

## MENDIP DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on Monday, 18 September 2017 in the Council Chamber at Mendip District Council, Shepton Mallet commencing at 6.30 pm.

### COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Councillors Eve Berry, Shane Collins, Nick Cottle, Steve Henderson, Damon Hooton (Vice Chair), Claire Hudson, Lloyd Hughes, Terry Napper, Nigel Hewitt-Cooper, Graham Noel, John North, John Osman (Chair), Dick Skidmore

### OTHER COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Councillors Des Harris, Mike Pullin, Rachel Carter, Clive Mockford, David van Dyk, Alan Townsend, Linda Oliver, Danny Unwin.

### OFFICERS:

Tracy Aarons	Lead Officer of the Scrutiny Board
Caroline M <sup>c</sup> Cafferty	Committee Officer
Peter McGuire	Project and Service Development Officer
Sara Skirton	Group Manager Corporate Services

### OTHERS PRESENT:

Emma Plummer	Strategic Manager – Performance, SCC
Toby Eliot	Leader of Frome Town Council
Sheila Gore	Mayor of Frome Town Council
Nina Swift	Vice Chair of Street Town Council
Celia Wride	Deputy Mayor of Wells
John Winstone	Chair of Mendip Conservation Advisory Panel

Agenda Item	Subject	Actioned By
1	<p><b>Chair's Announcements</b></p> <p>The Chair explained the procedures in the case of an emergency and asked that all mobile devices be switched to silent. Hearing aid users were asked to switch their devices to position 'T'.</p> <p>The Chair introduced the background to the changes in approach to the Scrutiny function of the Council, and informed the Board that Town Councillors had been invited to this first meeting of the new Scrutiny Board to update the Board on their areas and advise the Council of their views on the Scrutiny function. He continued that the new Scrutiny function would hold full meetings each quarter and that 4 working groups would look at certain areas in greater depth. He thanked Members for offering to sit on the working groups.</p>	

2	<p><b>Apologies for Absence</b></p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillors Claire Hudson and Nigel Taylor and Tony Robbins (Wells City Council).</p>	
3	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>There were none.</p>	
4	<p><b>Public Participation</b></p> <p><b>Items on the agenda:</b></p> <p>There was none.</p> <p><b>Items not on the agenda:</b></p> <p>There was a request to speak from John Winstone, Chair of Mendip Conservation Advisory Panel. He addressed the meeting with regard to the Planning Board, and summarised saying, "The Panel cannot recall receiving any feedback from the board or from development control officers and too often we now find the advice given is afforded less weight than other considerations, leading to outcomes that are contrary to our advice and endanger the district's heritage. We are a team of highly qualified and motivated volunteers and currently feel this rich resource is not being effectively used for the benefit of the Council and also those who seek to develop and maintain the wealth of heritage assets of which we are all steward. We shall be pleased to answer further queries in due course after Scrutiny has considered these concerns and examined the materials provided".</p> <p>The Chair of the Planning Board responded that he could recall one invitation from the Mendip Conservation Advisory Panel which he had declined due to work commitments. He added that he would be happy to attend outside of the summer months. In response to the perceived lack of protocols to receive or discuss the panel's views, he clarified that the panel's comments form part of the officer reports, which then appear on the agendas sent out to all Planning Board Members. These comments are taken into consideration, and full robust discussions are held at the Planning Board prior to determination. The Chair of Scrutiny requested that the Chair of the Planning Board provide a written response to Mr Winstone's comments.</p> <p>Councillor Dick Skidmore added that the Planning Board were regularly monitored and looked at in depth.</p>	
5	<p><b>Previous Minutes</b></p>	<p><b>Caroline M°Cafferty</b></p>

	<p>The minutes of the Scrutiny Board meeting held on 26 June 2017 were accepted as an accurate record subject to the following amendment:</p> <p>Item 4 – Public Participation, Items on the Agenda. The Glastonbury Town Councillor was the Glastonbury Town Clerk.</p>	
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>Invitation to Town Councils</b></p> <p>The Chair informed the Board that this was a means of involving local communities and that rural Councils would be invited to the next meeting of Scrutiny. He thanked the representatives from Wells, Street and Frome and stated that this item was intended for Town and Parish Councillors to bring matters for Scrutiny through constructive dialogue. He added that one of the new Scrutiny Working Groups was to focus on local communities and to work in depth with City, Town and Parish Councils.</p> <p>Councillor Celia Wride, Deputy Mayor of Wells City Council said that it was felt that the views of the City Council may not be taken into account by the Planning Board. The Chair requested that the Deputy Mayor attend the December meeting of Scrutiny when the spotlight item would be Planning. The Chair of the Planning Board clarified that the views of the City, Town and Parish Councils were represented on each report which went onto each agenda, but that local feeling may differ from the framework of planning legislation. The Mayor of Wells suggested that a Mendip officer could attend planning meetings at the City Council to assist with decision making. The Chair noted that the District Council did not have the resources to adopt such an approach but may be District Councillors might look to bridge the gap. One Member stated that City, Town and Parish Councillors were able to contact a planning officer prior to a planning meeting for direction.</p> <p>Councillor Nina Swift, Vice Chair of Street Parish Council stated that her Council were keen to hear about liaison and effectiveness. It was felt that Street Parish Council were not always supported by Mendip District Council with regard to parking enforcement and planning. She queried whether a generic legal agreement could be drawn up in respect of offering free parking at certain times to support local residents. She informed the Board that the Parish Council were funding a feasibility study for safer cycling, and queried whether Mendip District Council could assist via Section 106 funds from the proposed Marks and Spencer store. The Chair stated that he would refer the car park issue to the car parks working group. He welcomed any ideas such as the assistance with safer cycling and further stated that the Parish and Town Councils could request that their District</p>	

