

WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Minutes of the: **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Held on: **WEDNESDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2005**

Held at: **COUNCIL OFFICES, BRADLEY ROAD, TROWBRIDGE**

Present:

Councillors: Phillips OBE, (Chairman), Bower, Conley, Cunliffe-Jones, Fortescue, Manasseh, Mudge, Repton, Rosier, Viles and While

Cllrs Brown, Carbin and Osborn

Also in attendance:

Officers: Corporate Director (IG), Financial Accountant (TG), Principal Planning Officer (PW), Interim Commercial Services Manager (KG) and Member Support Team Leader (YR)

Also present: Graeme Hay, Highways Maintenance Manager – Wiltshire County Council

27. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the following:

Cllrs Blakemore, Bryant, Lewis, Mounde, Newbury, Oakman and Payne.

28. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

The membership of the Committee was noted. The following temporary changes took place:

Cllr Repton replaced Cllr Blakemore

Cllr Viles replaced Cllr Mounde

Cllr Mudge replaced Cllr Payne

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reported that unfortunately Marie Laws, the Policy and Co-ordination Officer was on sick leave at the moment and on behalf of the Committee, he wished her a speedy recovery.

29. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 6 July 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the

- deletion of Cllr Bower's name from the list of attendees and inclusion of his name in the list of those who had tendered an apology for absence in minute no. 15;
- deletion of Cllr Viles' name from those who had tendered an apology in minute no. 15..

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Rosier declared his interest in minute no. 31 as he was this Council's representative on the South West Procurement of Excellence.

31. STREET CLEANSING AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

The Chairman introduced a report which had been requested by Members. The purpose of the report was to provide the basis for a discussion on street cleansing and grounds maintenance within West Wiltshire. The specific issues Members would be asked to focus attention at this meeting were street cleansing, weed control (spraying) and grass cutting.

The Chairman welcomed Graeme Hay, the County Council's Highways Maintenance Manager and this Council's Interim Commercial Services Manager, Kevin Gibbs who attended to answer Members' questions.

The Chairman welcomed Town Council representatives who had taken up the Chairman's invitation to attend the meeting. Unfortunately, Bradford on Avon Town Council was unable to send a representative but a letter from the Town Council was circulated to the Committee. He also welcomed representatives from the Seymour Tenants and Residents' Association. At the Chairman's invitation, representatives participated during the debate.

The report outlined the service provided, allocation of resources and the corresponding best value performance indicators.

It was noted that the Wiltshire Customer First Partnership of which this Council was a member of, had been successful in a bid to the South West Regional Centre for Excellence for £120k. This money would be used to part fund a project by the Partnership to improve the street scene within Wiltshire. The project was intended to reduce costs and markedly improve services and customer satisfaction through working strategically in partnership across Wiltshire's public service sector. There were two stages to this project with a view to going 'live' in 2007. The project would include a proposal for a joint contract for street cleansing and grounds maintenance with the County Council, Wiltshire District Councils and West Wiltshire Housing Society. This would be reported to Cabinet on 28 September. At that meeting, Cabinet would also be asked to approve an extension to the contract with English

Landscapes for grounds maintenance in the Central area (Trowbridge) which was due to expire at the end of 2005.

The report also referred to the External Audit Plan which included grounds maintenance. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee had previously commented that this audit should be limited to just grounds maintenance and not cover wider issues such as waste and recycling.

Reference was also made to the Customer Relationship Management project in so far as it related to commercial services and the logging of complaints/incidences involving street cleansing.

Members considered that this subject warranted the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to investigate the issues further before making any appropriate recommendations back to this Committee.

RESOLVED:

That a Task and Finish Group be established with the following:

Membership

Cllrs Cunliffe-Jones, Mudge and Oldrieve

Remit

To examine the issue of street cleansing and grounds maintenance in more detail to include recommending areas for improvement and appropriate mechanisms for monitoring performance and report back to the next meeting of this Committee. The Committee would then be able to determine whether there were any outstanding issues that needed to be brought to the attention of Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

That the Wiltshire Customer First Partnership bid be welcomed but that Cabinet be asked to give further attention to the proposed timetable to allow the project to go 'live' as soon as possible.

32. FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Financial Accountant presented a report which detailed the Council's financial Position for the period ending 31 July 2005.

The revised Capital Programme for 2005/06 stood at £6.334m. Gross spend to 31 July 2005 was £1.941m. Total investment income to date was £190k against £375k budgeted for the year which was likely to be exceeded.

The base budget for 2005/06 on the General Fund stood at £12.382m with expenditure to 31 July at £3.797m.

The Committee's attention was drawn to main changes in the projected General Fund out-turn which stood at £12.548m.

The Committee sought further information from Cabinet on a number of concerns.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

That Cabinet and the Finance Portfolio Holder be asked to address the following issues of concern:

- **the effect of lower interest rates on investments;**
- **the escalating fuel costs;**
- **the financial report presented to Scrutiny Committee referred to 'one-off pressures totalling £171k. The Scrutiny Committee would like Cabinet to explain what these pressures are;**
- **concern that the contingency fund will be eroded.**

33. AUDIT REPORTS

The Financial Accountant presented a report which outlined the findings and recommendations of the Internal Audits recently conducted in respect of:

- Payroll
- Statement of Internal Control
- Accountancy and Budgetary Control (ABC)
- Treasury Management and Prudential Code

For each audit, areas of good practice and significant recommendations were brought to the Committee's attention.

The Committee was invited to consider the recommendations made and query any areas of concern.

The Committee did not raise any concerns and was pleased with the systems in place.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

34. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

A Performance Monitoring Group was established by the Committee at its last meeting to look at performance monitoring and performance monitoring indicators in

more detail. The Group is chaired by Cllr Roy While and consists of Cllrs Bower, Mounde and Manasseh.

The Group held its first meeting on 16 August to monitor performance for quarter one of 2005/06. Cllr While reported that it was a very productive first meeting. The Group had agreed to that it should focus on a limited range of performance indicators at each meeting and seek to make recommendations as well as report to the Scrutiny Committee. The Group would first concentrate on performance indicators which were showing red and not expected to reach their target by the year end. Future work would include highlighting those indicators which were showing green and which had demonstrated good or very good performance. The Group had considered and queried the following 'red' indicators:

- improving development control
- meeting housing need
- better access to recreation
- putting customers first
- sound financial management
- efficient and effective service delivery and
- high quality communications.

The Committee was asked to identify any other areas of concern which would benefit from further investigation by the Group and identify any recommendations the the Committee would like to make to Cabinet.

A suggestion was made that it would be useful to compare this Council's performance with other authorities in the south west and other rural councils.

A comment was made that improvement in development control would be assisted by improvements by the Planning Committee. The Committee was concerned that training in planning had been delayed.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee

- (a) confirms that it is happy with the approach being adopted by the Performance Monitoring Group.**
- (b) notes and supports the future work of the Group in reviewing targets, in collaboration with Service Managers**
- (c) note that Group will be closely monitoring the 40% of indicators for which the information is not yet available.**
- (d) support the need to focus on those indicators which are doing well in addition to keeping under review and paying close attention to, those**

indicators which are missing the target

- (e) note that the Group will be establishing trends and putting performance indicators into context**
- (f) support the Group's work in the revision of indicators where necessary, for example carrying out work on the usage of the website and reviewing leisure activities as indicated in the report presented**
- (g) Support the Group's intention to keep a close review of BV183ii (length of stay in hostels) to see whether performance improves. This indicator is important for CPA purposes.**
- (h) support the Group's intention to keep PC8 (top quartile performance) under close review. This indicator is important for the Council's overall ambition.**

35. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

The Council was currently reviewing its Constitution. A Seminar meeting of Council was held on 11 August at which Members' views were sought in order to shape an initial draft of the Constitution. All Members would be invited to attend Cabinet on 28 September when Members would be advised on the progress with the review. All Members would also be invited to attend the Standards Committee (date rescheduled to 25 October) to consider the draft and any issues that arise out of it.

Given that this was a relatively new Committee, it was asked what contribution it would like to make to the Constitution.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee had met with officers to consider what specific references they would like to see included in the Constitution with respect to the Committee. A report was presented to highlight the issues identified by them. The Committee's views were sought on those areas in particular.

