted a bid to Place Based Social Action Work. They secured their bid for £249,000 and were one of the ten groups in the country to be successful out of twenty who got through the first phase. This would deliver benefits for Watchet and the wider district.
- The Chairman highlighted that a question had been raised in Minute Number SC28 from the previous meeting on Invest to Save which had not been answered and the Committee were still awaiting a written answer.

SC37 Financial Monitoring - 2018/19 as at 31 December 2018

The report WSC 3/19 was presented by Councillor M Dewdney.

The report provided an update on the projected 'outturn' – end of year – financial position of the Council for the financial year 2018/19 (as at 31 December 2018).

The current forecast outturn for the Revenues Budget was a net underspend of £380,000.

The General Fund reserves forecast balance as at 31 March 2019 was projected to be £964,000. The balance remained above the recommended minimum reserves level approved in the Council's Budget Strategy (£700,000).

The Earmarked Reserves projected balance was £3,748,000 after any transfers to and from earmarked reserves during the year. The majority of

those reserves were allocated to business rates funding volatility (£1,290,000), Strategic Housing Market Area Assessment (£576,000), Planning Policy (£137,000), Asset Maintenance and Compliance (£207,000), Sustainability (£168,000) and Creating a New Council/Transformation (£836,000).

The current forecast position for the General Fund Capital Programme in 2018/19 was projected to overspend by £15,000 against a total approved budget of £13,905,000. Forecast spend during the year was £2,137,000 with £10,037,000 projected to be spent in future years.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Chairman highlighted that section h) in paragraph 5.4 of the report needed to be removed as it had been repeated.
- Members requested that the wording be amended in Appendix B from East Wharf to the East Quay.
The wording would be amended and clarification was given on why the reserve was required.
- Concern was raised on Non Domestic Rates (NDR) and that although the rates generated an income, it was stored away. Members queried whether there would be a time when the rates could be used as a business stream for the Council.
The Interim Finance Manager advised the Committee that although the Government proposed 100% rates retention, that did not mean that every penny raised would stay within the area. Officers had made assumptions in their calculations but the future was unknown for NDR. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had released a consultation document on the future of NDR which the Council would respond to.
- Members queried why the Server Refresh and JMASS ICT Transformation had still be included in the Capital Programme in Appendix B.
The question had been raised at the previous Shadow Scrutiny Committee and a written answer would be distributed.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee noted the Council's forecast financial performance as at 31 December 2018.

SC38 Parking in West Somerset Task and Finish Group

The report WSC 4/19 was presented by Councillor J Parbrook as the Chair of the Parking in West Somerset Task and Finish Group.

The purpose of the report was to set out the findings of the Task and Finish Group charged by the Scrutiny Committee to review West Somerset Council's Parking Strategy, with the expiry of the previous Strategy in 2011 and to prepare in advance of the work due to take place under the new combined Council to review the Strategy across the entire area.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- The Chairman advised the Committee that the report would go to Cabinet on 6 March 2019 and not Full Council.

- Members congratulated the Task and Finish Group for the work they had achieved.
- Members queried the use of funds to 'up staff' the parking wardens as they were employed by Somerset County Council (SCC).
The proposal was to request that SCC employed more officers, not for the New Council to fund them.
- Members queried the installation of electric vehicle charging points and would there be a charge for their use.
Yes, officers would look to charge for their use and generate some income. There were also Government grants available to assist with the cost.
- Members queried whether the New Council could manage some of the parking areas in Minehead that were currently managed by SCC. Members had noticed a difference in the ability to arrange events in some of those parking areas along with the different charges.
There was supposed to be uniformity on the parking charges across the areas managed by SCC and those managed by West Somerset Council (WSC).
- Members were pleased to see that the majority of car parks were in good condition.
- Members acknowledged there were issues with boundary ownerships, which made it difficult to arrange repair works.
- Concern was raised on the car park expenditure.
- Members were reassured that all the dangerous issues, that had been highlighted through the work of the group, had been addressed.
- Members highlighted that some of the recommendations would depend on the SCC parking review and on-street parking issues.
- Members suggested the introduction of tourist zones when the parking charges were calculated.
- Members acknowledged that some of the parking incentives had not been publicised, which meant that they had not been utilised to their full potential.
- Concern was raised on the size of parking bays as they did not reflect the increase in size of the modern day vehicle.
The size of bays had been noted and would be addressed.
- Members agreed that blue badge holders should be charged a nominal fee for parking, but that it did not help with the on-street parking issues.
- Members highlighted that some car parks were located near campsites and that the recycling bins stored in the car parks should be retained as they encouraged campers/users to recycle.
- Members highlighted that strategic investment was needed.