	<p>Councillors bring these issues to the attention of the Cabinet. Members felt that Town and Parish Councils would benefit from planning training days. The Chair of the Planning Board informed the Scrutiny Board that planning training for Towns and Parishes was in hand. He warned Members against discussing any potential planning applications.</p> <p>Councillor Toby Eliot, Leader of Frome Town Council stated that he was happy that the relationship between the District and Town Councils was being taken more seriously. He thanked Mendip District Council Officers for their positive working relationship with Frome Town Council Officers. He recognised that Mendip District Council were bound by legislation in regard to planning, but asked that Frome Town Council could be involved at an early stage with any developments in Frome to enable more successful partnerships.</p>	
7	<p><b>Q1 Plus Performance Report</b></p> <p>The Group Manager Corporate Services presented the report which introduced the high level actions and projects that would support the delivery of the Council's new Corporate Strategy 2017-20 <i>Shape the District</i>. A status update was provided for those actions and projects that were already live.</p> <p>Additionally, the report provided performance information in relation to corporate complaints and praise, Freedom of Information (FOI) and Data Protection Act (DPA) requests, Finance and Human Resources (HR) statistics for Q1 2017/18.</p> <p>In response to queries regarding the Dashboard, Members were happy with the new colour format. It was clarified that Parishes had received emails and invitations to join the Health and Wellbeing Board and that the response had been positive. The Chair stated he intended that the Performance Working Group would look at metrics in detail, and stated that Members were able to ask questions prior to the meeting to enable the Group Manager for Corporate Services to better explain at the meeting. A discussion followed with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of paperless working, with some Members preferring hard copies for ease of reading, and others preferring paperless from a wastage and modernisation point of view. The Vice Chair suggested that the format of the report might be suggested to the 5 Councils Scrutiny Board, which was currently overly complicated. In response to a query regarding the Car Parks Working Group, the Chair stated that he would raise the issue with the Leader of the Council to ensure that working parties meet regularly. In response</p>	Sara Skirton

	<p>to queries regarding the effectiveness of the contracted out services, the Chair responded that there would be opportunity to measure costings when the contracts came up for renewal, though he felt that the contract had run very well.</p> <p>With regard to customer feedback, Members congratulated the Group Manager for her work on this report. In response to queries regarding Community Health Services and the number of days to respond to complaints, the Group Manager stated that she would email Members with further detail. The Chair felt that this may have been due to staffing issues. In response to questions regarding charging for Freedom of Information requests, it was clarified that this was not possible. It was also clarified that measures were being taken to reduce the amount of repetition in requests, and that FAQs would be published on the Council's website in due course.</p> <p>With regard to queries regarding Human Resources issues, the Group Manager for Corporate Services clarified that the majority of the sickness figures arose from a small number of employees with long term medical issues where the Council was aware of what they could do to assist. In response to further questions, it was clarified that sickness absences were paid at full pay for 6 months and half pay for the following 6 months.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <p>Members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Considered and commented on the information contained within the report</li> <li>2. Considered and commented on the format of the report and levels of detail provided and agreed that these should be looked at closely in the appropriate Working Party.</li> </ol>	
8	<p><b>Spotlight on Housing Services</b></p> <p>The Project and Service Development Officer introduced the "Spotlight on Housing" report which looked at specific areas of both the Housing Options Team and the Private Sector Housing Team within Housing Services. The report focused on key areas within both teams, and statistics were displayed via graphical representation and explanatory text to give additional context.</p> <p>In response to queries regarding homeless preventions, it was clarified that YMCA homeless preventions were not</p>	<p><b>Peter McGuire</b></p>

recorded due to changes in management at the YMCA. A new process had been put in place to reintroduce the recording of these statistics. With regard to questions regarding Universal Credit, it was clarified that Mendip was working hard to mitigate the impact of issues surrounding Universal Credit and that anecdotal feedback regarding problems could be provided. The Project and Service Development Officer informed Scrutiny that Frome Town Council had an initiative to encourage private landlords to rent to residents on low income via Universal Credit.