RESOLVED:

That the issues highlighted by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee as detailed in the report presented be submitted as this Committee's contribution to the review of the Constitution to be amended by the following points which emerged from the discussion:

- The Chairman or Vice-Chairman of a Committee being scrutinised should not serve on a Task and Finish group set up to look at the activities of that Committee.**
- Agreed to public participation.**

- **No formal questions be allowed.**
- **Agreed in principle the establishment of an Audit Committee to have the same membership as the Scrutiny Committee to meet 3 times a year.**
- **To have a standing working group to look closely at audit reports.**
- **Under 'role' to include the 'four principles'**
- **No Cabinet member on the Committee. Chairman not to be a member from the ruling group.**
- **Substitutes be allowed (but discouraged)**

36. SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING

The Corporate Director presented a report which provided background information to assist the Committee to determine its role in the service and resource planning process for 2006/07.

The key aims of the service and resource planning process were outlined.

He explained that it was vital for Comprehensive Performance Assessment and general public accountability that a robust and complete approach was given to this process. It was noted that Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team had were already involved throughout the process and had commenced the planning stage and would conclude with the setting of the budget and Council tax in March 2006. A timetable was presented for the Committee's information.

The Committee was asked on how it saw its role and degree of involvement in this process. A number of options were outlined for the Committee's guidance.

The following comments emerged from the discussion:

- The Committee should look to scrutinise the proposed budget rather than proposing an alternative one although an opposition group could submit an alternative budget which could also come under scrutiny by the Committee.
- In scrutinising the proposed budget, the Committee should challenge it if appropriate, but remain politically impartial in order to provide effective scrutiny.
- To look at service levels and targets instead of the more politically sensitive and emotive area of council tax levels.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and that a further report be considered at the next meeting.

37. TASK AND FINISH GROUP – PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

The Committee received a report which gave background information to assist it in setting up a Task and Finish Group to consider the effectiveness of the Planning Service at monitoring enforcement.

RESOLVED:

That this item be deferred to allow the Service Manager to implement the existing Service Improvement Action Plan

38. FORWARD WORK PLAN

The Committee considered its forward work plan with particular attention to the items for inclusion in the agenda of the next two meetings 19 October and 30 November. It had previously been agreed to consider the Leisure and Recreational Needs Assessment at the next meeting. However, the Chairman had agreed to put this item on hold given that a Council Seminar had been arranged on the subject.

19 October 2005

- Update from Councillor Jeff Osborn, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development.
- Update from Councillor Terry Chivers, Portfolio Holder for Community.

Both Portfolio Holders had been invited to present the issues and challenges within their respective portfolios. Members would be invited to submit their questions in advance of this meeting.

- Service and Resource Planning – following discussions at this meeting to begin work on the Committee's input into the medium term financial plan and service and resource plans.
- Audit Plan - A report by the Council's internal auditor KPMG, consisting of the annual report for 2004-05 and the planned work for 2005-06. The Committee will have an opportunity to influence the planned audit work for 2005-06.
- Regular budget and financial monitoring report. Figures as at the end of August 2005.

30 November 2005

Performance Monitoring - This meeting will be dedicated to performance monitoring.

- Performance indicators – to look in detail at those performance issues brought to its attention by the Performance Monitoring Group as at the end of September 2005.
- Chief Executive will be invited to attend the meeting to provide an update on the progress being made against the actions in the Corporate Plan and the current challenges facing the council.
- Regular budget and financial monitoring report - figures as at the end of October 2005.

RESOLVED:

- (a) **That the Forward Work Plan be noted and that the items for the next two meetings as outlined above be agreed.**
- (b) **That Members be invited to submit questions to Cllrs Chivers and Osborn in advance of the next meeting. .**

Note: Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on 19 October 2005 to be held in the Council Chamber at the Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge at 7pm.

(7pm – 9.45pm)

These minutes were prepared by Yamina Rhouati, Member Support Team Leader who can be contacted on direct line 01225 770322 or email yrhouati@westwiltshire.gov.uk

Chairman:

Date:

commdev/word/scrutiny/minutes2005 – 07/09/05