

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 November 2015 at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor P H MurphyChairman
Councillor R LillisVice Chairman

Councillor A Behan
Councillor G S Dowding
Councillor J Parbrook

Councillor R Clifford
Councillor B Maitland-Walker
Councillor R Woods

Members in Attendance:

Councillor M Chilcott
Councillor A Hadley
Councillor A Trollope-Bellew
Councillor D J Westcott

Councillor M Dewdney
Councillor K J Mills
Councillor T Venner

Officers in Attendance:

Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer – (B Lang)
Democratic Services Coordinator (E McGuinness)
Assistant Director – (P Fitzgerald)
Revenues and Benefits Manager (H Tiso)
Finance and Performance Manager (P Harding)
Finance Manager (S Plenty)
Administrative Support (A Randell)

Derek McCullough, Operations Manager: South Western Ambulance Service NHS
Foundation Trust

Neil Le Chevalier, Director of Operations: South Western Ambulance Service NHS
Foundation Trust

Heather Strawbridge – Chair of South Western Ambulance Service Trust

SC121 Apologies for Absence

No Apologies were received.

SC122 Minutes

(Minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 October 2015 –
circulated with the Agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 October
2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

SC123 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 D Archer	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted
Cllr J Parbrork	All Items	Minehead	Personal	Spoke and voted

Additional Interests were declared by Councillor Dowding as a first responder, Councillor Murphy who has a relative on the board of Artlife and Councillor Lillis declared an interest as a Board member of Engage.

SC124 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 from the meeting held on 4 November 2015, be noted.

SC125 Cabinet Forward Plan

(Copy of the Cabinet Forward Plan published 4 November 2015, circulated with the agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan published on 4 November 2015, be noted.

SC126 Ambulance Service Provision within the West Somerset Council District.

The purpose of the briefing was for the South West Ambulance Service Trust to update Council and provide information on the Ambulance Service provision in West Somerset.

Jim Butterworth read out the following statement to the committee relating to Ambulance Service provision:-

It was stressed this is not a rant against the Ambulance Service but I do support the legitimate concerns raised in the letter from this Committee.

There is no question that the medical care is first-class; I think we all agree on that. But many are concerned at the frequent unavailability of an Ambulance when we really need it.

From first-hand experience: My heart attack was correctly triaged as a red alert, but it took 72 minutes to get an ambulance to Blue Anchor; 135 minutes to get me to Musgrove. I was lucky.

Something is wrong and it needs changing. I looked at the South West Ambulance Report September 2015: it is 70 pages long. If this were an Ofsted Report on a school they would be very close to Special Measures.

Difficulties seem to be reflected in the high 15% staff turnover which must be disruptive and very costly as experienced staff continually move on.

The Ambulance Service has an A19 target which requires a two-man ambulance to arrive within 19 minutes for 95% of life-threatening call-outs. This sounds good unless you are one of the 5% of failures.

It gets worse - for Somerset as a whole the A19 response is under 90% that is a 10% failure rate and double the target figures.

It appears that, in a life-threatening emergency, one in every ten needing urgent treatment are kept waiting for over 19 minutes. Stressful for all concerned; not least the medics.

But, from the age profile, level of complaints and distances involved, we might project the A19 failure rate to be as high as 25% in the rural areas which includes Minehead - one in four life-threatening emergencies do not get an ambulance within 19 minutes.

We all recognise there are financial restraints but surely there needs to be a rebalancing of resources such that rural areas are not unfairly compromised simply in order to reach targets?

Mr Chairman, in addition to questions already asked by this Committee, I think we should like to know:

1. What is the actual A19 rate for West Somerset? - and if there isn't a figure; why not? - and get it or my estimated 25% failure rate will stand.
2. How the new "Dispatch on Disposition" initiative is helping to improve these A19 figures?
3. The reasons behind the 15% turnover of professional medical staff?
4. How can this rural Authority support the Ambulance Service and impress our concerns on the powers-that-be?

ref: <http://tinyurl.com/g3ux4I5> South West Ambulance Report September 2015.

Heather Strawbridge, Neil Le Chevalier and Derek McCullough gave a presentation in relation on the Ambulance Service Provision within West Somerset.

During the course of discussion the following points were made:-

- Members questioned how often Ambulances from Minehead are on standby in areas in and around Taunton. This was dependent on demand. There was a status plan management system to ensure network provision that was required.