It was clarified that housing condition complaints included social housing providers, and that information regarding complaints could be provided geographically. Similarly, homelessness figures could be presented geographically.

In response to questions regarding Gypsies and Travellers, it was clarified that combined work was undertaken on a county wide basis and that a strategic approach was being developed. The Deputy Chief Executive clarified that existing caravans were dealt with via private sector housing, who could offer advice on loans and grants. With regard to future sites, she clarified that work was underway, together with the Phoenix Sponsorship Board and the Somerset Community Land Trust to identify possible land to purchase.

The Chair asked what the current process was with regard to affordable housing within the District. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that the Council worked through Section 106 funding to deliver affordable housing and also worked with rural parishes to identify additional exception sites. Another strand was the new housing company set up by Mendip District Council, which would in time build affordable housing as part of its planning obligation when developing a site, which would be passed on to housing associations to be managed. The Chair informed the meeting of a company called ND7 in Bristol, who had invested money into building 1 bedroom apartments in strategic locations with 10 – 15% affordable rates. He queried whether Mendip were in dialogue with companies in respect of these opportunities and if it should be a project for one of the Working Groups. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that work has been done involving the marketing of Somerset as a package rather than solely Mendip. Conversations had been initiated with pension companies to invest in housing building in Somerset. The Chair added that other District Councils were actively engaging with companies and that Mendip should follow their lead.

The Vice Chair raised the issue of the viability assessment, which resulted in developers saying that they could not afford to build affordable housing. He queried whether there was a way to creatively work with pension companies and

	<p>developers to build affordable housing on a development. It was noted by one Member that there was the need to attract industry to provide jobs as well as housing.</p> <p>The Chair proposed that he and the Vice Chair would meet with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Growth and Housing Services and Officers in relation to affordable housing strategy generally and to put forward the company ( ND7) for consideration.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <p>Scrutiny Board:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Considered and commented on the information contained within the report.</li> <li>2. Made further recommendations about what other statistics / trends could be reported on in future.</li> <li>3. Agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair would meet with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Growth and Housing Services and Officers regarding the affordable housing strategy.</li> </ol>	
9	<p><b>Membership of Working Groups</b></p> <p>The Chair introduced the proposed membership of working groups.</p> <p><b>Policies and strategies group</b> – responsible for reviewing strategies and policies and giving feedback to the relevant officers. This group will be consulted by officers as policies and strategies are formed and will be expected to review documents and give feedback to officers.</p> <p>Lead Convenor – Mike Pullin Members – Dick Skidmore, Shane Collins, Nick Cottle, Terry Napper, Alan Townsend, John North</p> <p><b>Performance group</b> – responsible for reviewing performance targets identified in the corporate plan and in services, challenging where they consider targets to be ineffective or unrealistic and recommending new targets based on their investigations.</p> <p>Lead Convenor – Simon Davies Members – David Van Dyke, Steve Henderson, Graham Noel, Clive Mockford, Claire Hudson</p> <p><b>Partnership group</b> – responsible for building relationships between the District Council and the towns and parishes in our area. Members will initially visit, and observe,</p>	

	<p>town/parish meetings bringing their experiences back to jointly consider commonalities and how we might work more effectively with them, forming recommendations on how Mendip might work better with the councils and progress monitored. They will also look at how to develop the role of district councillors who either sit on, or attend, town/parish councils to provide a more effective liaison role between the two tiers.</p> <p>Lead Convenor – Linda Oliver Members – Nigel Hewitt-Cooper, Des Harris, Eve Berry, Lloyd Hughes, Rachel Carter, Edward Drewe</p> <p><b>Projects group</b> – responsible for co-ordinating the scrutiny representation on key projects agreed between the chair of Scrutiny and Cabinet. Members of this group may be nominated to sit on projects teams alongside members of Cabinet and provide the scrutiny role as the project develops, reporting back on progress to the Projects group. This group will also be responsible for taking part in joint scrutiny actions where the council works in partnership with others, including the Somerset Rivers Authority, the 5 Councils and Somerset Health and Wellbeing.</p> <p>Lead Convenors – Tim Rice and Jo Beale Members – Members will be appointed when relevant project boards have been identified by the Chair and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny and Cabinet.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b></p> <p>Members approved the list. The Chair stated that he and the Vice Chair would contact all lead convenors. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that training would be provided for each group.</p>	
10	<p><b>Forward Plans</b></p> <p><b>Mendip District Council Forward Plan</b> The Council Forward Plan was noted.</p> <p><b>Scrutiny Forward Plan</b> The Scrutiny Forward Plan was accepted and it was suggested that a major incident plan item be added as an agenda item.</p>	
11	<p><b>Urgent Business</b></p> <p>There was none.</p>	

The meeting finished at approximately 8.40 pm.