

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE 6 DECEMBER 2018

AT 3.30 PM

COUNCIL CHAMBER - WEST SOMERSET HOUSE

Present:

Councillor P Murphy

Chairman

Councillor N Thwaites

Councillor R Lillis

Councillor I Aldridge

Councillor J Parbrook

Councillor R Clifford

Councillor P Pilkington

Councillor S Dowding

Members in Attendance:

Councillor M Dewdney

Councillor A Trollope-Bellew

Councillor B Maitland-Walker

Officers in Attendance:

Andrew Stark

Richard Doyle

Marcus Prouse

Clare Rendell

SC22 Apologies

No apologies were received.

SC23 Minutes of the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 18 October 2018 – circulated with the Agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 18 October 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

SC24 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 I Aldridge	All items	Williton	Personal	Spoke and voted
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 Clifford further declared a personal interest as Chair of the West Somerset Advice Bureau.

SC25 Public Participation

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

SC26 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 20 November 2018, circulated at the meeting).

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 20 November 2018 be noted.

SC27 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman wished everyone a Happy Christmas.

SC28 Invest to Save Report

The report WSC 88/18 was presented by Councillor M Dewdney.

Members were made aware that when the Council approved the budget back in February 2018, the proposals included a contribution to be made to the Sustainability Reserve of £210,000.

There had also been a debate at the time about the intention of the use of the reserve and in particular about how it should be used to provide resources for 'Invest to Save Initiatives'. The intention was always to help capacity to bring projects forward.

With regard to the use of the reserve, it was confirmed that part of it had been used to fund the employment of a Consultant Estates Surveyor to strengthen the staffing resource of the Estates Team. Whilst not directly engaged on any specific 'Invest to Save Projects', they had been an invaluable resource on a number of asset and estate projects that had provided a valuable source of revenue to the Council.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members raised concerns on the Transformation Project.

The Chairman advised that those concerns should be raised at the Full Council meeting scheduled for 12 December 2018.

- Members queried how much of the Sustainability Reserve had been used to fund the extra officer capacity.

A written answer would be sent out to the Committee.

- Members queried what work had been undertaken on 'Invest to Save Projects' that did not include work to produce extra income from our existing assets.

There were a couple of projects in the pipeline and further details would be sent out to the Committee.

- Members queried whether the Council intended to sell space on the new website for advertisements to create a source of income.

The suggestion would be passed onto the Web Development Officer.

- Members requested clarification on the projected balance of the Sustainability Reserve of £163,000 and whether it had included all deductions for the Transformation Project and other commitments.

Yes it had taken all deductions into account.

- Members queried when they would start to see a return on the 'Invest to Save Projects'.

A specific date could not be given. There had been a project that was discussed at the previous Full Council meeting in closed session that had taken months to prepare to the point it was ready to take forward for approval. The types of projects involved would take certain periods of time to complete.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee noted the update report and awaited further information to be distributed.

SC29 Quarter Two 2018-19 Performance Report

The report WSC 89/18 was presented by Councillor A Trollope-Bellew.

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with Key performance management data up to the end of Quarter Two 2018-19, to assist in monitoring the Council's performance.

There were five red measures reported in quarter two:-

HC4.13 – Number of households that made a homeless application and percent accepted where we had a duty;

KPI 90B – % Minor planning applications determined within eight weeks or an agreed extension time;

KPI 123 – Customer complaints answered within twenty working days;

KPI 1234 – Freedom of Information requests answered within twenty working days; and

HC4.17 – To facilitate the delivery of the affordable housing pipeline to achieve thirty-four new affordable homes in 2018-19.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members highlighted that the figures for households that were homeless had risen dramatically due to the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2018 and suggested that the target for HC4.13 needed to be revised to reflect the changes.

The Corporate Strategy and Performance Officer agreed and would review the target that had been set.

- Concern was raised on the staffing levels within the Housing Department and how would that be monitored in the future.
Staffing levels would continue to be monitored as part of business as usual and would be reported on again in next quarter's performance report. The Corporate Strategy and Performance Officer would also pass on the Councillors concern to the new Head of Function for Housing.
- Members raised concern for the homeless customers that turned up at the door who might not receive the help they required due to staffing issues.
The Governance and Democratic Specialist read out a section of the minutes from the previous Scrutiny meeting where the Homelessness Manager had attended and highlighted her concern on staffing and resource.
- Members requested a report could be brought to the Committee from the West Somerset Advice Bureau on homelessness issues.
The Governance and Democratic Specialist would follow up on that request.
- Concern was raised on KPI 90B and the time it took to process a planning application. Members were aware of an application that had taken approximately nine months to process to the stage it could be taken to the Planning Committee for determination.
It was suggested that the delay was often caused in the validation stage of the process due to incorrect forms being used and further information being requested.
- Members hoped that KPI 160 on staff sickness figures would improve over time after the completion of the Transformation Project. They were aware that staff were under pressure but hoped that would improve.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Council's performance and highlighted any areas of particular concern.

SC30 Financial Monitoring 2018-19 as at 30 September 2018

The report WSC 90/18 was presented by Councillor M Dewdney.

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the projected 'outturn' – end of year – financial position of the Council for the financial year 2018-19 (as at 30 September 2018).

The current forecast outturn for the Revenue Budget was a net underspend of £150,000.

The General Fund reserves forecast balance was projected to be £1,049,000. The balance remained above the recommended minimum reserves level approved in the Council's Budget Strategy.

The Earmarked Reserves projected balance was £4,241,000 after any transfers during the year. The majority of those reserves were allocated to

business rates funding volatility, Strategic Housing Market Compliance, Sustainability and Creating a New Council/Transformation Project.

The current forecast position for the General Fund Capital Programme in 2018-19 was on target against a total approved budget of £13,893,000. Forecast spend during the year was £1,987,000 with £10,185,000 projected to be spent in future years.

During the discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Members requested clarification on the figures reported on the Sustainability Fund.
The Interim Finance Manager confirmed that the figures were calculated prior to Full Council and had been amended to reflect the changes.
- Members requested clarification on the figures calculated for Business Rates Retention.
The Interim Finance Manager confirmed that the details were within the report and it was primarily down to paying a larger levy that was budgeted for because the Council's income had risen due to a higher compensation factor allowed against Small Business Rates Relief.
- Members queried whether Hinkley Point B was the main factor that caused the volatility with the business rates calculations.
It was one of the factors but not the only one, it was based on many different calculations.
- Members queried what the title Facilities included.
It included buildings and assets and the overspend covered the cost of the security guard based at West Somerset House.
- Members queried what impact would the delay in the Local Government Settlement have on officers.
The delay meant that officers could not start planning for next year and they would not know the outcome of the bid for the Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee noted the Council's forecast financial performance as at 31 September 2018 with the estimated position at the end of the financial year.

SC31 **Scrutiny Work Programme**

Members were reminded that if they had an item they wanted to add to the agenda, that they should send their requests to the Governance and Democratic Specialist.

During the discussion, the following point was raised:-

- Members were advised that there were two meetings scheduled for January and February which were no longer required due to financial reports being taken through the Shadow Council process. Members were asked which date they preferred.

RESOLVED that the content of the Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting closed at 5.00 pm