- The status plan manager was a dynamic plan that would be used to maximize resource cover and reduce the response time. The service is provided to the County as a whole. Cover for Taunton was a recognised part of the service provided.
- Three units were deployed to cover the areas surrounding Minehead (a 24 hour ambulance, an 8 hour ambulance and a car unit. These could also serve other areas. A minimum level of cover would be ensured in the area with resources from other areas able to be deployed to Minehead from areas such as Bridgwater.
- The role of the first responder was discussed along with their training and responsibility. An initial three day training course was provided along with continual refresher training to keep knowledge current. A first responder would generally not travel more than 2-3 miles to a response.
- The purpose of first responders were to enhance the cover that they already had, the majority of these were based in rural areas to provide an early response and better chance of survival with immediate support. The standard requirement was for a defibrillator to be with the patient within 8 minutes.
- Figures for the quarter between July and September set out the response times at 70.62% in red 1 and 2 scenarios.
- Due to the risk of the risk posed to the public intelligent use of blue lights was encouraged to avoid danger on the roads.
- Suicide was treated in the same category as a life threatening emergency (R1).
- The rapid response figures for West Somerset were detailed at 865 made in under 15 minutes which left them amongst the top performing for a trust in Somerset.
- It was considered if staff shortages were a factor in the increased response times. There was a national shortage of paramedics, work was being done to recruit more staff. Universities were being worked with to attract and recruit to close the staff shortage gap and recruit nurses in addition to paramedics.
- Paramedics had increasingly greater options to pursue career development and move elsewhere in the healthcare profession, this was a contributing factor of staff shortages along with recruitment issues.
- Work was additionally being done in collaboration with St Johns ambulance service to maintain full cover.
- Continuing improvement in response times was being delivered across the service with 90,000 less calls needed a response in 2015-16 because of the dispatch and disposition approach to responding to calls.
- There was a strong relationship with the commissioning group and communities were being worked with to understand how the ambulance service works to further appreciate what healthcare service is needed.
- The trust had £227 million turnover with all surpluses invested and one of the only trusts that were not facing financial deficit.
- Concerns were expressed over response times experienced by some in the community. It was acknowledged that this was the case in the rural areas where travel times would be increased.
- Public access to defibrillators was being increased with training given where possible.

- The SWAST representatives were unable to answer the following questions at the meeting and agreed to provide a written response after the meeting:
- On average, per 999 call, how many miles are ambulances travelling on 'blue lights' to respond to calls in West Somerset?
- Over the past 12 months, how many calls from West Somerset have been responded to by Ambulances **leaving** from within the West Somerset Area?
- Over the past 12 months, how many response times to calls from West Somerset have exceeded 45 minutes within each of your response categories?
- Are you able to provide any data that shows where the Minehead ambulances physically are when West Somerset response times have exceeded 45 minutes and crews from as far away as South Molton have attended?
- How long, on average, does it take for back up to arrive to support Rapid Response Vehicle crews within the West Somerset area?

Resolved that:- members noted the answers given and asked that a written response be provided as soon as is practicable to those questions the SWAST were unable to answer at the meeting.

SC127 Council Tax Rebate Scheme Review for 2016/17

Considered report, WSC 162/15 previously circulated

The purpose of the report was:-

To provide the Scrutiny Committee with information on our existing Council Tax Rebate scheme and the context for reviewing our scheme for Working Age applicants from 2016/17.

To advise the Scrutiny Committee of the outcome of the public consultation on our Council Tax Rebate scheme in 2016/17.

To obtain support from the Scrutiny Committee on the preferred revisions to our Council Tax Rebate scheme in 2016/17 provided by the Corporate Policy Advisory Group at the meeting held on 28 October 2015.

During the course of discussion the following points were made:-

- It was questioned if second homes could be charged beyond 100% which was currently the maximum in future. You could not charge beyond this if the property was furnished.
- The costing to take maintenance into account was discussed.
- The modelling options in set out in 9.6 were considered

Resolved that:-

The Scrutiny Committee support the preferred revisions to the Council Tax Rebate scheme for 2016/17 as outlined in the report, namely Model 15. It was noted that Model 15 would affect working age applicants by:

(see [Model 15](#)). disregarding maintenance received for children

- removing entitlement to applicants with capital over £6,000;
- applying a Minimum Income for Self-Employed applicants; and
- paying CTR at a level that would be no more than for a Band C property

Implementing [Model 15](#) would result in an estimated saving in comparison to the cost of our current CTR scheme of £90,383.31. When the implications of tax credits changes are taken into account, the net additional cost in 2016/17 is estimated to be £45,416.69 for all preceptors, with West Somerset Council's share of that additional cost at 9.46% being £4,296.42.

SC128 Corporate Performance Report Q2 2015/16

The Committee considered the report, WSC 158/15 which had been previously circulated.

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with key performance management data up to the end of quarter 2 2015/16, to assist in monitoring the Council's performance. Publishing this information also supports the aim of greater public accountability.