The Group was aware of the fact that Transformation had impacted on the levels of capacity within the organisation. They hoped that the recommendations would be supported by the Cabinet and that they would be actioned as swiftly as possible and taken forward under the New Council.

RESOLVED that the Parking in West Somerset Task and Finish Group recommended the following:-

- 1) The success of car parks in encouraging vehicles to use them and thus take parked vehicles off the main streets of our towns and villages was adversely affected by the regulation or lack of it of on-street parking in the streets around the car parks. It was also adversely affected by the

perception of the charging regime which was seen as being expensive for users and poor value for money. It was also adversely affected by the haphazard approach to car park facilities including signage which lacked consistency and visibility.

- a) Engage constructively with SCC Highways in their county wide Parking Review and encourage the active involvement of Parish and Town Councils to examine the options for on-street parking to encourage more use, particularly by commuters of off-street parking.
 - b) To review the charging regime to retain seasonal charging where there was a significant difference in usage between summer and winter. To consider the part that reduction in car park charges could make to increasing off-road parking. Both of which to be considered as part of the combined parking strategy review for the New Council of Somerset West and Taunton.
 - c) To reconsider the charging for blue badge holders in car parks in the light of a perceived increase in on-street parking by blue badge holders after the introduction of charging for them. To be considered as part of the combined parking strategy review for the New Council of Somerset West and Taunton.
 - d) As part of the combined parking strategy review for the New Council of Somerset West and Taunton carried out a comprehensive assessment of signage to and signage within car parks so that facilities were identified within the car parks and that directions to town and village centres were clear. Also to ensure that accurate up to date terms and conditions were on both signage and the website as legal requirements of Traffic Regulation Orders.
 - e) As part of the combined parking strategy review for the New Council of Somerset West and Taunton identified suitable locations for electric car charging points within the main car parks of each settlement together with dedicated parking bays. Work with local communities to establish such charging points and to make such efficient arrangements to maintain them as necessary.
- 2) It was likely that the presentation of the car parking account currently did not meet the Government Transparency Code because the recharging of work to the car park account was incomplete which gave a false impression of the expenditure carried out in car parks and thus of the overall surplus or deficit attributable to the car park account. As part of the combined parking strategy review for the New Council of Somerset West and Taunton, carried out the following actions:-
- a) Establish new working and accounting practices such that routine maintenance tasks were commissioned by the car park team and set against car park income;
 - b) Ensure that 26% of car park income derived in Minehead and Watchet car parks was allocated to the Harbours account in the interests of greater transparency to reflect the use of car parks by those that used the Harbours;
 - c) A maintenance strategy was adopted forthwith as set out in Appendix C of the Strategy and a robust inspection regime was put in place to identify maintenance, Health and Safety and other issues which required action in the immediate and short term. Such action to be commissioned by the car park team and recharged to the car park budget.

- d) Where on-street parking abuse was identified which might contribute to the reduction of off-street parking, consideration should be given to funding extra on-street enforcement patrols.
- e) As part of the combined parking strategy review for the New Council of Somerset West and Taunton, consideration should be given to the conclusions and recommendations contained in the area conclusions section which formed a part of the Strategy document attached.
- f) Commence work to establish ownership and responsibilities for car park boundaries and establish contact with boundary owners to agree maintenance duties for the future. If necessary, increase officer capacity to undertake this work in a timely manner. Such work be chargeable to the car park account.
- g) The principle of charging users for our off-street car parks should be levied on a suggested calculation of the following charges being made up of operational costs including capital and put aside for routine and long term expenditure minus the income generated through charges.
- h) The Group recommends the New Council should consider some form of zoning in its charges e.g. urban, rural, tourist.
- i) The New Council as part of its review should look at those Car Parks that were currently free/non charging but owned by the Council to determine whether to bring these into line with charging regime or asset transfer to the community/appropriate responsible body.
- j) Consideration should be given to a “free after 3pm” offer in designated car parks to encourage use/behaviour patterns, help the town centre businesses and discourage on-road commuter parking. Care should be taken when publicising these initiatives.

SC39 Closing of West Somerset Council Scrutiny Committee.

As this was the final meeting of West Somerset Council Scrutiny Committee, the Chairman wished to thank all the officers and councillors for their hard work over the four years he had been Chairman of the Committee. He also thanked councillors for the way they had scrutinised the reports in a politically unbiased manner.

The Meeting closed at 5.10 pm