During the course of discussion the following points were made:-

- Recent improvements in relation to performance on minor planning applications were discussed.
- The Highlight summary of Appendix C (Energy Infrastructure Program) was detailed to members for information. The responsibility for this remained with the programme manager.
- Further details of sickness absence levels were provided to members. The projection of 7.4 days within the authority was comparable with the figures of 8.3 days for SCC with the average for local authorities around 8.2 days. Employees off work for longer than 28 days are referred to Occupational health. There had been a number of instances of long-term sickness cases.
- Members stated that sickness absence figures were a concern with further service changes to be implemented in the future. It was considered that there could be an increasing amount of stress related illness with the implementation of the transformation programme.
- Members were made aware that the software migration from Northgate to Civica in the Revenues and Benefits service, could lead to some impact in the performance of how housing benefit claims were processed, given the timescales to migrate across to the new software. This could be picked up in future highlight reports if it became a performance issue.

Resolved that:-

- (1) Scrutiny committee noted the performance in Q2 and highlight to the Cabinet matters of particular concern in relation to staff sickness ;
- (2) Supports the change of measure in relation to Disabled Facility Grants described in paragraphs 5.8 to 5.11 of this report.

SC129 Fees and Charges 2016/17

Members considered the report, WSC 159/15 as previously circulated.

The purpose of the report was to consider the proposed fees and charges for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, prior to submission to Cabinet on 2 December and Full Council on 16 December.

During the course of discussion the following points were made:-

- The Scrutiny committee were requested to make comment on the Fees and Charges report.
- There were proposed changes to bring WSC and TDBC charges in alignment with one another.
- Concerns were expressed that there was a downward trend in relation to fees for planning applications.
- Following a review there had been a reduction in Council Tax court costs and in the breakdown in how these costs were calculated. This was to take notice of a recent high court case and avoid legal challenge.

Resolved that:- Scrutiny recommend to Cabinet the proposed Fees and Charges for 2016/17 on the following basis:-

Amended charge structure for:

- Building Control Charges

Increased charges for:

- Harbour Mooring and Slipway Fees;
- Pleasure Boat Dues;
- Various Waste Charges

Decreased charges for:

- Court Summons and Liability Orders for Council Tax and Business Rates

The rest of Fee's as set out in the report were to remain unchanged.

SC130 Financial Monitoring Report 2015-16 (April-September 2015)

Considered report, WSC 160/15 previously circulated.

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with details of the Council's latest forecast financial outturn position for the 2015/16 financial year for both revenue and capital budgets, together with information relating to predicted end of year reserve balances.

During the course of discussion the following points were made:-

- The committee acknowledged the difficulty in bridging the budget gap.
- A number of budget reserves were questioned and considered if these could be reduced or taken back into general reserves.

- It was considered important for the sustainability reserve to remain as there was existing work to be completed around tests and checking.
- Money was needed to be set aside in the election reserve to provide for any elections that may be called in addition to the rolling out of electronic registration.
- It was anticipated that more money would be needed to be set aside in the JMASS reserve, following future service options resulting from the transformation project.
- The existing car parks reserve was in place to deal with any surface maintenance along with signage that might be needed across the car parks.
- It was detailed to members that funds were committed in these reserves which would have major consequences if released. The priority choices as to where funding went remained a member decision.

Resolved that:- Scrutiny noted the current financial standing of the Council together with the estimated position at the end of the financial year.

SC131 Budget Update and Initial Savings Options 2016/17

Considered report, WSC 161/15 previously circulated.

The purpose of this report was to provide Scrutiny Committee with an update on budget estimates for 2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) forecasts, and to consider initial savings options towards addressing the Budget Gap for next year.

During the course of discussion the following points were made:-

- Councillors expressed concerns over the lack of paperwork provided in terms of equalities impact assessments. It was considered that due to this information being incomplete could members give this matter the appropriate level of consideration?
- Councillors recognised that budget reductions have to be made, however there were reservations over reductions to voluntary organisations, some charities had felt they had been told what their settlements were before a council decision had been made. Assurance was given that this was not the case but initial contact with voluntary organisations on initial savings options had been made in order to fully assess any potential impacts.
- More work was still to be completed on the Equality impact assessments prior to any final decisions being taken..
- Members were reassured that proposals were still a work in progress and under discussion with a range of options still being worked through, further assurance was given that the report would be taken back to the Management team and be presented in a clearer form when When next considered. There were further concerns that the cuts to the proposed services would hit low income families along with those that were socially and rurally isolated.

- It was proposed that members start to consider bringing the reserves below the minimum recommended level following this report.

Resolved:- that Scrutiny noted the latest budget estimates 2016/17.

SC132 Scrutiny Committee Work Plan

(Copy of the Forward Plan for 2015/16, circulated with the agenda.)

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Forward Plan published on 4 November 2015, be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.30 pm.